OVERVIEW

Military Support to Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Five Uneasy Links Between Practice and Policy

The CNA 1995 Annual Conference examined the military's role in responses to "complex humanitarian emergencies." This newly minted phrase describes large-scale emergencies caused by civic breakdowns often accompanied by economic or environmental crises or natural disasters. The conference brought together seasoned observers and practitioners from the military, policy, and humanitarian communities to discuss a broad range of operational and policy issues in complex humanitarian emergencies.

The goal of the conference was not to produce policy recommendations or propose new ways of planning operations. Several other meetings and symposia have taken on those challenges. Rather, our goal was to provide a forum for military officers, statesmen, and humanitarians to explain their perspectives on the military's role in complex humanitarian emergencies. The conference succeeded in illuminating the cultural differences among these players—differences between military and civilian culture, between U.S. and foreign militaries, between U.S. national and political culture and that of our partners or those in the conflict area.

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Conference participants explored how such differences—whether at the policy or operational level, in the planning process or operations on the ground—may create or exacerbate barriers to a united response with a common goal.

The conference built "from practice to policy" in three sessions:

- **Session I** comprised three concurrent case-study panels of operations in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia.

- **Session II,** two consecutive panels, explored the perspectives of military leaders and then those of relief organizations on their respective roles in responses to complex humanitarian emergencies.

- **Session III,** a seminar game based on a hypothetical crisis scenario, explored key issues for national decision-makers and international organizations and partners in complex humanitarian emergencies.

Conference participants differed in their cultural orientations, national histories, and current visions of their—and others'—roles in complex humanitarian emergencies Yet five themes emerged from the conference. These themes ranged from the basis for policy-making and planning for emergency responses **(mandates and missions)**; to guiding principles for the conduct of the players in an intervention **(neutrality, impartiality, credibility)**; to the proper relationship between official policy and action and humanitarian response to emergencies **(humanitarian action as a surrogate for political will)**; to the question of when military action can and should be taken **(timing of the military commitment)**. At the center of all these issues was **U.S. leadership**.

Mandates and Missions

These two words were used in several contexts throughout the conference. Often their meanings seemed to overlap, but they were never quite equivalent Both words seemed to have special connotations for some of the participants, connotations that others may not have understood. Further, for all the players the connotations of each word provided important insights into how they define and carry out their roles in complex humanitarian emergencies. Thus, to better understand the nuances of the exchanges among conference participants as they discussed the mandates and missions for various interventions, we define each word and give a brief history of its usage.

Mandate comes from the Latin *mandare*, which literally means "to put in the hands of, to entrust." As a form of societal authority, it is an authorization given to a representative (of the People in a democracy) to act. "Mandate" was first used in the context of the international community as an order or commission granted by the League of Nations for establishment of a legitimate government over a former German territory or other conquered territory. It is easy to see that "mandate" connotes legitimacy and responsibility, particularly for UN organizations, as it did for those on the Bosnia panel representing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Some might also see it as a term that lends "legitimation" for neocolonialism, as journalist Tom Ricks pointed out.

Panelists discussing Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti believed that the meaning of "mandate" was broader than "mission." The "mission" was a set of specific tasks and the way those tasks would be carried out, rather than a scope of legitimacy. They observed that their "mandate" outlined what the force could and could not do to fulfill its mission. The mandate authorized certain actions and prohibited others. But options that were neither authorized nor prohibited could be exploited to support the mission. The panel urged future intervening forces to exploit the "gray area" of possible actions neither explicitly authorized nor prohibited in order to increase the military's flexibility. It is not clear, however, that all higher authorities would condone this source of flexibility.

Mission derives from the Latin *missus*, the past participle of the verb "to send" (*mittere*). In medieval Latin it signified a specific assigned task, and evolved to a specifically religious connotation in new Latin. This evolution makes it easy to understand that the word can mean different things to different communities using it today. For the military, "mission" sets out a definite assigned task; it is what the forces are going to do. The military wants a clearly defined mission with measures of effectiveness and an end state, as Session II panelists and players in the Session III game reminded us.

For humanitarian organizations, mission connotes legitimacy and responsibility. *Missionary* work is an important aspect of their work, although many of these organizations do not have the religious association of, for example, Catholic Relief Services. Humanitarian organizations see the relief mission as the highest imperative, as Canon Burgess Carr of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and Staffan de Mistura of UNICEF emphasized. For the military, a mission is a duty. For relief organizations, it is a calling. Both of these connotations have important, but different, moral resonances.

Neutrality, Impartiality, Credibility

The debate over the wisdom—and the possibility—of maintaining a neutral stance in interventions has taken center stage in discussions of both Bosnia and Somalia. Are the Serbs the primary aggressors and should we say so? Was going after Aidid the undoing of the intervention? These discussions are set in the larger context of the basic principles of the parties to interventions, and their view of the credibility they have in their respective roles.

The U.S. military views some of the compromises that may be required to maintain a neutral posture as potentially damaging to its overall credibility as a fighting force. For example, as General Zinni observed, if a U.S.-escorted relief convoy encounters a roadblock, the U.S. escorts feel compelled to force their way through. The use of force in this situation was absolutely anathema to the UNHCR representatives on the Bosnia panel, who pointed out that their credibility—and safety—are based on their ability to maintain relationships with all the parties in Bosnia.

Most relief and international organizations and many other militaries with experience in humanitarian or peace operations (the Canadians at the conference, for example) have long viewed neutrality as the very basis of their credibility.

How, given these conflicting bases for credibility, can relief organizations and the U.S. military work effectively together?

Canon Burgess Carr of ICVA addressed this issue directly in his remarks. He observed that humanitarians are left with two choices: they can integrate their efforts into the political-military context or they can isolate themselves and follow a separate path. ICVA has chosen to work in concert with the UN agencies that are involved in emergency responses. Because the UN deals with, and often has a major role in setting, the political and military contexts of a response, the voluntary agency's role should be in harmony with the political and military aspects of the operation.

However, UNHCR's difficulties in maintaining a neutral image led the panelists to talk about "even-handedness" rather than complete neutrality. In Session II, Andrew Natsios of World Vision asserted that it is no longer possible for the relief community to enter a conflict-torn area as a neutral player. Relief organizations must be conscious that their presence is viewed as political. It is clear from these and other discussions at the conference that the issue of neutrality is key in complex emergencies. While many relief organizations still believe that their credibility with the local populace rests upon their reputation as neutral, beneficent actors, the realities of these emergencies often make neutrality nonviable.

U.S. Leadership

Several years after the end of the Cold War, U.S. leadership has proven a hard habit to break, both for the foreign policy élite in the United States and for many of our foreign partners. But the peculiarities of the U.S. political process and the orientation of U.S. military forces create dilemmas for many of our partners. Furthermore, the U.S. public, as represented by members of Congress and other defense and foreign policy analysts at the conference, appears to be ambivalent at best about the United States' position at the head of the international table. The conference left some participants wondering whether U.S. leadership would continue to be desirable and credible to our partners. It also left them looking for alternatives.

The issue of U.S. leadership ran through the entire conference. The skepticism of the U.S. Congress, as demonstrated in the seminar game, and the repeated reference to a public focused on domestic challenges were not surprises. Nor was General Marvin Covault's belief that many Europeans had waited for decisive U.S. action in Bosnia. But the U.S. criteria for leading and others' expectations of U.S. leadership did not always cohere well. In fact, U.S. perspectives on leadership were not consistent with each other. This was clearly demonstrated in the seminar game, where differences among the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Congress, and the Executive Branch sparked UN Assistant Secretary S. Iqbal Riza to describe the U.S. national decision-making process as "marked by masochism."

At the operational level, the condition of U.S. command of operations implies a major role for U.S. forces in potentially dangerous situations. Although conceived as a means of ensuring proper security for the force, it could conflict with public

aversion to casualties. Some participants at the conference believed that the greater and more visible the U.S. presence, the greater risk for incurring casualties. They held that U.S. forces are a political presence, and hence a potential target for those opposed to intervention. And U.S. forces may operate under rules of engagement that are more assertive than some of the other militaries involved, such as Canadian or Scandinavian forces.

Conference participants were divided in their assessments of whether greater acceptance of forceful measures increased or decreased the potential for violence. This was a disputed issue for the Somalia panel, but members of the Haiti panel believed that decisive action by U.S. forces early on contributed to a more stable and secure environment.

At the policy level, the Bosnia panel and the UN and allied representatives in the seminar game reaffirmed the international desire for U.S. leadership. But U.S. leaders' concern about a "fickle public" and the cost of the operation made the United States a fickle participant when the risks increased in the seminar game. In the face of casualties, many decision-makers were ready to cut and run, leaving coalition partners holding the proverbial bag.

When this actually happens, it is difficult to believe that the credibility of the United States as a leader is not severely damaged. Again, Americans are left, as we have been for several years now, to wrestle with a vision of what we want our leadership to accomplish, and when and whether we, both political leaders and the public, are willing to bear the cost of achieving our goals.

Humanitarian Action as a Surrogate for Political Will

The same uncertainty over our national goals—our *national interests*—that is at the heart of the dilemma surrounding U.S. leadership has led, in the eyes of some Session II panelists, to the use of humanitarian action as a "surrogate for political will." What does this mean, and what does it have to do with U.S. national interests?

The question of "political will" relates to the question of what Americans define as their national priorities and ideals, and what they are willing to do to uphold them. In a dictatorship, Stalin, for example, embodied the political will of the Soviet Union. He defined the national interests and the acceptable means of furthering them, without regard to the desires—the *will*—of the Russian citizenry.

In a representative democracy, however, the concept of the "general will" as established by Rousseau means that the wills of individual citizens are expressed at the ballot box. Citizens vote for representatives—and a national leader—whom they trust to act according to their political views.

Hence, the concern for public opinion and the sensitivity to the electoral cycle displayed by the Congress and the Counsel to the President in the seminar game. These issues are as old as our form of government. But they seem worse in an era in which U.S. leaders are accustomed to a starring role on the international stage in pursuit of an "active" foreign policy, while substantial numbers of citizens oppose this role. The tug-of-war is between parts of the international community

that call on U.S. leaders to "Do something!" to respond to collapsing states and corroding environments, and the American voters who admonish "But not too much!"

So, in the view of some conference participants, U.S. decision-makers have responded to Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda by using the U.S. military to support humanitarian crises. These operations seemed relatively low-risk at first, but proved far more dangerous—not just to the military forces but also to their humanitarian partners—because the responses did not address the root problems, which were of a primarily political nature. This way of responding, some participants believed, was a cop-out, not a compromise.

On the other hand, rather than "operation other than war," the blanket application of the term "complex humanitarian emergency" to interventions that are not primarily humanitarian can be a way—disingenuous, perhaps—of "selling" them. Seeing Haiti as a "complex humanitarian emergency" helped us feel more justified in intervening. However, this created false expectations among the troops deployed to Haiti—they expected to find an active relief community to partner with. But the relief community was not a strong presence in Haiti because relief organizations did not view the situation there as a humanitarian emergency.

Timing: When Should Forces Go In? When Should They Leave?

The timing of the commitment of military forces to complex humanitarian emergencies—and the proper reasons for and timing of their withdrawal—was a theme that ran throughout the conference. Often, those participants focused on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis found "early" commitment imperative. Others pointed out how difficult it is to protect and aid people affected by a crisis while fighting is ongoing.

Responding early to a crisis is commonly seen as important to the success of an operation. As General Zinni observed, things generally don't improve over time. In Somalia, for example, some have contended that the U.S. military forces arrived too late to contribute substantially to relieving the famine. And the ethnic cleansing continued in Bosnia in spite of the UN forces eventually deployed.

In the Haiti session, however, anthropologist Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, a Haitian national, explained that the military intervention, coming after both the embargo and the diplomatic efforts, became acceptable to Haitians *over time* as the best alternative for their country's political and economic future.

Early commitment of forces begs the question of the role those forces are to play. In complex humanitarian emergencies, the role often is peace-making or peace-enforcing, rather than the seemingly less dangerous missions of keeping the peace between parties that have agreed to stop fighting and providing escorts and logistics support for relief convoys.

Back to the issue of U.S. political will: what do we want to accomplish with our forces and what price, in both financial and human terms, are we willing to pay? How long will it take U.S. decision-makers to explain their goals to the Congress

and the public? What is our assessment of the odds for success in achieving both peace and economic and environmental stability in the crisis area, and how does this affect the decision of when and under what conditions to send forces? In Bosnia, the Dayton peace accord was the prerequisite for putting American troops on the ground. What happens there in the coming months is sure to affect how we respond to future crises.