Six

Nonviolence

In January 1997, students in Belgrade continued many months of demonstrations to protest official refusal to acknowledge opposition victories in municipal elections in Serbia. The demonstrations were denounced by an official who declared that "this must end in bloodshed." In response, students proceeded to a clinic, where they donated their blood [1] This is but one of a series of images of nonviolence that have caught public attention in the last decade, from "People Power" in the Philippines in 1986 to the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s The student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989, though they ended in tragedy, also brought before the world powerful images of nonviolent strategies.

Grantees of the United States Institute of Peace have been looking at many aspects of nonviolence, from the theological and theoretical to the strategic and tactical, and from antiquity to contemporary occurrences. Several scholars and analysts have undertaken case studies that assist in the formation of comparative frameworks, providing data for addressing the questions of why nonviolent strategies have worked in some situations and not in others. These provide significant advances in specifying the limits and the potential of nonviolent transformative action.

Historical and Religious Views

The volume Peace/Mir gathers together more than 160 historical documents from around the world regarding alternatives to war [2] They range from a quotation from Aristophanes' play The Peace in 421 B.C. to the 1945 UN Charter, including selections along the way from many political, religious, literary, and historical figures. These brief excerpts make it clear that concern with nonviolence is not limited to any particular place or time. They also introduce a wide range of perspectives.

Some of these perspectives are pursued further in a study of nonviolence from different religious traditions In War and Its Discontents, several contributors grapple with the simultaneous and sometimes contradictory imperatives of respecting the sacredness of life and struggling for justice [3] They examine such topics as the nature and appropriate use of nonviolence, the concept of just war, the moral use of force, and the difference between responsibility and control. Writing from a Christian tradition, Walter Wink insists that nonviolence is not a capitulation to evil, but a refusal to fight evil on its own terms. Claiming that Jesus abhorred both passivity and violence, Wink advocates active nonviolent resistance that opposes but does not mirror evil, resists but does not emulate the oppressor, and neutralizes but does not destroy the enemy From a Jewish perspective, Yehudah Mirsky of the U S. State Department also sees a role for nonviolent resistance, but within specified limits. In agreement with Wink's analysis, Mirsky sees nonviolent resistance as effective when the oppressor seeks subjugation and submission within the existing system Mirsky argues, however, that nonviolent struggle cannot be effective where the oppressor seeks simply to annihilate the victim. According to Mirsky, "Nonviolent resistance aims to push the latent contradictions of an oppressive society to the surface. Hence it is inapplicable vis-à-vis societies whose violence and oppression is not a contradiction, but rather of their essence."[4] The Holocaust, thus, afforded no "nonviolent moment "

Evaluating the moment that would be appropriate to nonviolent strategies is a chief concern for many analysts and practitioners. Such an assessment entails a clear view of what nonviolent strategy is, what its limits and potential are, and how it interacts with the surrounding context. Theorists have sought to clarify several misconceptions about nonviolence and to create a research agenda to address its historical occurrence.

Analytical Clarifications

Among the common misconceptions about violence and nonviolence, according to Doug Bond of the Albert Einstein Institution at Harvard University, is that physical violence, military force in particular, is the ultimate means of coercing an opponent. Bond argues, rather, that physical force has an extremely limited utility, because all it can do is injure, displace, or kill victims: it has no impact on their wills. Even a more constrained use of violence, intended as "forceful persuasion," does not induce enduring or internalized change, according to Bond. Violence cannot be used to change people's wills and is therefore, in Bond's view, not to be seen as an ultimately powerful device.[5]

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A second common misunderstanding is that nonviolence is a weapon of the weak. Ronald McCarthy, also of the Albert Einstein Institution at Harvard University, asserts that it is historically more accurate to view nonviolence as a weapon of the excluded. Excluded groups are potentially strong, what they objectively lack is not strength but access to political power. According to McCarthy, "groups generally turn to irregular means, such as nonviolent struggle, when channels of political access are closed, not because of their weakness."[6]

A third analytical clarification is that nonviolence is not passivity. There are many proactive strategies and methods of nonviolence. Gene Sharp has identified several categories of nonviolent methods. Those identified as methods of protest express a position, grievance, or claim symbolically, via words, music, theater, and displays of all kinds. Methods of noncooperation include strikes, boycotts, disobedience against unacceptable laws, or any way in which people turn refusal to behave as expected into an instrument of opposition. Methods of nonviolent intervention consist of active direct interference in the operation of institutions or blocking an adversary's intentions, such as staging sit-ins.[7]

All these different methods can result in many different levels of success. A fourth point made by those analyzing nonviolence is that reaching the ultimate goal, such as overthrowing a government, need not be the only standard or level of success. There are many important steps along the way. In addition to the ultimate goal, there are secondary goals, achievement goals, and intermediate goals. Creating an organization that can survive repression would be one important intermediate goal. Other intermediate goals might be learning more sophisticated means of action or opening a dialogue with other forces. McCarthy notes that "Nonviolent action does not cease when opponents are violent nor is their violence a sign that nonviolent action has failed. In fact, it is quite the reverse. Opponents use violence because nonviolent opposition mounts a credible challenge that they respond to with an escalating repressive response. It is testimony to the perceived power of opposition when nonviolent means are often declared illegal or violently suppressed."[8]

A final important observation made by analysts of nonviolence concerns the significance of strategy and the interaction of strategic choice with the surrounding political context. Christopher Kruegler of the Albert Einstein Institution at Harvard University argues against what he sees as common misconceptions about nonviolent struggles: that their outcome is determined by the degree to which nonviolent resistors are willing to sacrifice themselves or by the degree to which those in power are willing to use violent repression. Kruegler disagrees and asserts instead that the

outcomes of such struggles are shaped by the interaction of strategic choices and surrounding context. Thus, careful strategic thinking, and not simply a willingness to sacrifice, is crucial for success in nonviolent struggles. This entails, for example, getting an accurate reading of one's opponent, finding the right balance between courage and caution, and not escalating a confrontation beyond one's capacity to either carry through one's threats or withstand the repression that may follow.[9]

Wojciech Ostrowski echoes these concerns, arguing that nonviolent action can be successful only under certain conditions. He identifies as relevant factors the openness of the society in which nonviolent strategies are pursued, the visible weakness of the system it opposes, and the role played by international attention Nonviolent strategies cannot be chosen or evaluated in isolation, but only within the context in which they occur.[10]

Evaluating Nonviolence: Eastern Europe and China

Two of the most intriguing and analytically challenging nonviolent struggles occurred in Eastern Europe and China. The very different outcomes of nonviolent struggles in these two regions invite analysts to specify and compare the contexts and strategies that interacted to produce their divergent results. These observations of contemporary history lay a basis for further comparative analysis of nonviolent approaches to conflict.

The nations of Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, varied in many ways, from their domestic policies to their historical relations with the Soviet Union. But when it came to dealing with the nonviolent movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, they had many salient commonalities in terms of economic performance, political elites, cultural change, and military strength. Analysts of nonviolent struggle point to several key features of the overall context in Eastern Europe during this period.

Despite their economic differences, Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia were all experiencing economic decline. The period of extensive development in relative isolation was superseded by the need to achieve competitiveness through intensive development. Frustration with centralized bureaucratized economies could be found among manual workers, technical workers, and managers. Some nations were further burdened with debt.

Politically, even the party elites were dissatisfied with the system. According to Jaroslaw Peikalkiewicz, old-guard revolutionaries had given way to "a group of white-collar professional politicians who cared more about their own careers than about 'building communism.'"[11] Such political elites were disinclined to fight for the defense of the communist system, and were more open to its reform. They were also not directly threatened by such reform. As Joel Edelstein, professor of political science at the University of Colorado, Denver, observes, "with the exception of some members of state security forces and a few leaders at the apex of the political structure, those who lost power did so anticipating at least a tolerable future for themselves and their families."[12]

Culturally, changes were occurring such that opinion polls in Poland in the late 1970s showed no dominant system of values among the general population [13] The old system was not satisfying expectations it had implanted, and new concerns were receiving attention, including environmental protection, the role of churches in public life, issues of peace and nuclear armaments, and the role of women. The rise of countercultures made available alternative means for questioning and evaluating the legitimacy of the communist system.

Militarily, even had there been a political commitment to defend the existing system at any cost, it was not at all clear that violent suppression of the opposition would solve the myriad crises confronting these governments, including the debt crises and declining economies.

A final important aspect of the context in Eastern Europe was the situation in the Soviet Union. With the advent of glasnost and perestroika, the Soviet Union was rejecting the model it had

enforced across Eastern Europe Conservatives in Eastern Europe thus suddenly found themselves without external support.[14] Indeed there was a sense that the tides had turned and a moment of historic change had arrived.

All these factors were part of the context in which protest movements in Eastern Europe pursued their strategies of nonviolence. Why was nonviolence the strategic choice of these protest movements? The reasons were often entirely practical· popular movements had a gross insufficiency of military might in comparison with their opponents In the case of the labor union Solidarity in Poland, for example, Marek Garztecki sees the decision to use nonviolent action as being essentially pragmatic rather than moral, they lacked guns and tanks, leaving them no choice but nonviolent action.[15] Solidarity's strategies also became more effective as the union proceeded along a learning curve Lawrence Goodwyn, of Duke University, points out that early Solidarity demonstrations were in the streets, where workers were vulnerable to repression. Subsequent demonstrations were staged within the relative safety of workplaces.[16]

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Another benefit of nonviolent strategies was their capacity to garner popular support. Also in reference to Poland, Edelstein argues that "Armed struggle would have narrowed the extent of popular participation in the movement and would probably have reduced popular support."[17] Garztecki sees the nonviolent strategies as having provided a "moral armor" for these movements, even if this was not their initial impetus.[18]

It was the interaction of these dynamic contexts within the economies, political systems, and cultures of Eastern Europe and the evolving nonviolent strategies of the opposition movements that resulted in the peaceful capitulation of communist governments. These contexts of economic decline, loss of political legitimacy, elite disaffection, the rise of new cultural values, and the lack of an external buttress were confronted by the solidity and innovations of widespread nonviolent strategies. Neither these contextual factors alone nor this set of strategies would have resulted in the same outcome. According to analysts who have examined these cases, the interaction of context and strategy was crucial to the immediate outcome of these democratic revolutions

The situation in China in the late 1980s was quite different from that in Eastern Europe The overall context was not as amenable to reform, and the strategic choices made by students in their protest movements were not as considered or cohesive as those of their Eastern European counterparts The interaction of context and strategy in this nonviolent struggle yielded a very different outcome

While Eastern Europe was experiencing an economic decline, the economy in China was performing very well following the 1978 economic reforms. In 1989 the economy was growing at an annual rate of 10 percent. That performance is considered all the more impressive because it was achieved with little foreign debt and was based largely on agricultural production, even though China has less arable land per capita than Bangladesh Physical quality of life indexes also rated China high among poor nations in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality, and literacy Thus the Chinese government could successfully claim to be meeting the social and economic needs of the people.[19]

Politically and culturally, China was also in a very different situation than the nations of Eastern Europe. The Communist Party had not lost its legitimacy. As Stephen Thomas's analysis reveals, citizen demands in China have sought to make the government provide marginally greater public accountability of its actions and to strengthen civil and political rights; they have not challenged the system as such. "All of the political movements since 1978," writes Thomas, "have called for increased civil and political rights rather than calling for the overthrow of the government or the social and economic systems."[20] Thomas, a professor of political science at the University of

Colorado, Denver, finds that the system continued to receive the endorsement of a large part of China's predominantly rural population. Even when there was support for the students, particularly during hunger strikes, this did not mean that the system had lost its overall legitimacy.

The students, for their part, pursued classic nonviolent tactics and made extensive use of symbolic protest. Students organized rallies and marches, waved banners, circulated leaflets, composed songs and slogans, and engaged in hunger strikes. They appropriated many traditional symbols and images of legitimacy and reform. One of the most striking was the Goddess of Democracy statue, erected in Tiananmen Square directly in front of the portrait of Mao, thereby creating, according to Dru Gladney of the East-West Center, "a stark juxtaposition with the Chinese male ruling hierarchy."[21]

The students' strategic planning, however, had several weaknesses. These nonviolent strategies were often ad hoc and spontaneous, in response to each new government challenge or threat. Even the construction of the Goddess of Democracy, after Tiananmen Square was occupied, was improvised. The planning that did occur evolved within the situation. There was also some lack of cohesion among the student demonstrators. Many student groups from Beijing were ready to leave the square when it became apparent that the government would use military force to clear it. Other student groups from around the country had come to Beijing to participate in the demonstrations. "It was mostly those outsiders," notes Thomas, "who still occupied Tiananmen Square when the tanks finally rolled in on the night of June 3, 1989."[22]

The failure of the student movement, culminating in the massacre in Tiananmen Square, was "as much a consequence of its social and economic rights context as of its strategy and tactics," according to Thomas.[23] The dominant system in China was not particularly vulnerable in terms of its economic performance, political legitimacy, or cultural acceptance, and the strategies used by the students were not sufficiently coordinated. Yet the failure of the nonviolent student movement was also not predetermined. There is no set recipe for the interaction of context and strategy so as to yield a successful outcome in nonviolent struggles.

As Thomas also points out, the students in China were highly successful in appealing to moral virtue, calling for peaceful change, and mobilizing citizen support. Their action, writes Thomas, "drew large numbers of previously quiescent Beijing officials and citizens—including police, soldiers, bureaucrats, teachers, journalists, and middle-level officials—into supporting student demands."[24] Indeed, the government exhibited some reluctance to use coercion against the students. It met them first with unarmed police, then unarmed soldiers, and only then with tanks and armed units. Many military commanders had also signed a petition stating their opposition to martial law.[25] Such features of this struggle suggest that there were many turning points and partial successes leading up to the final tragedy of the massacre.

In Thomas's view, the way that the students lost was significant. By losing in so principled a manner, they may have "set the stage for a struggle that will probably be successful in bringing civil and political rights to China over the long term."[26] Doug Bond suggests another possible contribution from the student movement in China. Considering reports from around the world, Bond perceives "not only that nonviolent struggle is truly a global phenomenon, but that there is strong evidence of cross-cultural learning."[27] The movement in China may provide lessons for other nonviolent movements elsewhere in the world, as well as comparative data for analysts trying to understand this form of political action.

Seven

Humanitarian Aid

Complex political emergencies, defined as multicausal political crises with major humanitarian repercussions, present very difficult challenges for the international community. How should the international community respond to such crises, which may include massive violations of human rights or intentionally created humanitarian tragedies? What are some of the unforeseen implications of the international community's usual mode of operation in such cases? What are the risks involved in the international response—for those undertaking it and for those who are the beneficiaries of it? Many analysts and practitioners have addressed these questions, considering when humanitarian aid should be provided, examining different agents of international aid, and providing constructive criticism and suggestions for improving the delivery and impact of aid. The United States Institute of Peace has not only provided grant funding for research and analysis on the topic, but also organized a symposium in October 1995 with participants from many NGOs engaged in providing humanitarian assistance.[1]

The Role of the International Community in Humanitarian Aid

Why should the international community become involved in humanitarian crises in the first place, particularly those internal to a nation? Justifications include the destabilizing and costly effects for regional peace and security, as well as the fundamental ethical issue of not leaving human beings to suffer through dire emergencies and humanitarian tragedies. Francis Deng, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, also poses another justification for an international role: in humanitarian crises, there is often no one else to respond. Deng considers crises within nations where the state has divided on itself or has simply collapsed. In neither case can the state exercise what Deng sees as the responsibilities of sovereignty. Regarding such a situation, Deng poses the question: "To whom is a government accountable for failure to discharge its responsibility toward its citizens? To argue that it is the people of a country would be to give an obvious, but only a partial answer. The mere fact that a government that has failed dismally remains in power indicates the limits of national accountability. The alternative leverage can only be external."[2] Where a failed state continues to hold power, the international community becomes the only realistic source of protection, relief assistance, and rehabilitation for the population.

The international community is a broad category, comprising the governments of individual states, international and regional organizations made up of governments, and nongovernmental organizations. Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss, co-directors of the Humanitarianism and War Project at Brown University's Watson Institute, consider these varied actors in their essay Humanitarian Politics.[3] According to Minear and Weiss, government involvement in humanitarian aid has not always been constructive. At times, they argue, humanitarianism has been subservient to politics. Decisions to intervene have been based on the politics of the victims or on other goals of the government that is providing aid. Humanitarian aid may also be used to mask the absence of a political agenda. When governments, either singly or within international organizations, cannot decide on a political response to a problem, they may address it with humanitarian aid instead. Minear and Weiss offer the former Yugoslavia as an example. Unable to agree on diplomatic or

military steps needed to confront the complex political problems in the former Yugoslavia, governments instead embraced aid as a less controversial or less politically costly response. In such circumstances, assistance is offered as a substitute for addressing the root causes of violent conflict. The aid may alleviate the victims' immediate suffering, but does not stop unlawful violence and may allow the suffering to continue.

Increasingly, nongovernmental organizations are taking a larger role in humanitarian-relief efforts, often in concert with international organizations. Many international and local NGOs are subcontracted by major international organizations to perform various tasks of humanitarian aid, from administering refugee camps to transporting and distributing food, maintaining potable water supplies, running orphanages, teaching elementary school classes, training adults in a particular trade or craft, or staffing hospitals. Julia Taft of InterAction points out that NGOs have come to function as the implementing agents for the UN and donor governments.[4]

Undertaken in a vacuum of political authority—as is the case in failed states, civil wars, or international conflict—the depth, scale, and complexity of the roles played by NGOs can become immense. The resources they control can be quite large relative to those of the local (or even national) government. According to Mary Anderson of Collaborative for Development Action, when NGOs have more funds than local governments, the imbalance between external and domestic resources makes it more difficult for local institutions to build for peace.[5] Richard Sollum and Darren Kew also draw attention to the "quasi-governmental roles" filled by NGOs that are exercising "significant de facto political authority in the host country."[6] This raises many practical questions regarding the performance and impact of NGOs, as well as issues of their accountability and legitimacy.

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A Critique of Humanitarian Aid

Many analysts and practitioners have given careful thought to the practice and consequences of humanitarian aid. In Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa, John Prendergast of the Center of Concern begins his assessment of relief operations by criticizing what he refers to as "the numbers game." Because of public relations, fundraising, and reporting demands, many operations are driven by logistics. There is pressure to portray aid inputs (food, medicine, tents) delivered to target populations as having a direct impact upon saving lives. Impact is assessed only quantitatively—tons of grain delivered, numbers of vaccinations given—and the logistical targets become ends in themselves. The focus is on relieving immediate suffering, as quantified by logistical targets, rather than on the political and social roots of the crisis. Likewise, media exposure of an agency's response, crucial to fundraising, will portray pain and hardship rather than their deeper causes. The "disaster pornography" of worst-case pictures, like meeting logistical targets, may serve an agency's interests in fundraising and public relations but is ineffectual, if not counterproductive, in addressing "the communal dissolution and institutional decay that underpin complex emergencies."[7]

Another common shortcoming of many relief operations Prendergast has labeled the "the law of the tool," in that the response is determined by whatever tools happen to be at hand, rather than the tools that would be most appropriate to the situation.[8] Stockpiled food and medicines are often readily available because of agricultural surpluses and commodity support programs, as well as the pharmaceutical industry's surplus production. Offering such goods to relief operations serves the interests of agribusiness and pharmaceutical industries, providing charitable tax deductions and fostering eventual markets for these products. While such goods may be helpful, so long as

adequate transportation and distribution facilities are available, earlier intervention with conflict resolution exercises or work-skills training might be far more cost-effective in achieving lasting solutions. Julia Taft also points out that donor governments prefer NGOs to distribute relief aid in the form of food exported from donor countries While benefiting farmers in the donor countries, this practice does little to strengthen local food production or economies.[9] As these and other analysts have noted, aid that is driven by available stockpiles fails to identify strategic intervention opportunities and also leaves the relief program in the hands of outsiders rather than contributing to the capacity of local communities to rebuild their own society.

Sometimes humanitarian aid can also have unforeseen consequences, actually helping to sustain violent conflict.

Sometimes humanitarian aid can also have unforeseen consequences, actually helping to sustain violent conflict. Mary Anderson of Collaborative for Development Action identifies several possible negative impacts of humanitarian assistance.[10] One of the most direct is resource transfers, when material aid becomes the major liquid asset in regions at war. This includes the communications and transportation equipment of aid agencies, such as trucks and radios, and the food aid itself. Diversion and theft are major problems for relief operations Food may be seized by a warring party and distributed under its auspices, thereby enhancing that party's standing with the population Food supplies may also be stolen and sold or bartered, particularly if there is a ready international market, as is the case for rice. Such sales can provide the primary funding for the purchase of weapons. Humanitarian aid can also increase the resources available to governments to prosecute conflicts. Governments gain indirectly through taxes, dual currency exchange rates, rents, salaries, and contracts. In addition, aid may provide for the social welfare of the population, thereby releasing a government's resources for war-making.

In serving population centers, relief operations also become part of the prosecution of conflicts. Refugee camps can become protective covers and food sources for garrisons and training centers. Military headquarters are located near refugee camps to shield the headquarters from attack. If attacked, the civilian casualties can delegitimize their opponents for being willing to attack noncombatants. Humanitarian-aid operations can also exacerbate tensions within populations. Aid targeted for refugee populations that excludes equally impoverished host populations will heighten the potential for conflict between these groups.

Among these risks and problems, many analysts also perceive an inherent shortcoming in relief operations: their potential to undercut indigenous capacities and social organization Externally managed, nonparticipatory, and heavily dependent upon expatriate staff, humanitarian-aid operations can undermine local resilience, subsistence economies, and local authorities. Joel Charney of Oxfam America observed this in Somalia, where international humanitarian assistance resembled a military logistical exercise more than an attempt to empower Somalis to cope with their crises. Too often, according to Charney, international actors think foreigners must parachute in to save local people.[11] Prendergast of the Center of Concern echoes this characterization, charging that humanitarian aid may "'intervene' to save 'vulnerable groups' (often iconographed in Western appeals as helpless women and children) rather than 'working with people' and developing social resources and skills. This situation reinforces the image and fact of dependency."[12]

Proposals for Improving Humanitarian Aid

For dealing with these shortcomings, analysts and practitioners have generated a number of proposals. One of the first requirements is improved planning, including an independent assessment of needs and attention to the actual impacts of targeting and distribution methods Such mapping of the risks in advance can make emergency responses more efficient and reduce the mistakes that sustain or exacerbate conflict. One way to achieve early preparedness might be to pre-position

experienced personnel in situations deemed likely to explode. At the least, donors could require operating agencies to demonstrate short- and medium-term plans of action as a condition for receiving support.

Organizations should also be flexible about the types of aid provided. Agricultural rehabilitation programs are much harder to convert to cash than is direct food aid. Certain products are also easier to divert and market. Rice, for example, is a high-value food item, attractive to looters. Sorghum and mixed cereals are just as nutritious but have a much lower resale value Similarly, establishing and staffing clinics can contribute to the health of a community. while stockpiled medicines can also be stolen and resold for cash.

NGOs can also limit the negative impact of their involvement by coordinating on local expenditures and standardizing costs. The excessive amounts paid to local authorities and factions for supplies and equipment often fuel conflicts. NGOs need to cooperate to keep payments for transportation, housing, and local salaries at reasonable levels and to undermine governments' efforts to manipulate foreign exchange rates to their advantage.

Although rarely intended, the actions of NGOs often influence both the military and political dimensions of conflicts.

Many analysts affirm the importance of strengthening local subsistence economies and local community structures and authorities. Unless these are restored and protected, the beneficiary population may become dependent upon nonsustainable external inputs. Local capacities may be supplanted rather than enhanced. To address this problem, Prendergast encourages relief organizations to prioritize engagement with the local community, support of a survival economy, and strengthening of indigenous capacities. He defines engagement as "actively advocating particular principles with authorities as well as consulting with them on these issues and building where appropriate on their views."[13] The twin goals are not only to relieve suffering but also to build self-reliance. Thomas Alcedo of CARE also underscores the need to shift the balance from relief to development. Although it is harder to obtain funding or media attention for development projects, Alcedo notes that such projects address root problems and are less likely to contribute to conflict than the simple provision of relief supplies.[14]

Another aspect of humanitarian aid where analysts recommend changes regards the aim of political neutrality, which has long been one of the cardinal principles of humanitarian assistance Angela Raven Roberts of UNICEF questions whether NGOs and donors can avoid political issues by claiming neutrality in highly politicized contexts. Although rarely intended, the actions of NGOs often influence both the military and political dimensions of conflicts. While neutrality might be feasible in cases of traditional interstate conflict, it is much harder in the case of failed states with competing factions. "A generic problem for aid operations in failed states," observes William DeMars of the University of Notre Dame, "is that the boundary between the political and the humanitarian erodes."[15] Prendergast suggests an aim of "independence" rather than neutrality for the behavior of relief organizations.[16] When the aim is neutrality or balance, organizations may be pressured to provide equal amounts of aid to groups of very different need levels. Being guided by independence or nonpartisanship would free organizations to provide aid based on needs assessment

A proposal to put conditions on humanitarian aid is more controversial. On the one hand, a ready supply of unconditional aid may result in permitting and sustaining conflict; there are no costs to warring parties for their continued belligerence and recalcitrance. Thus Will Thach, formerly with the International Committee of the Red Cross, advocates setting conditions on humanitarian assistance, arguing that when a factional leader abuses civilians or obstructs and diverts the delivery of supplies, NGOs have a responsibility to object and not be complicit. However, as Julia Taft of InterAction points out, the imposition of conditions and threats of withdrawal are pointless unless all NGOs operating in a particular locale are united. Further, NGOs cannot in good conscience

terminate food shipments to noncombatants at risk of starvation.[17] Prendergast urges careful analysis of each situation and suggests that each case is unique and has distinct phases. A phase of acute emergency would require unconditional aid, while in more stabilized phases, conditions and negotiations become more possible. This would be preferable to repeatedly putting band-aids on continually reopened wounds.[18]

Most analysts agree that the provision of humanitarian assistance will be an endless and futile process unless accompanied by efforts, perhaps spearheaded by other bodies, to build peace. NGOs may be able to explore new roles for themselves in this area. Russ Kerr of World Vision International urges NGOs to share information on particular crises, monitoring changes in famines or conflicts so as to be prepared to act effectively in new situations. More broadly, NGOs may contribute to longer-term peacebuilding by strengthening civil society. Rudy von Berneuth of Save the Children suggests that establishing local institutions that can support participatory democratic processes and pluralism is the best way to ensure lasting peace. NGOs contribute to this process when they establish effective partnerships with local institutions, including local NGOs.[19]

Such partnerships could have effects in both directions. While local NGOs could be strengthened, international relief organizations could be challenged to be more accountable. Relief organizations, notes Prendergast, are usually accountable to their funders—governments, philanthropic organizations, businesses, or membership contributions. But what of their accountability to target populations and local groups? Relief organizations may give beneficiaries a substantial voice in local logistics, but little say regarding the internal functioning of the organization or larger strategic decisions. Addressing this issue of accountability could have a larger impact on the way international relief organizations operate, helping to minimize some of the negative consequences of humanitarian aid.