

Tbilisi Symposium on Conflict and Humanitarian Politics
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Summary Record of Proceedings

Sponsors

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UN OCHA Regional Office
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Dr. Mary B. Anderson, President, Local Capacities for Peace Project
Dr. S. Neil MacFarlane, Lester B. Pearson Professor of International Relations, Oxford University
Mr. Greg Hansen, Consultant

Context

This document provides a summary record of proceedings from the Tbilisi Symposium on Conflict and Humanitarian Politics held at the Sheraton Metechi Hotel in Tbilisi on 7 October 1998. The record is based on notes taken by rapporteurs during the session. A consolidated report will be prepared and circulated by the Humanitarianism and War Project encompassing discussions held during the Symposium and at the 7 strategy sessions held elsewhere in the region.

A series of Symposia, Roundtables, and Strategy Sessions occurred in the Caucasus in the autumn of 1998 with financial support to the Humanitarianism and War Project from the Swedish Agency for International Development (Sida), the U.S. Department of State, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In-kind support was provided by agencies throughout the region. The purpose of these activities was to further enhance international and local capacities for responding creatively to unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus.

Strategy sessions covered each aid focal point in the Caucasus, drawing participants from UN agencies, international and local NGOs, diplomatic and observer missions, donors, and local authorities. Venues included Moscow (covering the North Caucasus), Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Tskhinvali, Yerevan, Barda, and Baku. The agenda for each session was purpose-built according to needs and priorities defined by aid actors in cooperation with the H&W Project. All sessions were convened and organized among the humanitarian community. Dominant themes included humanitarian politics; security, strategic planning for safe returns and rehabilitation; and assistance by remote control. Where possible, participants were provided in advance with copies of the H&W Project's recently published *Humanitarian Action in the Caucasus: A Guide for Practitioners*.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mr. Giorgi Burduli, First Deputy Foreign Minister, Government of Georgia

Mr. Burduli welcomed all participants and thanked the facilitators and organizers of the Symposium for convening the gathering. He cited the experience of Georgia in its efforts to address the internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as providing rich food for thought to the day's discussions. Georgia was committed to peaceful resolution of these conflicts, whose effects constituted a heavy burden on the whole country. The results of these armed conflicts were grave: hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced. He hoped that the day's discussions would further elaborate the means to confidence building and peacebuilding and better coordination among conflicting parties and international bodies to complement political peace processes conducted in accordance with recognition of internationally accepted borders and democratic governance.

Mr. Marco Borsotti, UNDP Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Georgia

Mr. Borsotti remarked that the aim of the Symposium was to stimulate discussion on improved synergies between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors. The place to start was by looking at experience and practice rather than with theory. Although previous work conducted by the two sponsoring Projects had laid important academic groundwork for the day, the Symposium was not purely an academic initiative. Rather, it was an opportunity for self-examination and a chance to review lessons-learned.

Introduction to the Symposium (*Mr. Larry Minear*)

After describing the activity in the Caucasus and elsewhere of the Humanitarianism and War and Local Capacities for Peace Projects, Mr. Minear reiterated the goals of the Symposium. These were to review the interactions between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping efforts in the Caucasus and to explore ways of improving synergies between these constituencies.

Plenary 1 -- Interactions In Practice: A Review of Recent Experience (*facilitated by Greg Hansen*)

1. Hansen observed that there has been a growing awareness among aid actors in the Caucasus that humanitarian and development assistance is part of -- not apart from -- the political, social, economic, and moral forces that serve to sustain or discourage conflict. More attention is being paid to the impacts of the aid presence on conflict, on economies, and on local settings in general. Aid agencies are more attuned than they once were to the moral and ethical messages conveyed by aid work in conflict settings. Similarly, diplomatic and peacekeeping actors are becoming more aware of the central roles played by humanitarian and development assistance in the pursuit of peace. Humanitarian efforts increasingly are being seen as complementary to peace efforts rather than competing with them.
2. Examples of interactions between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping efforts were neither uniformly negative nor uniformly positive in the region. Humanitarian actors sometimes regard the entry of diplomatic and peacekeeping actors into the humanitarian sphere with a degree of suspicion or at least trepidation because they see diplomatic or political activity as threats to aid agency neutrality, impartiality, and non-partisanship. Conversely, diplomatic actors have sometimes relegated humanitarian concerns to the backburner or perceived humanitarian efforts as competing, rather than complementary, efforts.
3. Hansen posed the following question to participants and asked them to keep it in mind throughout the day:

Does the synergy -- or lack of synergy -- between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors result in increased or decreased protection and security for vulnerable populations, security for aid operations and personnel, or access to populations in need?

4. Hansen gave a number of examples from the region of positive and negative interactions. In the autumn of 1995 aid agencies called the OSCE's attention to a likelihood of violence and renewed displacement of spontaneous returnees to the security zone in Gali region as a result of tariffs imposed by Abkhaz authorities and milicija on the multi-million dollar hazelnut harvest. The fear was that disputes over these tariffs would quickly turn violent and would act as a flash point for something larger in a climate that was already very tense.
5. The OSCE Ambassador took a stern demarche to Abkhaz authorities at the highest levels, sending a clear message that they would be held accountable for the actions of Abkhaz milicija and fighters if the harvest and its passage out of the region were interfered with. The OSCE's firm and principled stand had the desired effect: the harvest passed relatively quietly. This was an example of the political modality of protection for vulnerable populations who, on many previous occasions, had been placed at risk or had become victims because authorities and the fighters over which the authorities claimed control could act with a high degree of impunity.
6. From Russia and the North Caucasus there were promising examples of how diplomatic actors can help to undermine the climate of impunity in which attacks on aid workers and agencies grew steadily worse. Since the assassination of 6 ICRC workers south of Grozny nearly two years ago, the six embassies representing the nationalities of the Red Cross workers have made collective and forceful representations to the Russian and, through the OSCE Assistance Group, the Chechen authorities reminding them that their investigations into the crime were being closely watched. It was a way of sending Federal and secessionist authorities the message that it was they who were ultimately accountable for bringing the perpetrators of an unprecedented crime to justice.
7. Similarly, under extremely tense and trying circumstances in 1997 the Head of the OSCE Assistance Group in Grozny, Ambassador Rudolph Thorning-Petersen of Denmark, personally, forcefully, and repeatedly intervened with Chechen president Maskhadov to get the presidents' personal guarantee of safety for an aid worker, who had been held hostage for months, and was in the difficult process of being released. Once the aid worker was released into the OSCE's safekeeping, Chechen anti-terrorist police surrounded the OSCE compound and demanded at gun point that the worker be turned over to them for interrogation. Part of the OSCE's mandate in Chechnya was to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This aspect of the mandate had been interpreted differently by successive heads of mission and in different stages of the war.
8. In both cases, diplomats enhanced the protection of aid workers and helped to create conditions more favorable to a continued aid presence, sending the message that those who claimed authority were accountable for the behavior of those under their control.
9. In another positive example, which Neil MacFarlane later expanded upon, UNDP embarked on a creative initiative in South Ossetia / Tskhinvali Region to address earthquake and war damage. In past years humanitarian assistance to relieve life-threatening suffering had been provided by the ICRC and a small number of NGOs. However, major donors ruled out reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance on the logic that such assistance would legitimize de-facto authorities in South Ossetia and fortify the region's secessionist claims, jeopardizing their relations with the Georgian government in the process. Ossetians, meanwhile, whose living conditions were dismal, viewed the withholding of aid as punishment. Was this strengthening or weakening Ossetian views that they were part of a country called Georgia? UNDP's response worked to the advantage of both Ossetians and

Georgians by involving them in a joint initiative around projects of mutual interest, investment, and benefit.

10. An example of negative interaction or of a missed opportunity for improved synergy was drawn from the situation of victims of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. There are 600,000 - 650,000 displaced people in Azerbaijan, many maintained in dismal conditions. After many years of the conflict being frozen, what is the humanitarian imperative? Has it become ambiguous? The first priority, which the international community has acted upon, is to assist these people in place. But the larger challenge, of helping these people to go home, has not been tackled. Some eminently valid humanitarian questions have not been pressed -- by the High Level Planning Group of the OSCE's Minsk process, nor by the UNHCR. These people have the right of return. Meanwhile, there is near consensus that the situation of IDPs in Azerbaijan has intentionally been kept marginal by the government of Azerbaijan to keep the unfinished business of Nagorno-Karabakh visible. But many aid agencies in the region see themselves as caught in a Catch-22 scenario: no progress on the political front means that a return cannot proceed, but this return, when and however it happens, will be extremely costly and complex. This makes contingency planning a must so that aid agencies are not caught unprepared by progress on the political front. The lack of a humanitarian impetus in peace talks represents a missed opportunity, if not a failure, of synergy between humanitarian and diplomatic actors.
11. In and around Nagorno-Karabakh, uniformed and non-uniformed Karabakh Armenians continue systematically to loot homes from which ethnic Azeris have fled. What are the consequences of this? As this activity continues we can assume a hardening of attitudes among Azeri IDPs, some of whom have had occasion to watch from a distance their homes being loaded brick by brick onto the backs of trucks. Clearly the readiness to reconcile will be further damaged as this activity continues, and it is likely to continue for as long as those who are doing the looting enjoy impunity. As US-funded reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance gears up inside Nagorno-Karabakh, who could hold Karabakh Armenian authorities accountable so that the looting will be stopped? Hardly US NGOs, who may themselves come under pressure to use looted materials in reconstruction programming in Nagorno-Karabakh.
12. Hansen asked what lessons could be drawn from these examples. Some additional questions were posed in the hope that they would help bring the issues into sharper focus:

Where there are positive synergies is this a result of dynamic personalities acting in a principled way? Is personality enough?

Has the missed opportunity for synergy resulted from interpretations of aid agency or observer mission mandates that are too narrow? Where do mandates allow for improved synergies, and where are they an obstacle?

Where humanitarian, diplomatic, or peacekeeping interests have come into collision, was this the result of competing interests or irreconcilable differences in the way each perceived the situation, or were other factors at work?

Discussion / Commentary

13. A participant from Armenia noted the crucial role that would need to be played by the UN Department of Political Affairs in shaping future responses by the UN to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Without initiative from DPA, it was felt that the humanitarian and development organizations of the UN had their hands tied. However, it was still possible to encourage better awareness of other perspectives among national staff, e.g., through joint training initiatives bringing national staff together from the three countries of the region. Another felt that it was necessary to explore where assistance agencies had the space to do

more under present conditions. For example, what opportunities were there for increasing cooperation between Armenians and Azeris? Initiatives involving children had shown promise.

14. Speaking to earlier comments made regarding diplomatic interventions on behalf of aid worker security, a senior diplomatic participant from the UN asserted that the examples given were largely irrelevant. Aid workers needed to accept that they work in uncontrolled, dangerous environments where, like others, they were the targets of criminality. Young aid workers in particular arrived on the scene unprepared for the difficulties they faced, then were often unwilling to follow security guidelines and procedures put in place to help protect them. Some agencies exhibited better security discipline than others. Diplomatic actors could issue protests to authorities but these protests were of limited value when the authorities themselves were unable to exercise control.
15. The same speaker noted that humanitarian and development assistance should proceed as part of an overall strategy for responding to conflict. When violence erupted in Gali region of Abkhazia in May 1998, there were 2 or 3 aid workers in Gali, 1,506 Russian troops with the CISPKF, and 136 UNOMIG Observers. In this speaker's view, humanitarian actors knew little about what was occurring and were naive in their approach to the hard realities of the situation. A history of misinformation and disinformation about events counseled caution in how information was used. There was disagreement in the group as to how much was known by the diplomatic, peacekeeping, and humanitarian constituencies about impending violence in Gali region of Abkhazia in May 1998, and how well information was shared among them.
16. Mr. Minear noted that while it was indeed important for diplomatic, peacekeeping, and humanitarian actors to work together toward the same goals, this was not possible in the absence of communications between them. The contention that peacekeeping and diplomatic actors were well-informed about local realities was not consistently borne out by experience. Meanwhile, there was a perception among peacekeeping and diplomatic constituencies that humanitarians were generally naive do-gooders, a view that likewise had proved inaccurate. A participant noted that due to the three-month tenure of NGO liaison officers in UNOMIG it took a continual process of education and outreach to ensure that aid actors and liaison officers spoke the same language. Personnel turnover was lower among key humanitarian organizations.
17. On another note, a donor observed that the humanitarian imperative involved more than returning displaced people to their homes. The challenge was to cultivate independence among IDPs by integrating them -- temporarily, pending a political outcome to conflict. The question that needed to be asked was how far the humanitarian imperative should be subordinated to political issues.
18. The OSCE's role in South Ossetia was discussed by a senior diplomatic participant. In contrast to the situation in Abkhazia relations and information-sharing between the OSCE and the international humanitarian / development assistance community were described as complementary and sound. Even though parties to the conflict tended to look upon aid work in political terms, the OSCE saw a role for itself in explaining the mutually beneficial results of aid work to both sides and providing backstopping for aid actors with the relevant authorities when attempts were made at manipulation. Its head of mission had given clear instructions to OSCE observers that they be cooperative with the aid community in South Ossetia.
19. The OSCE had helped authorities to understand that aid agencies were interested in assisting people and the peace process, rather than advancing partisan political interests. They also tried to build an awareness among authorities that international organizations expected peace processes to move forward. This was related to the need for such organizations to be clear about the ground rules under which assistance was being provided. The participant felt that an underutilized resource was the use of media to build an awareness

among populations in conflict areas of the roles of international humanitarian, development, and political assistance and to make it clear that if their leaders behaved in certain ways, they were at risk of again becoming victims.

20. This participant noted that the readiness of international aid organizations to redress the economic and social costs of armed conflict did not act as much of a deterrent to authorities who were bent on fighting it out militarily. The terms of engagement by aid agencies therefore, need to be clear. Aid agencies generally clustered around 2 schools: the “Hippocratic oath” school which put humanitarian concerns and victims first, and a larger school of agencies who provided a broad range of social, economic, and political rehabilitation programs. The efforts of the latter are undertaken with money paid by taxpayers in rich countries so there is a responsibility to be accountable for the quality of this work. Quality entails having a kind of optimal, overall strategy for responding in a conflict, coordinated with the social, economic, and political strategy of international organizations like the UN or OSCE. This might entail giving or withholding assistance in order to bring about desirable political effects.
21. The need to listen more carefully to the displaced was raised by another participant. It was noted that IDPs are political actors with political agendas. How then could aid agencies decide what is best for IDPs? If they want to return, this must be taken into account. If they are afraid to return, this too must be factored into aid strategies. International actors need to be prepared to listen to fears, not just what they want to hear.
22. In response, a participant questioned whether UNHCR hadn’t been unfairly criticized for the failed repatriation to Gali region in 1994. The parties to the conflict had agreed to a return, but the implementation of the return was flawed. Moreover, donors play a major role: the viability of an operation rests on the availability of funding, but the funding situation has become more difficult.

Plenary II -- Interactions Between Aid and Conflict: Policy and Donor Implications for Doing No Harm *(facilitated by Dr. Mary B. Anderson)*

23. Dr. Anderson described the learning of the LCPP about how aid could be provided in conflict settings so that the harmful effects could be minimized and the positive effects maximized. The key was to diagnose the conflicts where aid is provided to anticipate harmful and helpful interactions. The LCPP has borrowed the “Do No Harm” methodology from the Hippocratic Oath, which recognizes that medicine is not perfect: medical procedures are often intrusive so it is often necessary to do some harm in order to do good. Medical doctors pledge to learn from their experience, to accumulate this, and to share it with others so that the entire profession gets better. As in medicine, aid often does harm even when it tries to do good -- but also like in medicine, providing no aid also does harm. Although caution is called for when generalizing from setting to setting, experiences gathered from conflicts around the world suggest that there are ways of providing assistance without doing harm.
24. The LCPP’s Framework for Considering the Impact of Aid on Conflict is the diagnostic tool developed based on this experience. Dr. Anderson presented the Framework, sketching out the categories of tensions and connectors which characterize the context for aid in conflict. She then described how aid programming interacted with these, and gave examples from elsewhere about how negative effects of aid on tensions had been successfully avoided by finding creative programming options. Other examples were given illustrating how aid programming could support connectors in war-torn societies, or avoid making them weaker.
25. Although Dr. Anderson noted that aid workers often attribute the harmful effects of aid to policy decisions, but that often they still have options to avoid negative impacts, the LCPP had discerned some patterns in how donor policy can have harmful effects. These were:

- *targeting constraints which focus on sub-groups to the exclusion of others, thus reinforcing existing divisions between people (e.g., those labeled as returnees receive assistance, but residents do not)*
- *the nature, quantities, and scheduling of aid deliveries to a conflict environment can be problematic: the concentration of aid goods in space and time creates conditions conducive to theft and manipulation in ways which feed into conflict. Donor funding cycles and behavior may lead to situations where there is too much aid too fast, or it is late in coming, or arrives when it is inappropriate but impossible to stop*
- *specifications of quality can reward certain groups in ways which can feed into pre-existing tensions or perceptions of bias. For example, small credit schemes in which some groups perform better in repayment than others can play into tensions if only those who perform well are entitled to further loans. In this case, good developmental criterion for success do not equal the amelioration of tensions*

Discussion / Commentary

26. A participant observed that war-torn societies are not what they once were: they have been broken and replaced by that which was made during and after conflict. There may be situations where everyone has committed a crime in war, or where it is the mission of a society to prove the impossibility of ever living together again with another group. This pointed to the importance of looking for connectors in the structures that have survived in some fashion in spite of war, (e.g., families), and which allow people to act in non-war ways.
27. Prof. MacFarlane pointed out that in the Caucasus the challenge was not open warfare so much as prolonged states of frozen conflict under reasonably durable cease-fires. The question was how could societies be moved beyond the status quo into a more normalized political situation when some elements, such as smugglers, have an interest in maintaining the status quo?
28. A concern was expressed that in the case of Abkhazia, the tendency was toward cutting support for local NGOs in response to the events in May 1998. This was seen by local NGOs as collective punishment, inferring that local NGOs are mere fronts for de-facto authorities and thus should be punished for something the authorities are responsible for. In terms of negative impacts, this undermines the constructive roles that local NGOs can play in tempering the behavior of authorities, by limiting the space for civil society actors.
29. Concern was also expressed later regarding discussions on cuts to international programs. USAID's intervention in Abkhazia was contrasted with that in Nagorno-Karabakh as an example of how politically-motivated aid did not necessarily have to result in poorly conceived or disproportionate assistance. A participant cited how USAID in Georgia had consulted with many key international actors with experience working in Abkhazia before issuing a request for applications from implementing agencies, then invited two representatives from the aid community to take part in the proposal review process. This helped to guide USAID's ultimate selection of proposals in ways which averted unbalanced assistance (i.e., both Gali region and other areas with majority Abkhaz populations received were earmarked for assistance).
30. It was noted that people could be put in greater danger by the provision of support for connectors. Local connectors can be vulnerable, especially in environments of ethnic cleansing. How wise is it to place people back in multi-ethnic environments? The alternative is to accept ethnic cleansing. Discussions about return however should not be blind to the importance of discerning the special circumstances that prevail in each local

setting: very different dynamics will be present in Gali region, Sukhumi, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Lachin, for example.

31. Another participant warned against generalizations, again in relation to return questions. IDPs might or might not ultimately be able or willing to go home in the long term, but the aid community had little capacity to analyze this. Caution was needed to avoid building unduly high expectations about early return to prevent disruptions in overall development and increased dissatisfaction among the displaced.
32. In response to earlier comments on information sharing, transparency between aid, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors was cited as being a particularly important first step towards complementary efforts. However, diplomatic actors are often characterized by a culture of secrecy. There were risks entailed by having too much held secret behind closed doors. A proven alternative is to have a degree of openness where the rules of the game are on the table. It was noted that certain situations, such as sensitive negotiations, call for a degree of confidentiality. However, secrecy reinforces perceptions that outsiders are meddling behind the backs of local actors. In the experience of the LCPP, transparency to the extent of explaining what was being done and why it was being done had seldom if ever had a negative consequence.

Special Guest Speaker on the Human Face of Displacement: Ms. Julia Kharashvili (Society of Displaced Women/ UNV)

33. Ms. Kharashvili was introduced by Mr. Marco Borsotti as “one of the builders”, someone who has made tremendous contributions to confidence building. She is presently involved in cross-conflict initiatives involving women and children. Ms. Kharashvili’s aims were to share her personal views, experiences, and hopes as someone who had been forced to flee from her home. When she was displaced she felt that she had stopped being Julia Kharashvili, stopped being a physicist, and started being a beneficiary, an IDP.
34. She and others needed to feel as though their lives had not stopped forever, and they wanted to take part in the decision-making that affected their lives despite the lack of information that surrounded them and uncertainty about the future. Even Georgians were sometimes surprised to learn that “IDPs” had their own non-governmental organizations. It was a long time before she and her colleagues felt that they were being listened to, but five years ago it felt good to have their opinions “put on a flip chart for the first time”.
35. The activities of her initiative group began with psycho-social support for women and children, and led to the development of the children’s magazine “White Crane”. Her group has organized several peace camps bringing together children who otherwise would remain separated by conflict. In an initiative which gives expression to the “children’s community” rather than ethnic communities or “IDP communities”, she and her colleagues are finalizing a book containing letters from children from across the Caucasus including from all parts of Georgia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Ms. Kharashvili offered to send the book to participants in the Symposium.
36. Ms. Kharashvili noted that in situations of “frozen conflict” it can be very easy for people to gravitate to war or to peace, but that it is a choice. It can also be difficult to help people who have no hope. During the violent events in Gali region in May 1998, she assisted with psycho-social work among the people who had fled to Zugdidi. Some people in Western Georgia have been displaced for the second or third time, and Ms. Kharashvili noted that the most evident emotion she encountered was distrust, including distrust of the international community.
37. On relations with the international community Ms. Kharashvili noted that Georgians can learn from internationals and that internationals can learn from Georgians. Specifically, it is important for the international community to give people a chance to chart their own course.

International organizations can provide a framework and safe space to those who want to build their capacities or to come together.

Plenary III -- Interactions Between Aid, Politics, and Conflict in the Southern Caucasus (*facilitated by Dr. S. Neil MacFarlane*)

38. Dr. MacFarlane's opening remarks touched on 4 areas: the context of conflict in the region and implications for humanitarian action; categories of political factors and their implications for assistance; interactions between humanitarian action and politics; and things to come.

The Context of Conflict and Implications for Humanitarian Action.

39. Due to the specificities of each setting there are dangers in generalization. For example, the capacities for constructive action in South Ossetia and Abkhazia differ due to inherent differences in the conflicts. However, some generalizations can be made. All conflicts in the Caucasus have an ethnic dimension. That is, they follow along lines which reflect ethnic divisions. Civilians as well as combatants tend to be targets in all regional conflicts. Removal of communities has been an object of warfare, and the rules of engagement which define the way these wars have been fought tend to be indiscriminate. Also, the nature of international constraints on parties to conflict in the region have been much weaker over the life of these conflicts than they were during the Cold War when the patrons of warring groups could exercise restraint on their proxies. Finally, fighting forces have displayed weak command and control and lax discipline, and have difficulty distinguishing civilians from combatants: the boundaries between paramilitary forces and criminals have been difficult to define.

Implications for Assistance

40. As noted in the Guide security for assistance providers has been a serious and worsening problem in the region. It has also proved difficult to provide meaningful protection for civilians in these conflicts. The tension between humanitarian assistance and protection functions has been more problematic in the Caucasus than elsewhere. The protection challenge will become even more acute in the event of returns of populations. The political economy of violence in the region suggests that many people have an economic stake in continued conflict, but the challenge is to provide incentives for peace.

41. As mentioned earlier by a participant, conflicts in the Caucasus are characterized by situations of "no war, no victory". When people believe that they have won a war how do you convince them to give up part or all of what they believe they've won? What incentives can be provided?

Interactions between Humanitarian Action and Politics

42. In examining the interaction between humanitarian action and politics we first need to recognize that "*Politics is not a bad thing*". Political interest is not necessarily an obstacle to humanitarian action -- politics itself is neutral. That is, motives can be good or bad, with good or bad outcomes for humanitarian action. In an example from elsewhere, one motivation for US-led intervention in Haiti was to keep fleeing Haitians out of Florida during an election year. However, the intervention resulted in an increase of humanitarian space in Haiti.

43. In a more regional example, those who engineered the recent easing in Azerbaijan of Section 907 of the US Freedom Support Act may not be disinterested humanitarians. Yet oil interests have generated more balance in the debate over proportionality in the aid response to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

44. Questions of the politics of engagement by aid agencies loom large in the region. Donor policy has often meant disproportionality. For example, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were under-served by aid relative to other areas in Georgia. What have been the consequences of this? A heightened sense of isolation in insurgent has undermined international efforts at mediation by weakening the positions of interlocutors. For example, the imposition of

Section 907 detracted from the credibility of the United States as interlocutor in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.

45. While there is evidence that disproportionality has resulted in negative outcomes, we don't have evidence of the opposite effect. Have more proportionate responses resulted in visible positive outcomes? Aid agencies are not blind to the pitfalls of engagement such as the risks of conferring undue legitimacy on secessionist leaders by working with them in the aid enterprise.
46. In addition, the political and the humanitarian converge in the policies of host authorities where displaced populations in Azerbaijan and Georgia are manipulated for political purposes. There has been resistance among authorities to integration and resettlement in ways which keep IDP populations visible. This has led to increased frustration and resentment among IDPs.

War and Humanitarian Action

47. There are a number of observable interactions between war and humanitarian action. The leakage or theft of aid resources that feed into the war effort is one example. Humanitarian and other aid resources can also result in a substitution effect. For example, aid to Armenia during the war over Nagorno-Karabakh allowed the Armenian government to channel resources otherwise unavailable into the war effort. Relief assistance can also feed directly into the war economy.
48. Targeting in conflict situations can also be problematic when assistance benefits one identity group more than another. Avoidance of these pitfalls avoids doing harm but, again, the positive impacts of needs-based targeting are less clear.
49. In UNDP's initiative in South Ossetia / Tskhinvali region, consensus of both parties is an essential element. Both must agree what needs to be done and how it is to be done. The process which UNDP has followed is integral to the success of the initiative and has four essential elements:
 - *Ownership. The parties have committed to the process;*
 - *Mutuality of Interest. Rehabilitation of part of Tskhinvali's telephone system with links to infrastructure in Tbilisi, as well as reconstruction of a bridge linking the people and economies of once-divided communities are examples of shared interest;*
 - *Emphasis on Transparency. Those engaged on both sides of the process understand why decisions are being made because they have a part in them.*
 - *Credibility. UNDP has emphasized its political neutrality in the process as an agency with a development assistance mandate.*
50. In terms of the synergies between assistance and political/diplomatic actors, the South Ossetia / Tskhinvali Region example stands in contrast to aid programming in Nagorno-Karabakh. A number of factors mitigate against the possibilities for aid to link, rather than to divide, people. For example, the consequences of continued looting of building materials from damaged or destroyed homes in the occupied areas have already been cited. It is clear to see where the risks lie. It is conceivable to envision a scenario in which USAID-funded aid agencies reconstruct ethnic-Armenian settlements using materials looted from ethnic-Azeri dwellings. Among the parties to the conflict and those affected by it, will this build or detract from their confidence in the interlocutors, in the aid agencies who are responding to the conflict, or in the United States? Was Baku consulted about international aid activity in Nagorno-Karabakh, or has the sovereignty issue been overlooked?
51. The contrasts between what we have heard from those involved in managing the peace processes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia suggest that there are better and worse ways of managing the interface between assistance and politics. The relative emphases on transparency versus confidentiality is one example. Through the day we have not yet heard a convincing justification for the level of confidentiality manifested in the conflict

management process in Abkhazia. The central question we have been asking today is: How can the synergy between humanitarianism and politics be improved?

Things to Come

52. As pointed out in the *Guide*, the protection of displaced people and returnees is an unresolved challenge, as shown by the failed repatriation effort to Gali in late 1994. One question is, can the humanitarian community become comfortable with the notion of partial return? How do we respond when return to some areas is not ultimately possible despite the wishes of displaced persons to go back home? How do we sustain the flow of funding in the medium term in situations of frozen conflict?
53. Against the backdrop of discussions about the re-orientation of assistance strategies there are areas of tension and potential conflict where the interface between assistance and politics looms large. For example, what are the consequences for a Javakheti region which is under-served by aid? Are there possibilities for assistance to play a fire-prevention role in such situations?

Discussion / Commentary

54. Aid agencies work in a political context. Aid agency neutrality, specifically in the ICRC's case, can be a personal burden for ICRC workers which nevertheless allows the ICRC to function effectively in conflict situations. Although at a personal level delegates who wear the ICRC badge routinely find themselves in highly politicized circumstances, the badge sends the message that the humanitarian work being done is inherently neutral: that is, it assists the victims of conflict whoever they are and regardless of what community or other affiliations they have. Transparency with authorities is integral to this. The ICRC's work with Georgians, Russians, Abkhaz, Greeks, and Armenians in Abkhazia confirms its neutrality. In this way, neutrality can be a liberating factor for an aid agency rather than a constraint.
55. US assistance to the Caucasus was singled out as an example of assistance based not on human needs or idealism but on other foreign policy interests of the donor. Even so, USAID and its implementing agencies had found ways to reduce the harmful effects of Section 907, making it less restrictive and limiting its effects in the field. There is a tendency for aid agencies to say, "The donor made me do it". USAID, meanwhile, says, "Congress made us do it". Each of these is a cop-out. In one donor's view, donor policies could be misguided but were seldom malevolent, a point previously mentioned by Prof. Macfarlane in relation to Haiti, where dubious motives had nevertheless resulted in humanitarian space being increased by US intervention]. It was therefore necessary to sensitize donor headquarters to the potential negative consequences of policy or funding decisions.
56. Noting that there was no humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, others from the NGO community felt that aid work was inherently political, even to the extent that humanitarian action remained an instrument of politics, as it had been during the cold war. Although politics could bear heavily on humanitarian action, the margin for humanitarian actors to influence politics was peripheral at best. It was mentioned that local Armenian staff of US-funded NGOs working in Nagorno-Karabakh were paying income tax in Armenia. One participant felt that no amount of good aid agency management could change the politicized nature of US assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh. The question was not how an aid agency could disengage from the political, but how it could avoid doing harm and avoid creating or adding to political turmoil.
57. Proportionality in targeting was a dominant theme in this discussion. One participant noted that although experience elsewhere had shown that negative interactions between assistance and conflict could be anticipated from disproportionality, the opposite condition did not always hold true: proportionality in assistance did not always have a constructive impact. Where disproportionate aid responses are expected to have a negative impact on conflict, what are the local and immediate options? Transparency in decision making has proven important and useful, as has the cultivation of mutuality in aid responses. A longer-term option could be educating the potential beneficiaries of disproportionate assistance to

the problems it would create, letting them know that they have the right to refuse assistance on the grounds that it would make conflict worse. Alternately, other donors could be sought out to make assistance more proportionate. Ultimately, however, aid agencies that encounter situations where aid is going to exacerbate war have the right to say “no” to donors when their strategy is believed to be flawed.

58. It was mentioned that aid can serve the function of reassuring those who may otherwise resist a peace settlement, and therefore disproportionality can be desirable even if some aid is wasted. Providing limited assistance can send the message that more resources will be available in the event of progress on the political front. Under these conditions it is important to avoid sending the message that beneficiaries are getting something for nothing. Prof. MacFarlane reiterated that although Diaspora politics and oil lay behind disproportionate aid responses in the Southern Caucasus, oil politics had nevertheless helped to restore some balance in the debate in the US Congress over Section 907.
59. Some participants felt that it was too early to rule out the benefits of proportionality in aid responses in the absence of evidence that they do not have a positive effect on mediation efforts. What are the effects on parties to conflict -- those who perceive an interest in the continuation of conflict -- when they are provided with new options from outside? This isn't yet known. For example, it is too soon to tell what will be the impact of the recent assessment of reconstruction / rehabilitation needs in Abkhazia. It is important to note in that situation the vulnerability of the social / economic track because of its link to, and therefore its dependence on, successes or setbacks on the security track. The social / economic track was hostage to the security and repatriation tracks: when the Coordinating Council could not meet, neither could the other groups. Failure or setbacks in either of these areas meant that successful pursuit of the social / economic track would remain elusive. It was suggested that the Abkhazia case was an example of a missed opportunity for synergy between political and assistance strategies, but this did not mean that efforts should be curtailed. As shown by the success of the South Ossetia / Tskhinvali initiative, facilitating progress on economic issues of mutual interest can result in important symbolic gains in building bridges between parties. In this initiative, however, the social/economic track was de-linked from the political peace process.
60. Others expressed the view that it must be made more clear to authorities and governments that relief assistance could not continue indefinitely. Donor frustrations with unresolved conflicts were showing up in increased reluctance to fund relief activity. Governments and authorities in the region needed to demonstrate more of a willingness to assume responsibility for vulnerable groups, with international assistance supplementing, rather than supplanting, local responses. In the view of some participants from major multilateral aid organizations, the time was approaching for the consideration of exit strategies so as to encourage state actors to assume more responsibility. It was recalled that disproportionate responses and the withholding of aid in earlier years had fed into feelings of isolation in insurgent areas, reduced the transparency of decision-making over the welfare of civilian populations, increased resentments among insurgent elites, and diminished the credibility of international actors in their attempts to facilitate peace processes.
61. Concern was expressed by a donor that NGOs had not adapted to the new realities and complexities of working in conflict environments. Aid workers often went into situations with assumptions of vulnerability which did not hold true. Although they are often young and motivated by idealism or the need for adventure, they often were not capable of targeting assistance effectively. If they can't get vulnerability right, how can we expect them to get the social context and politics right? The participant felt that donors are part of the problems themselves: they do not normally provide adequate funding to NGOs for the hiring of experienced professionals.

Final Plenary -- Next Steps (*facilitated by Mr. Larry Minear*)

62. The facilitators opened for discussion a number of possible directions for the future. These were:

- *Further exploration by a working group of the issues raised in the Symposium: negative and positive synergies and interactions between humanitarian, diplomatic, and political constituencies?*
- *Clarification of the division of labor among humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors, i.e., identifying gaps and possible areas for improved synergies under existing mandates?*
- *Development of strategies and improved humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping synergies to result in improved protection (e.g., ad hoc protection group as in Kosovo)?*
- *Development of strategies for elevating humanitarian questions relative to political questions?*
- *Planning for 1999?*

Discussion / Commentary

63. The resource persons did not attempt a summary of the day's discussions. However, in the final session a number of comments and suggestions were made which may be useful in further strategizing by the participants and their agencies about the futures.

64. First, in the perceptions of the international community the political scene in the Caucasus is beginning to shift. A higher premium is being placed on conflict resolution, there is more attention to reconstruction and development, and a wider array of international actors are becoming involved. While positive in themselves, the day's discussions suggest the need for a cautionary note.

65. On the political side, progress remains fragile. The development of the region's energy sector is likely to be protracted and its benefits for the poor rather limited. The political leadership of the region is aging and, as the results of the recent election in Armenia suggest, advocates of moderation and accommodation may pay the price. On the humanitarian side, the shift away from relief to reconstruction and development is of course welcome. However, some of the same negative connections between emergency assistance and the conflict can recur. Thus there is a premium on distilling recent experience with an eye to maximizing future potentials for synergy.

66. Second, a major theme of the day's discussions concerned the need for more effective protection of civilian populations, a need which, if anything, is likely to increase should resettlement of refugees and IDPs become more possible. Experience demonstrates that while hot wars in the region tend to be short-lived, protection crises are for their part protracted. Considerably more creativity needs to be brought by international actors to the protection challenge. Again, experience suggests the possibility of building on and maximizing potential synergies between assistance and protection.

67. Third, the day's agenda provided a fascinating review of the myriad interconnections, for better or worse, between the humanitarian and the political. Food for thought came both from the persons around the table with political and peacekeeping portfolios and from people with humanitarian mandates who have themselves witnessed the interactions and their consequences at close hand. One recurring theme was therefore the sense that if past is prologue -- as it is likely to be -- then the coming years in the Caucasus will probably see politics retain their primacy over humanitarian action.

68. That said, humanitarian interests need to be more creative and assertive. They will fail to realize their potential to the extent that they acquiesce in the reality of frozen conflicts -- which they admittedly have limited ability to unfreeze. If humanitarian actors accept the likelihood of lower aid levels, knowing what they do of the impacts of inadequate assistance

levels on the willingness of participants to consider negotiated settlements, they will also disappoint.

69. In sum, if politics is not a dirty word, neither is humanitarian action necessarily a naive hope. Experience in the region suggests the need for politics to be informed by a sense of humanity and justice and, conversely, for humanitarian action to be politically astute. The day's discussions represented, perhaps, a modest step in making some of those connections. At the same time, the session left unanswered the steps that might be taken to fashion a more comprehensive and effective strategy to deal with the future and its challenges.

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