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Blood Aid
How Humanitarian Aid Empowers Warlords and Prolongs Conflict

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Abstract

This article analyzes the intersection of humanitarian aid and warlords and critiques the unintended causes of humanitarian aid. The author creates a theoretical framework to conceptualize how warlords manipulate humanitarian aid for their own benefit through direct diversion of resources, indirect diversion of resources, and other intangible benefits. Policy prescriptions to enable effective aid distribution include improved security in humanitarian zones to separate civilians and militants and enhanced collaboration among humanitarian agencies to act collectively against resource manipulation.

Humanitarian Crisis in Goma: An Introduction

In the summer of 1994 the Rwandan genocide was coming to an end, but the humanitarian crisis in central Africa was only beginning. After the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front successfully defeated the extremist Hutu government that had mobilized militias to kill all Tutsi and moderate

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Hutu, nearly two million Hutu fled the country, fearing retribution massacres by the victorious Tutsi army. Approximately 800,000 of these Hutu refugees gathered in eastern Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹ The international community, which had passively observed nearly a million people killed in the most horrifically rapid genocide of the twentieth century, suddenly felt compelled to act. Reports of a cholera epidemic and mass starvation inspired the West to spend about \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid to assist the refugee camps in and around Goma, Zaire.² Although these refugee camps were highly militarized and led by the same Hutu leaders who perpetrated the genocide in Rwanda, the humanitarian community continued to provide enormous quantities of resources to warlords under the veil of neutrality. The refugee camps became a state-in-exile that allowed the *génocidaires* to regain strength and launch small-scale attacks against Tutsi in Rwanda.

After two years without any United Nations-sanctioned intervention to disarm the Hutu militants, the Rwandan army, led by General Paul Kagame, invaded the camps and chased the *génocidaires* and their Zairian supporters all the way to Kinshasa, igniting a massive international war in central Africa that led to the deaths of over five million people.³ Kagame repeatedly blamed humanitarian aid for strengthening the power of Hutu extremists and forcing the Rwandan army to dismantle the militarized camps:

“I think we should start accusing these people [humanitarians] who actually supported these camps — spent one million dollars per day in these camps, gave support to these groups to rebuild themselves into a force, militarized refugees ... Why shouldn't we accuse them?”⁴

Freelance journalist Linda Polman explains succinctly, “without humanitarian aid, the Hutus’ war would almost certainly have ground to a halt fairly quickly.”⁵

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The purpose of this paper is to analyze the intersection of humanitarian aid and warlords. Through anecdotal evidence and several empirical reports analyzing the use of humanitarian aid, the author aims to create a theoretical framework that describes how warlords manipulate humanitarian aid to prolong

conflict. Despite the broad goal of all humanitarian organizations to alleviate suffering of innocent civilians, the refugee crisis in Goma suggests that humanitarian aid can sometimes be diverted by warlords and prolong the conflicts they attempt to suppress. Unfortunately, very little empirical evidence exists because non-government organizations (NGOs) have no incentive to self-report the amount of resources being extorted and stolen by warlords. However, significant qualitative evidence suggests that the contribution of humanitarian aid to armed militants is an open secret within the humanitarian field. Although the disastrous humanitarian operation in Goma remains the best case study for armed militants extorting humanitarian aid, it is far from the only example.

The Problems with Aid

A more robust analysis of humanitarian aid’s influence on conflict is essential in the twenty-first century because its presence has become an increasingly important characteristic in conflict and post-conflict settings. Since the end of the Cold War, governments affiliated with the

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Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) increased humanitarian aid from \$796 million in 1989 to \$11 billion in 2008, nearly a 1,400 percent increase.⁶ In 2013, the same governments further increased their humanitarian aid to a total of \$14.1 billion, with non-OECD governments providing another \$2.3 billion.⁷ More than ever, foreign governments are utilizing humanitarian aid to respond to civilians caught in conflict.

Additionally, globalization has dramatically contributed to the exponential increase in humanitarian NGOs and has facilitated the process for private individuals to provide money and resources to distant conflicts. Bill Clinton praised “the explosion of private individuals who devote themselves to a good cause,” which has led to an “unprecedented democratization of charity.”⁸ Private voluntary contributions totaled \$5.6 billion in 2013, increasing the cumulative total of government and private aid to over \$22 billion.⁹ More than 150,000 private philanthropic organizations exist in the United States alone, and the U.S. Internal Revenue Service grants tax exemption to an average 83 new charities every day.¹⁰ The prevalence of new communication technology, such as mobile cellular devices and social media, facilitates bringing distant humanitarian disasters to the social consciousness of the developed world. This dramatic increase in humanitarian philanthropy is nearly universally praised as a triumph for humanity.

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However, the universal support for humanitarian aid has actually damaged its accountability because of an assumption that unconditional humanitarian aid can do no harm. As Alain Destexhe, former Secretary-

General for Médecins Sans Frontières explains, “humanitarian action has acquired a monopoly on morality,” and is consistently given the benefit of the doubt on criticism, receiving a very low level of scrutiny from external actors.¹¹ A culture exists amongst humanitarian NGOs that aid must be provided at any cost, which transforms every humanitarian disaster into “one that lacks blame.”¹² Many humanitarian groups rarely ask questions as to the causes of a conflict. Instead, they attempt to rapidly respond to developing disasters in unfamiliar environments to quickly provide resources to alleviate the suffering of all victims involved.¹³ There is little expectation for humanitarian NGOs to hold themselves accountable and self-report the effectiveness of their aid or to analyze the broader impact of the aid on a conflict. The vast majority of people just assume that humanitarian organizations are doing the best they can to provide aid and help victims.

Contributing to the humanitarian aid problem is that the vast majority of their work takes place in regions where corruption runs rampant. In 2008, nearly 74% of all humanitarian aid from OECD governments went to states “affected by active conflict or emerging from conflict.”¹⁴ This becomes troublesome for humanitarian organizations because states that have a recent history of conflict tend to have much higher rates of corruption.¹⁵ Such fragile states often lack stability or formal institutions and as such, create greater hurdles for humanitarians to overcome, forcing NGOs to cooperate with warlords and former perpetrators of war crimes to gain access to refugees or acquire security to travel through violent regions of a war-torn country.¹⁶ Members of the humanitarian aid community consider these struggles the price of providing aid in unstable regions, and acts of extortion, theft, and corruption nearly always go unreported.

Finally, the democratization of humanitarian NGOs has inhibited proper coordination and collaboration among these organizations. The idea that

the “humanitarian community” collectively reacts to disasters as an organized unit is a myth. The international contingent that responded to the refugee crisis in Goma in 1994 included more than 250 private NGOs, eight United Nations agencies, three separate branches of the Red Cross, and military contingents from eight different foreign countries.¹⁷ Each organization had a different mission and a different ethical code: While MSF provides medical assistance and acts as a vocal witness to human rights abuses, Caritas Internationalis solely focuses on relieving suffering of the most disadvantaged communities through the Catholic Church. MSF-France eventually abandoned its mission in Goma because inadvertently providing aid to former *génocidaires* violated their ethical code, while Caritas Internationalis intentionally provided food aid to two known military camps, Panzi and Bilongue, because the organization did not want “to distinguish between civilian and military recipients.”¹⁸ As one aid worker explained, “I know some of them [refugees] have killed a lot of people. But I don’t care about the past. My job is to feed everyone irrespective of the past.”¹⁹ The lack of a cohesive mission among aid organizations makes it difficult to take collective action against corruption and extortion by warlords.

Warlords Set the Rules of the Game

To fully understand how humanitarian aid is manipulated to prolong conflict it is necessary to understand warlords and how they control the environment in which humanitarian organizations work. Warlords are generally described as individuals who utilizes violent force to maintain power and authority over a territory.²⁰ Although the term is relatively new, it describes a distinct “political phenomenon that has existed throughout history and continues to function ... wherever states are weak.”²¹ Warlords work outside of the “theoretical government monopoly” of military might and violence.²² They exist primarily wherever the state fails to exert its influence, most commonly in conflict zones or failed states.²³

As a Congressional report describing the prevalence of warlords in Afghanistan explains,

“... any single individual who commands hundreds or thousands of armed men in regular combat and operates largely outside the direct control of the central government is a competitor to the legitimacy of the state.”²⁴

In the absence of a functional state, warlords become the rule of law, or more accurately, the “law of the jungle,” and exercise their arbitrary power over the territory they dominate.

However, warlords often perceive their authoritarian power as entirely justified and attempt to gain legitimacy through international recognition. Warlords generally prefer to call themselves businessmen, generals, military commanders, strongmen, militia leaders, political leaders, or private security contractors.²⁵ Because of this perceived legitimacy, corruption is sometimes more difficult to identify. Although warlords are non-state actors, they often attempt to use legitimate state functions, such as taxation or import tariffs, to extort money.²⁶ Warlords often establish private security companies to secure protection for humanitarian groups, but the fees they collect are mandatory, and failure to pay results in imminent violence.²⁷ Regions that are power vacuums are inevitably filled by warlords who create the rules of the game. Therefore, any work that humanitarian organizations attempt to accomplish in these fragile regions is at the whim of the warlords that maintain power over those territories.

Warlords have learned to manipulate the massive influx of resources from humanitarian aid to help sustain expensive standing armies and prolong conflict. As mentioned earlier, the majority of humanitarian aid is provided to regions that are currently engaged in, or emerging from, conflict. In these regions, the central government is generally too weak and unable or unwilling to maintain the rule of law. Aid organizations

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have no choice but to rely on warlords for protection and to gain access to civilian victims in the warzone.²⁸ Warlords are savvy survivors and have developed several methods to manipulate aid and gain every strategic advantage possible to maintain their authority, including the extortion of humanitarian groups.

The most substantial way that warlords gain power from humanitarian aid is through direct diversion of resources, such as the theft of supplies or the taxation of NGOs. A second way that warlords benefit from humanitarian aid is through indirect diversion of resources, such as providing aid to militarized refugees, non-uniformed soldiers disguised as innocent civilians, or warlords gaining wealth through the wartime economy. Finally, humanitarian aid provides several intangible factors, such as granting international legitimacy to warlords or enhancing the perceived strength of a rebel group. The following sections will delve more deeply into each of these categories and thoroughly explain how warlords manipulate humanitarian aid for their own advantage.

Direct Diversion: Theft

One of the most common forms of direct diversion is the theft of humanitarian supplies by warlords or armed militants. In Goma, humanitarian NGOs rarely recorded the theft of aid supplies by armed militants, but certain organizations did recognize that theft was a prevalent issue. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees recorded that several vehicles were stolen along with at least 15,000 gallons of fuel.²⁹ The World Food Program noted that looted vehicles were utilized by warlords as bus and taxi services. One bus alone earned a rebel driver \$3,018 in a five-month period in 1994 transporting humanitarians.³⁰ Additionally, WFP reported that 200 tons of food was stolen from a warehouse near the Bukavu refugee camp outside of Goma.³¹

One of the most striking examples of reported theft by humanitarian aid comes from a 2010 U.N. Security Council report investigating corruption within the WFP in Somalia. In 2009, the WFP had a budget of \$485 million, accounting for about 60% of all U.N. assistance to Somalia that year.³² Al-Shabab has declared all humanitarian aid agencies unwelcome in Somalia, and the report indicates that U.N. and NGO offices have been regularly “raided and looted by al-Shabab fighters” and that “U.N. vehicles have been used ... for suicide bombings.”³³ Another report suggests that warlords stole between 20 and 80 percent of all food aid provided by humanitarian organizations in Somalia; no exact numbers can be reported because of the lack of transparent accountability by humanitarian NGOs.³⁴

However, perhaps the most shocking revelation about the theft of humanitarian aid in Somalia is that many WFP employees described the lootings with a casual “business-as-usual” attitude.³⁵ The lack of concern that many humanitarians hold about the theft of aid resources by warlords suggests that it is a completely normal occurrence. Furthermore, looting of aid in Somalia is not a new phenomenon: Another report suggests that as early as 1992, warlords stole nearly 50 percent of all food aid brought into Mogadishu.³⁶ Despite the security risks and consistently high prevalence of looted aid, international NGOs continually pour millions of dollars into war-torn Somalia. Losing resources to theft is simply considered part of the job. As the country continues to suffer from chronic conflict and the lack of a central government, little evidence suggests that the humanitarian aid will stop being manipulated and stolen by warlords.

Even more explicit evidence of theft was recorded in Liberia between 1994 and 1996 as the United Nations provided humanitarian aid in the midst of a violent civil war. In 1994 alone, the U.N. reported that over \$5 million worth of goods was stolen, including 74 vehicles, 27 trucks, 18 motorcycles, communications equipment, and thousands of tons of food.³⁷

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Two years later, another estimated \$20 million in humanitarian resources, such as food, medicine, miscellaneous equipment, and vehicles, was stolen from the U.N. and other humanitarian NGOs.³⁸ The situation became so dire that many aid agencies decided to leave Liberia entirely instead of continuing to provide resources to warlords.

Direct Diversion: "Taxation"

Another common strategy that warlords use to divert resources from humanitarian organizations is by creating the illusion of state institutions by imposing import taxes, visa fees, refugee taxes, and other "war taxes." This strategy is particularly common when warlords gain complete control of a humanitarian zone, such as a refugee camp. For example, the same leaders who perpetrated the Rwandan genocide eventually became the leaders of the refugee camps in and around Goma in 1994.³⁹ Many analysts described the refugee camps as a "state-in-exile" because the same organizational structure of the former Rwandan government was re-established around the camps in eastern Congo.⁴⁰ As Destexhe explains, the refugee camps in Zaire were "totally controlled by the former Hutu government which organized the genocide."⁴¹ Because the former *génocidaires* had control of the refugees, humanitarian organizations had no choice but to work with these warlords in order to provide aid and resources to the suffering refugee population.⁴² Once the humanitarian community acquired the mindset that they had no choice but to work with warlords, they were imprisoned by the rules of the warlords.

In Goma, the camp leaders established several rules of governance in order to extort large sums of money from humanitarian organizations. First of all, the former *génocidaires* instituted a "war tax" on the refugee population by "commandeering a portion of all rations and salaries."⁴³ The war tax took several forms within the Goma camps and allowed the militant Hutu leaders to acquire more resources and aid than the rest of the refugees living in the camps. For example, they required that all refugees

in the military-organized Mugunga camp outside of Goma to forfeit at least 15 percent of their food rations to help feed soldiers.⁴⁴ This allowed the warlords to strengthen their armed militias and prepare attacks against the Rwandan government.

Additionally, the camp leaders taxed the salaries of the thousands of refugees who were employed by humanitarian organizations as local staff, at rates between 20 and 30 percent.⁴⁵ Although it is difficult to ascertain an accurate number of locally employed staff because there were hundreds of different humanitarian NGOs, refugees' salaries generally varied from \$2 per day for a casual laborer to up to \$270 per month for a local doctor.⁴⁶ MSF alone hired 2,600 refugees at their peak presence in the Goma camps and paid the local staff an average of \$100 per month.⁴⁷ If each of these employees paid 30% of their salaries to camp leaders, the warlords may have realized profits of up to \$85,000 per month from MSF alone.⁴⁸ Considering that hundreds of NGOs operated in the various Goma refugee camps, it is not hard to imagine that warlords made millions of dollars per month though the taxation of refugees.

Beyond Goma, several humanitarian NGOs reported that warlords directly imposed levies on humanitarian supplies and resources entering into the humanitarian zone. Charles Taylor notoriously charged all aid organizations entering Liberia to pay import duties, acquire humanitarian licenses and permits, and pay additional airport charges.⁴⁹ He additionally demanded 15 percent of all aid entering his territory to be paid in cash to his cronies.⁵⁰ In Somalia, a U.N. report stated that "aid convoys are regularly 'taxed' and forced to surrender some of their cargo at checkpoints."⁵¹ Some warlords charged as much as 80 percent of the value of the aid supplies to grant aid convoys permission to enter certain territories in Somalia.⁵² Another agency reported that warlords in southern Sudan forced humanitarian organizations to pay 30 percent of the value of their resources in order to enter into the warlord-controlled territory.⁵³

Finally, a 2006 U.N. aid mission in southern Afghanistan reportedly paid a third of its food supplies to members of the Taliban to reach needy victims.⁵⁴ In each of these scenarios, humanitarian organizations were faced with the decision to pay warlords and continue providing humanitarian aid or to abandon the mission entirely. However, the widespread reports of humanitarians paying taxes to warlords suggest that this ethical dilemma is not seen as much of a dilemma at all: Humanitarian organizations regularly choose to pay warlords and continue to provide aid to needy civilians.

Direct Diversion: Protection Rackets

One of the most common forms of extortion that warlords use to gain funding from humanitarian organizations is through protection rackets. A protection racket is similar to a “war tax” in that a warlord will charge a fee to grant protection and security while entering an otherwise unsafe environment. As Kimberly Marten explains, the warlord “has an incentive to make sure that the world seems like a dangerous place.”⁵⁵ For this reason, humanitarians are occasionally ambushed and killed to create the illusion of disorder and anarchy around a relatively stable refugee camp. In Goma, Linda Polman reported that Hutu soldiers sometimes laid mines around the entrances of refugee camps and forced aid workers to pay for a taxi service to ensure that they did not drive over a mine.⁵⁶ As one U.N. report explains, “armed groups not only control access to needy populations but also seek to exert a degree of control over aid resources for their own purposes.”⁵⁷ Because humanitarian organizations often work in insecure environments, paying a warlord for protection appears to be a desirable solution to get needed aid supplies to innocent victims.

One of the best-reported protection rackets exists along the roads of Afghanistan, where aid and development convoys regularly rely on private security companies run by warlords to guarantee security. As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained in 2009, “one of the major

sources of funding for the Taliban is protection money.”⁵⁸ A detailed report published by the U.S. House of Representatives estimates that Afghan warlords make \$1.6 to \$2 million per week by providing convoy security for USAID alone.⁵⁹ Although many of these security companies are technically private, powerful warlords often control them and siphon a large portion of the company’s profits to sustain their standing armies. As of 2010, Commander Ruhullah was the single largest security provider for the U.S. supply chain in Afghanistan, commanding a small army of 600 guards armed with AK-47s, heavy machine guns, and RPGs that controls a critical section of Highway 1 between Kabul and Kandahar.⁶⁰ He reportedly charged up to \$1,500 per truck to pass through his territory and reportedly earns about \$63 million per year.⁶¹ Although his company is technically privatized under the name Watan Risk Management, Ruhullah has close ties with Taliban leaders and appears to influence the Taliban’s ability to attack American convoys. The nature of bribery and corruption in Afghanistan suggests that a large portion of Ruhullah’s proceeds goes toward paying other Taliban warlords for protection. At the very least, his powerful group of armed men certainly undermines the power of the state by encouraging payments for security, a service that is generally considered a responsibility of the state.

USAID’s struggles with protection rackets is mirrored in the problems encountered by other international organizations providing aid in Afghanistan. The director of another international NGO noted that “Taliban and local warlords typically take between 10 and 20 percent of the value of any project as the price to provide protection.”⁶² The warlord’s success in gaining funding from security rackets was most emphatically explained by a member of the Taliban, who stated that they received funding from:

“ ... U.S. dollars and the U.S. authorities! U.S. authorities distribute dollars to the tribal chiefs, local administrators, and other concerned

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people for welfare projects ... not every penny, but most goes to Taliban pockets to refuel the struggle.”⁶³

Although paying off warlords for protection appears beneficial in the short term, doing so appears to empower warlords to strengthen their forces and thus promotes instability.

Similar protection rackets have been reported among aid distributors in Somalia, where kidnapping is commonly used for profit but also to deter humanitarians from refusing to pay for protection. On July 17, 2009, the French government paid \$1 million to release three aid workers from the French NGO Action contre la Faim.⁶⁴ Such occasional kidnappings contribute to the sense of instability and encourage aid workers to develop relationships with and pay bribes to warlords in exchange for protection. A U.N. report explains that “the aid community has come to accept a certain level of risk, loss, theft, and diversion as ‘the cost of doing business’ in Somalia,” and is willing to work with warlords in order to bring aid to needy victims.⁶⁵

Indirect Diversion: Militant Refugees

Humanitarian aid is sometimes indirectly diverted to empower warlords when militants assume complete control of a refugee camp. Particularly in the post-Cold War world, the line between civilians and non-uniformed insurgents is blurred, making it difficult to distinguish between refugees and armed militants.⁶⁶ Because of this lack of clarity, aid organizations often indirectly sustain militants by providing food and other aid to militarized refugees.⁶⁷ Particularly in the refugee crisis in Goma after the Rwandan genocide, very few humanitarians realized that many of those living in the refugee camps belonged to the ethnicity that perpetrated the genocide.⁶⁸ Although records are far from perfect, an estimated 22,000 former Rwandan soldiers settled in the refugee camps alongside 10,000 to 50,000 civilian militants called *interahamwe* who actively participated in

the genocide.⁶⁹ Despite the highly militarized nature of the camps, humanitarian NGOs continued to provide aid that indirectly sustained and aided former soldiers.

Evidence of the militancy in the camps was staggering. In 1995, a Human Rights Watch report stated that “perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide have rebuilt their military infrastructure, largely in Zaire, and are rearming themselves in preparation for a violent return to Rwanda.”⁷⁰ Although Zairian troops were required to disarm militant refugees as they crossed the border from Rwanda, the troops’ corrupt nature and common ethnic-lineages with Hutu soldiers often led to the sale of armaments back to *génocidaires*.⁷¹ After several months, the former Rwandan government held six helicopters, more than 1,000 artillery pieces, 35,000 light weapons, and several armored vehicles in and around the refugee camps.⁷² Colonel Theoneste Bagasora, a well-known *génocidaire*, openly declared that the Hutu army-in-exile would continue to fight until “the minority Tutsi are finished” and completely exterminated.⁷³ Despite these seemingly apparent indicators, the international aid community made no effort to disarm militants or separate civilians from soldiers.

Furthermore, certain aid organizations did not appear to wish to distinguish between civilian and militant refugees. As mentioned earlier, Caritas Internationalis provided food supplies to two explicitly military camps, and Asian Volunteer Network provided medical treatment to wounded soldiers at Panzi camp.⁷⁴ In 1995, fifteen humanitarian NGOs, including MSF-France, threatened to withdraw from Goma unless the U.N. sent 10,000 to 12,000 peacekeepers to separate former political leaders and killers from the civilian population.⁷⁵ After the Security Council rejected this proposition, these organizations abandoned the refugee crisis but were quickly replaced by other organizations that were willing to continue providing aid to militarized refugees.⁷⁶ The politically naïve NGOs “walked straight into the trap” and continued to feed refugees that

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were being trained to continue an armed struggle in Rwanda.⁷⁷ By refusing to distinguish between soldier and civilian, hundreds of humanitarian organizations provided blood aid that fed an alarmingly militarized population and ultimately prolonged a war.

Indirect Diversion: War Economy

When hundreds of NGOs and thousands of humanitarians with first-world lifestyles descend upon a humanitarian crisis zone, they create opportunities for warlords to take advantage of a newly created war economy. Wealthier people who have more resources often benefit the most by responding to an increased demand for office space, housing, food, furniture, technological equipment, and other essential needs that a humanitarian operation requires.⁷⁸ The humanitarian crisis in Bosnia during the 1990s particularly highlights that the influx of money from humanitarians and the relative stabilization that a humanitarian mission provides can create a robust illicit economy that can include not only stolen aid and weapons but also drugs, sex slaves, and human trafficking.⁷⁹ Those who already have wealth and resources can utilize their properties as restaurants, hotels, or brothels and make a large profit off of the humanitarian community.⁸⁰ The refugees, who have no wealth or power, benefit far less from this influx of money.

The camps themselves also become artificially commercialized from the increase in foreign humanitarian aid. The four main camps around Goma eventually had at least 2,324 bars, 450 restaurants, 590 shops, 60 hair salons, 50 pharmacies, 30 tailors, three cinemas, two hotels, and presumably several brothels.⁸¹ The quality of life in the camps was good enough for most refugees to decrease the incentive to return home; particularly for those refugees with a paid job with an NGO, life in the camp was relatively more comfortable than the rural villages they came from.⁸² However, the economies in these camps were entirely artificial and dependent on foreign aid. Such artificial economies created a negative

cycle in which most refugees would not want to return home, forcing the humanitarian NGOs to continue providing aid and sustain the massive population of refugees.

Members of a war economy that become successful have the least incentive to bring an end to a conflict. Despite devastating poverty, some warlords drove gold Mercedes and other expensive cars around the refugee camps, and returned to their expensive houses in the surrounding areas every night.⁸³ In Afghanistan, after the violence in Kabul abated following the U.S. invasion, rents for apartments skyrocketed to over \$5,000 a month because humanitarians continued to pay drastically inflated prices.⁸⁴ The dramatic inequalities in wealth suggest that certain members of the refugee community benefit far more than the rest. As the humanitarian community spends millions of dollars on daily living expenses in crisis zones, the warlords eventually gain the most wealth.

Indirect Diversion: Resource Substitution

One of the greatest advantages that humanitarian aid indirectly provides to warlords is resource substitution, which allows warlords to neglect local welfare burdens and focus all of their resources on the war effort. As Hitomi Tsunekawa explains, “military-oriented leaders increasingly evade or defer their responsibility to address civilian welfare” because they know that humanitarian aid agencies will provide food, shelter, and basic healthcare.⁸⁵ Instead of occupying themselves with providing human security for the refugees under their charge, warlords divert all of their excess resources towards military purposes.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the fact that humanitarian agencies provide for the basic needs to those under the power of a warlord inadvertently provides some legitimacy to the warlord himself because he is successfully manipulating aid organizations to provide goods and services to his people. The civilians are often unwilling to question the authority of the warlord because their basic needs are being met.

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Although little empirical exists to assert that resource substitution makes a tangible impact on the power of warlords, the logic is certainly convincing. Without the presence of humanitarian aid, warlords would have the “political burden of fulfilling civilian needs” and create institutions that provide sustainable welfare to the general population.⁸⁷ The actual impact of resource substitution in empowering warlords and prolonging conflict may be questioned, but its existence cannot be denied. Without humanitarian aid, the refugee camps in and around Goma could not have sustained nearly a million people for over two years, and the majority of its inhabitants would have returned home to Rwanda much earlier. Many of the refugees did not abandon the camps until the Rwandan army, led by Kagame, invaded Zaire in 1996 in an attempt to demilitarize the camps and force the refugees to return home.⁸⁸ Ultimately, the presence of the militarized refugee camps, artificially sustained by humanitarian aid, became an important contributing factor in the Rwandan army’s decision to invade Zaire and fully conquer the militarized Hutu.

Intangible Factors

Humanitarian aid empowers warlords in several other ways that certainly cannot be quantified. First of all, humanitarian aid workers provide legitimacy to warlords simply by negotiating and working with them. Humanitarian agencies’ “obsession with neutrality” prevents them from judging the morality of any actors they work with.⁸⁹ In Goma, humanitarian NGOs refused to accuse any *génocidaires* of war crimes because they did not want to ostracize the same people they collaborated with to distribute aid. Instead, they were “forced to negotiate and work with unsavory rebel or government groups” in order to gain access to the needy population.⁹⁰ However, by allowing *génocidaires* and former Hutu government leaders to distribute resources throughout the camps, they provided them with an enormous amount of power.⁹¹ Within refugee camps, “food represents power” and the humanitarian organizations

delegated an enormous amount of legitimacy to warlords by allowing them to distribute food and other resources.⁹² In an inadvertent way, humanitarian agencies authorized the warlords' power by giving them formal roles and institutionalizing their leadership among a civilian population.

Another important advantage that warlords gain from manipulating humanitarian aid is a perceived increase in military strength and international importance. Neil Narang argues that wars are often fought as a result of uncertainty about the strength between warring parties: "Opponents fight in order to reduce uncertainty ... by observing their costs of war and risk of military collapse over time."⁹³ By providing humanitarian aid to refugees that are under the direct control of a warlord, the strength of a warlord's army becomes increasingly uncertain because the opposition has "incomplete information about its opponent's capabilities."⁹⁴ Therefore, even if arguments that humanitarian aid has no significant impact on the strength of a warlord are true, the fact that it can change the perceived strength of a warlord's capabilities increases the probability of conflict. This scenario contributed to Rwanda's decision to invade Zaire, because Kagame perceived that humanitarian aid allowed Hutu militants to "rebuild themselves into a force."⁹⁵ Despite the impact that humanitarian aid has on the dynamics of a conflict, humanitarians rarely analyze their influence and prefer to blindly provide aid with no regard to context or changing circumstances.

Solutions: Improved Security and Cooperation

The most important policy change to which the international community must commit is increasing the level of security in humanitarian zones where aid is distributed. Although corruption is always going to be prevalent in fragile states, it is essentially guaranteed in an insecure environment where warlords control civilian access to humanitarian aid. Before MSF-France abandoned its humanitarian mission in Goma, it

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called upon the U.N. for an “armed humanitarian” mission because it recognized the importance of creating a secure refugee camp to improve the efficiency of aid distribution.⁹⁶ Particularly in militarized refugee camps, NGOs must make aid “contingent on security improvements” such as disarming refugees, separating militants, and providing adequate police protection and security.⁹⁷ Humanitarian organizations sometimes do not realize how much leverage they actually possess. If humanitarian organizations collectively threatened to abandon a humanitarian crisis without the U.N. Security Council authorizing proper security, the international community may react with a more robust peacekeeping force to provide genuine security.

However, the biggest challenge for the humanitarian community is its inability to act collectively due to its competitive market-driven nature. In Goma, streets were “plastered with stickers” of humanitarian NGO logos that advertised their “names and logos like soft drink manufacturers.”⁹⁸ Organizations desperately wanted their logos aired on national television or for employees to be interviewed with CNN because the free publicity contributed to dramatic increases in donations.⁹⁹ Furthermore, these organizations rarely wanted to leave a crisis zone because once contracts and grants were obtained from U.N. and donor agencies, “the prospect of leaving ... could jeopardize all future relationships with donors.”¹⁰⁰ While MSF and 14 other NGOs abandoned Goma for security reasons, most organizations remained because they couldn’t afford to lose “market share” and the international recognition for helping alleviate the greatest humanitarian crisis of the decade.¹⁰¹ Despite the competitive nature of humanitarian aid, the U.N. and other international organizations must find ways to seek higher levels of cooperation to collectively combat manipulation by warlords.

Conclusion

After MSF decided to abandon its humanitarian mission in Goma, its Secretary-General, Alain Destexhe, asked the international community:

“How can we think of passing food through the window while doing nothing to drive the murderer from the house, or feeding hostages without attempting to confront their kidnapper, or feeding the murderer after the crime? These are not humanitarian acts.”¹⁰²

Although too little empirical evidence exists to substantially analyze the impact of humanitarian aid on conflict dynamics, too much anecdotal evidence exists to deny that warlords have the ability to manipulate it for their own gain. Humanitarian organizations should not continue to blindly provide aid without critically questioning which actors are benefitting the most from the dramatic influx of money and resources. Donor coordination and improved security are essential to curb the power of warlords in diverting humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the international community must demand increased transparency from humanitarian organizations so its donors gain a better understanding of where all of its money and resources go. Too much money and resources are being diverted towards warlords for the international community to continue its naïve belief that humanitarian organizations are incorruptible. Instead, it's time that humanitarian organizations begin to genuinely analyze the potentially negative effects of cooperating with warlords and prevent humanitarian resources from becoming blood aid.

¹ Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 171.

² Sarah Kenyon Lischer, “Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict.” *International Security* 28 (2003): 80.

³ Linda Polman, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong With Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Picador, 2010), 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶ Neil Narang. "Aiding and Abetting: How International Humanitarian Assistance Can Inadvertently Prolong Conflict and How Combatants Respond." (University of California, San Diego, 2011): 1.

⁷ Global Humanitarian Assistance Programme, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014*. Global Humanitarian Assistance (2014): 4.

⁸ Polman, 53.

⁹ Global Humanitarian Assistance Programme, 4.

¹⁰ Polman, 53.

¹¹ Alain Destexhe, "Humanitarian Neutrality: Myth or Reality?" *Preventive Diplomacy: Stopping Wars Before They Start*. The Center for International Health and Cooperation, Kevin M. Cahill, ed., (New York: Basicbooks, 1996), 213.

¹² Ibid., 212.

¹³ Daniel Maxwell et al., *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance*. Feinstein International Center, Humanitarian Policy Group, Transparency International (2008): 7.

¹⁴ Lydia Poole, *Humanitarian Aid in Conflict: More Money, More Problems?*, Global Humanitarian Assistance (2010).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bertram I. Spector, Michael Johnston, and Svetlana Winbourne, *Anticorruption Assessment Handbook*. (Washington, DC: Management Systems International 2009): 13.

¹⁷ Terry, 15.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Rearming with Impunity: International Support for the Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995).

¹⁹ Lischer, 106.

²⁰ Kimberly Marten, *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 3.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² John F. Tierney, *Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan*, (Washington, DC: House of Representatives 2010): 19.

²³ Marten, 4.

²⁴ Tierney, 20.

²⁵ Marten, 8; Tierney, 20.

²⁶ Bertram I. Spector, Svetlana Winbourne, and Phyllis Dininio, *Practitioner's Guide For Anticorruption Programming*. (Arlington, VA: Management Systems International, 2015): 51.

²⁷ Tierney, 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sarah Kenyon Lischer, Sarah Kenyon, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 91.

³⁰ Terry, 190.

- ³¹ Ibid., 189.
- ³² Claude Heller. *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)*. (New York: United Nations Security Council, 2010): 60.
- ³³ Ibid., 59.
- ³⁴ Narang, 61.
- ³⁵ Heller, 60.
- ³⁶ Hitomi Tsunekawa, "The Interaction Between Humanitarian Assistance and Politics in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies," (master's thesis, McGill University, 2001): 25.
- ³⁷ Narang, 61.
- ³⁸ Lischer, 84; Narang, 61.
- ³⁹ Terry, 175.
- ⁴⁰ Lischer, 87.
- ⁴¹ Alain Destexhe, "Interview: Dr. Alain Destexhe, Medecins San Frontieres Secretary-General," *Africa Report*, 40, vol. 2 (Mar. 1995): 8.
- ⁴² Destexhe 1996, 211.
- ⁴³ Lischer, 84.
- ⁴⁴ Tsunekawa, 26.
- ⁴⁵ Polman, 27; Terry, 189.
- ⁴⁶ Terry, 190.
- ⁴⁷ Neil MacFarlane, "Humanitarian Action and Conflict," *International Journal*, 54, no. 4, (1999): 554.
- ⁴⁸ MacFarlane, 554; Tsunekawa, 27.
- ⁴⁹ Tsunekawa, 26.
- ⁵⁰ Narang, 62.
- ⁵¹ Heller, 59.
- ⁵² Polman, 98.
- ⁵³ Tsunekawa, 26.
- ⁵⁴ Polman, 98.
- ⁵⁵ Marten, 8.
- ⁵⁶ Polman, 14.
- ⁵⁷ Heller, 59.
- ⁵⁸ Tierney, 39.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 35.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 17, 22.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 17.
- ⁶² Ibid., 38.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 39.
- ⁶⁴ Heller, 64.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 59.
- ⁶⁶ Narang, 60.
- ⁶⁷ Lischer, 83.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.

- ⁶⁹ Terry, 157.
- ⁷⁰ *Rearming with Impunity*.
- ⁷¹ Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, 183.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 161.
- ⁷³ Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 81.
- ⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch 1995.
- ⁷⁵ Ian Martin, "Hard Choices After Genocide: Human Rights and Political Failures in Rwanda," in *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*. International Committee of the Red Cross, Jonathan Moore, ed., (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998) 161.
- ⁷⁶ Polman, 36.
- ⁷⁷ Rakiya Omar and Alex de Waal, *Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate Relief Operations in Political Emergencies*, (London: African Rights, 1994): 34.
- ⁷⁸ Narang, 63; Tsunekawa, 39.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ Narang, 63.
- ⁸¹ Polman, 23.
- ⁸² Alain Destexhe, "A Border Without Doctors," *The New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1995, A23.
- ⁸³ Lischer, 80; Polman, 99.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ⁸⁵ Tsunekawa, 28.
- ⁸⁶ MacFarlane, 551.
- ⁸⁷ Narang, 62.
- ⁸⁸ Terry, 193.
- ⁸⁹ Omar and de Waal, 28.
- ⁹⁰ Lischer, 85.
- ⁹¹ Polman, 27.
- ⁹² Destexhe 1995, A23.
- ⁹³ Narang, 91.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ⁹⁵ Terry, 192.
- ⁹⁶ Medecins Sans Frontieres, *Populations in Danger 1995*, (London: Medecins Sans Frontieres, 1995), 91.
- ⁹⁷ Lischer, 103.
- ⁹⁸ Richard Dowden, "Battle of Logos and T-Shirts Rages in Refugee Camps: Aid Agencies Scramble for Cash." *The Independent*. (Sept. 4, 1994).
- ⁹⁹ Dowden; Terry, 203.
- ¹⁰⁰ Terry, 203.
- ¹⁰¹ Lischer, 106.
- ¹⁰² Medecins Sans Frontieres: 14.