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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS / EXERCICE NOUVEAUX HORIZONS

**THE CHALLENGES OF MILITARY  
HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have historically played a lead role in providing humanitarian aid, the face-to-face emergency provision of food, shelter and health care to needy populations. Widespread regional instability and extreme levels of violence have considerably altered the humanitarian context in the post-Cold War era. Military forces are increasingly tasked with humanitarian objectives as part of their peace-support missions in volatile theaters. Military humanitarian operations, defined as using military resources to either deliver or assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid, significantly overlap with the NGO sphere of activity. This paper contends that military humanitarian operations considerably undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts and blur the distinction between military and civilian personnel, thereby endangering the safety of all humanitarian workers. Based on a limited review, current Canadian Forces operations and governmental policy also lead to similar problems. With millions of victims in dire need of assistance in war zones, the urgency of solving this complex issue must be emphasized. This paper offers several recommendations to assist the challenging process of developing a comprehensive model guiding future humanitarian operations.

## Introduction

Contrary to expectations, the post-Cold War era failed to deliver the much anticipated peace dividend. The decline of superpower rivalry allowed regional conflicts and state disruptions to flare up amid a reordering of the geopolitical power structure. Major increases in both the frequency and severity of humanitarian crises<sup>1</sup> in war zones are overloading the international community's current capacity to provide relief,<sup>2</sup> leaving millions of victims in dire need of assistance. To alleviate this suffering, private individuals, civilian organizations, military forces and supranational entities such as the United Nations (UN) are devoting significant time, energy and resources in giving humanitarian aid<sup>3</sup> to victims.

Military humanitarian operations (MHO), defined as using military resources to either deliver or assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid,<sup>4</sup> allow military forces to play an important role in relief operations in war zones as part of their mandate. Despite all the goodwill, humanitarian and military objectives can lead to objectionable results:

The churning violence of the persistent civil war in Afghanistan was taken to a new level by U.S. forces working with local warlords to end the Taliban's harsh political domination. Women and girls were liberated from the yoke of Islamic mullahs, and hopes arose that international attention would hasten aid to a country that had rarely experienced investment and development. Yet strange and dangerous paradoxes were at

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as emergency situations where people's best efforts can no longer ensure their survival. Source: Mary B. Anderson, "Development and the Prevention of Humanitarian Emergencies," in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 85-96 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Defined as the face-to-face emergency provision of food, shelter, health care and similar aid to needy populations. Source: Olga Oliner et al., *Aid During Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2004), 5.

<sup>3</sup> The expressions "humanitarian aid", "relief" and "humanitarian assistance" all designate the emergency food, shelter and health care directly provided by humanitarian actors to victims; all three expressions will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to improve its readability.

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030 (Ottawa: DND, 06 Nov 2002), 5-12.

hand: for a time, both cluster bombs and emergency relief rained from the sky in a color and a form that were indistinguishable.<sup>5</sup>

Both MHO and civilian relief organizations face tremendous challenges when providing humanitarian relief in volatile theaters. Violent attacks against civilians and military personnel involved in humanitarian missions are skyrocketing, with fatality rates for UN missions quadrupling over the last fifteen years.<sup>6</sup> While military forces are specifically trained and equipped to protect themselves against such mounting threats, MHO are often blamed for actually worsening the security situation for all humanitarians, as well as interfering with civilian relief operations. This essay will demonstrate that military humanitarian operations considerably undermine the safety and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance efforts amid conflict. It is therefore proposed that a new model is urgently needed to guide the entire spectrum of activities comprising humanitarian action.<sup>7</sup>

To better understand this complex issue, this paper will first examine how relatively recent geo-strategic developments have drastically changed the humanitarian context. The next section will show how MHO can negatively impact relief efforts, then conduct a limited analysis of this problem in the Canadian context. Finally, the urgency of developing a better model to guide humanitarian action will be discussed, followed by recommendations to assist this challenging task.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword & Salve* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), xx.

<sup>6</sup> Ludovic Andreacola and Xavier Zeebroek, "Morts en mission," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 13-20 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 14.

<sup>7</sup> For this paper, the expression "Humanitarian Action" designates all social rebuilding, peace-support and relief activities conducted by civilian and military organizations.

## The New Context of Humanitarian Action

Humanitarian emergencies can arise from natural causes, or conflicts and wars caused by human desires for more wealth, power and security.<sup>8</sup> Civilian victims are particularly vulnerable to the oft-resulting widespread violence, suffering displacement, disease, famine, injuries and death.<sup>9</sup> Witnessing these victims' suffering, benefactors often experience altruistic impulses to assist. This compassion is at the root of humanitarianism, which is defined as "a feeling of concern for and benevolence toward fellow human beings . . . manifested globally and throughout the ages."<sup>10</sup> Humanitarianism has led to the creation of countless relief agencies over the last 150 years.<sup>11</sup> Mostly established as non-profit civilian organizations, these entities are commonly known by the generic term "non-governmental organization" (NGO). Though extremely diverse in terms of quality, size, maturity and expertise, NGOs generally operate similarly, raising funds, lobbying governments to address humanitarian issues, and managing a vast array of field operations (medical assistance, food distribution, infrastructure repair, transport and logistics, etc).<sup>12</sup> While smaller agencies offer somewhat limited capabilities, NGOs specifically evolved to address humanitarian needs and have become prime stakeholder in aid provision.<sup>13</sup>

The post-Cold War era dramatically altered the context of humanitarianism for

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas E. Seal, "Managing future chaos: The United States Marine Corps," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 83-95 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 85.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Mary B. Anderson, "Development and the Prevention of Humanitarian Emergencies," 25.

<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword & Salve* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 39-45.

<sup>12</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, 1-8.

<sup>13</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, 2-5.

victims and humanitarian actors alike. In addition to the state disruptions resulting from major geopolitical power shifts, the rise of ethno-nationalism and religious extremism causes considerable international and regional tensions. The resulting extreme levels of violence, social collapse, forced population migrations and even genocides, considerably overwhelm the capabilities of relief agencies.<sup>14</sup> Governments and armed groups actively opposing humanitarian and developmental activities that interfere with their political goals further exacerbate this challenging context.<sup>15</sup> Substantial violence and opposition to relief efforts now make it extremely difficult to conduct all types of humanitarian action.

Military forces also play a significant part in humanitarian action and must adapt to this difficult environment. Accordingly, contemporary doctrine details complex peacekeeping operations (CPKO) models that consider both on-going violence levels and the consent level of parties to a conflict towards various activities comprising peace support and related operations.<sup>16</sup> Still, military involvement in CPKO is only one tool at a government's disposition for conflict resolution. Modern multidimensional approaches to human security now exist, such as the "3-D" (Defence, Diplomacy and Development) "whole-of-government" framework which considers fundamental humanitarian needs down to the individual level.<sup>17</sup> Such strategies potentially enhance the synergy of all

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick M. Burckle Jr., "Complex emergencies and military capabilities," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 96-108 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 96.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas G. Weiss, "Military Force and Humanitarian Action: Commentary", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 57-68 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, 2-4.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Koerner, Security Sector Reform: defence Diplomacy, dated 17 May 2006, available from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0612-e.htm>; Internet, accessed 16 Apr 2007.

humanitarians. Unfortunately, expanding the mandate of military forces rather than implementing the more comprehensive constructs is often more expedient. Accordingly, new doctrines of full-spectrum operations are emerging, such as the "three-block war" (3BW), which clearly invest military forces with a humanitarian assistance mandate.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, new improvements in military capabilities now allow decision-makers to attempt resolving conflicts from 15,000 ft, or even thousands of kilometers away.<sup>19</sup> On the ground however, 3BW and advanced technological means offer little hope in resolving the belligerents' deep hatred. Yet they both directly impact theater dynamics, ultimately resulting in increased use of military forces for tasks significantly different from traditional war-fighting, peacekeeping, and disaster relief missions.<sup>20</sup> Overall, this considerably increases the demands on military forces, with MHO being tasked more than ever before.

Excessive reliance on MHO and extremely challenging conditions for all humanitarians are symptomatic of the "New Humanitarianism", which clearly breaks away from the fundamental principles of neutrality towards belligerents, impartiality to all victims regardless of their affiliation, and consensual humanitarian action.<sup>21</sup> MHO often empowers military forces with providing humanitarian assistance while simultaneously pursuing operational objectives that support national interests. However, linking humanitarian efforts to a government's foreign policy significantly undermines humanitarian principles. The reverse situation also exists, such as mislabelling the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas E. Seal, "Managing Future Chaos...", 90.

<sup>19</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 146.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 84-87.



Rwandan conflict as a humanitarian crisis to avoid confronting the political leaders responsible for the genocide, thereby avoiding foreign policy engagement.<sup>22</sup> This new reality not only reduces the credibility of MHO, it also negatively affects how much aid victims ultimately receive:

"U.S. militarization of ostensibly nonmilitary responses to war (i.e., the channeling of resources through military actors as opposed to humanitarian or developmental agencies) suggests a transformation in the strategies and means of relief and reconstruction. Funds that had been allocated to addressing shortfalls in social services have been (and increasingly are) redirected toward security."<sup>23</sup>

Humanitarian action becoming more militarized, more biased towards strategic goals, and more subject to violence and opposition, essentially defines the New Humanitarianism and brings extreme concern to relief organizations.

The New Humanitarianism affects the complete spectrum of Humanitarian action, from humanitarians and victims at the tactical level, to how the UN responds to member states at the strategic level.<sup>24</sup> Not only must MHO contend with the New Humanitarianism, but this new paradigm is in constant evolution, influenced by ideology changes, security demands, and economics.<sup>25</sup> The New Humanitarianism is also modified by recent events such as the highly mediatized U.S. military failure to end hostilities in Somalia, or aid manipulation by parties to the Rwanda conflict.<sup>26</sup> The New Humanitarianism also fuels the new "private armies" such as *DynCorp* or *Kellogg Brown*

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<sup>22</sup> Fiona Terry, "Reconstituting whose social order? NGOs in disrupted states," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 279-299 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 288.

<sup>23</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Gayle E. Smith, "Relief Operations and Military Strategy", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 97-116 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 101.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 185.

<sup>26</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 117.

& Root, who are busily repackaging profit ventures into humanitarianism, yet share unsettling characteristics with the cheap "UN-hired" military forces of Fiji or Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup> Even the high-priced physical protection of relief workers now qualifies as humanitarian assistance, despite its mercenary connotations.<sup>28</sup> The New Humanitarianism effectively means that "business as usual" no longer applies to humanitarian assistance; complex NGOs, military and para-military forces must now learn to interact in volatile environments where humanitarian needs intersect with self-serving interests. Amid high levels of violence resulting from widespread political, economic, religious and ethno-nationalistic tensions, traditional humanitarian assistance models therefore no longer provide satisfactory guidance to either NGOs or MHO.

### **The Adverse Impact of Military Humanitarian Operations**

Military involvement in humanitarian assistance appears to be a key factor in the deteriorating humanitarian environment. This section will first compare NGOs and military forces as actors in the humanitarian context, then examine the impact of their overlapping spheres of activity. Finally, a limited analysis of this problem in the Canadian context will follow.

Several NGO characteristics offer significant operational advantages over military and governmental organizations; their independence, flexibility and deep commitment to humanitarian causes allow them to quickly reach affected areas, efficiently deliver aid, and maintain a long-term perspective.<sup>29</sup> Unlike military organizations however, many

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<sup>27</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 171.

<sup>28</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 149.

<sup>29</sup> Canada, DND, Peace Support Operations, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030, 1-9 - 1-10.

NGOs possess few material resources and rely on unstable funding. They therefore constantly compete for limited donor funds and local resources, often trying to surpass each other to improve their international standing.<sup>30</sup> While small NGOs can be relatively unobtrusive, major U.S. NGOs are often well networked with political authorities and aggressively fight for the limelight, sometimes becoming influential foreign policy instruments.<sup>31</sup> Large West-European NGOs also tend to play a significant role in various theaters, occasionally leading to power struggles with American NGOs.<sup>32</sup> Other significant NGO weaknesses include their uneven quality, lack of accountability and narrow focus.<sup>33</sup> NGOs face the additional constraint of requiring complete top-down authorizations to conduct their work, from state authorities to the local leaders.<sup>34 35</sup> Smaller NGOs often operate on borrowed time, accepting more risk levels than mainstream organizations, venturing in hazardous areas and staying past recommended evacuation deadlines.<sup>36</sup> Large NGOs have developed impressive logistical capabilities however, allowing them to rapidly deploy and sustain sizable operations in remote areas where limited infrastructure exists. Despite large variations in their capabilities, NGOs make worthwhile humanitarian contributions and should have the prime responsibility for

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<sup>30</sup> Gayle E. Smith, "Relief Operations and Military Strategy", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 97-116 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 98.

<sup>31</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire* (Paris: CIRPES, 2005), 247.

<sup>32</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 210.

<sup>33</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, 1-10.

<sup>34</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, "Je t'aide, moi non plus," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 121-148 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 123.

<sup>35</sup> Canada, DND, Peace Support Operations, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030, 2-6: "While there may be consent at the strategic level . . . at the tactical level there may be groups who disagree violently with their leaders, and who may be hostile to the mission."

<sup>36</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, "Je t'aide, moi non plus," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 121-148 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 134-144.

providing aid.<sup>37</sup>

The effectiveness of mainstream NGOs in delivering humanitarian aid is well established. Relief efforts can buy the necessary time to develop long-term solutions, however they cannot end conflicts.<sup>38</sup> Military forces bring considerable capabilities that can adequately cover the entire spectrum of humanitarian action, from disaster assistance to forceful humanitarian intervention.<sup>39</sup> Powerful forces such as the U.S. Marine Corps can readily intervene despite host nation objections, projecting military resources and capabilities deeply into theater to stabilize crises.<sup>40</sup> Expeditionary forces are especially suited to swiftly deploy to austere disaster areas for relatively long periods without support from the international community. Unlike their NGO counterparts, military forces can conduct the much more robust peacemaking and enforcement activities to create suitable conditions for conflict resolution.<sup>41</sup> Negotiations between opponents require enough power stability to allow compromises to be made, which obviously exceeds NGO mandates.<sup>42</sup> Given proper training, equipment and mandate, military forces can therefore play an essential role in humanitarian action.

Despite significant capabilities and motivation, forces involved in MHO face significant challenges in completing their assigned mission. Tackling a lower-priority

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<sup>37</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, 2-5.

<sup>38</sup> Julian Wathen, *Humanitarian Operations: The Dilemma of Intervention*, The Occasional, Number 42 (Shrivenham: Strategic & Combat Studies Institute, SCSI, 2001), 25.

<sup>39</sup> Defined as combat operations imposing stable security conditions that permit humanitarian access to an at-risk population. Source: Canada, DND, *Peace Support Operations*, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030, 2-5.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas E. Seal, "Managing future chaos...", 91.

<sup>41</sup> Canada, DND, *Peace Support Operations*, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030, 2-3 - 2-5.

<sup>42</sup> William Maley, "Institutional design and the rebuilding of trust," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 163-179 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 166.

role, military forces tend to focus on their traditional concerns of command and control, force protection and operational effectiveness, which potentially undermines their mandated humanitarian objectives.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, military forces may lack adequate training and experience in relief operations, arriving in theater with insufficient language and diplomatic skills to tackle delicate humanitarian affairs.<sup>44</sup> Military personnel often seek to "own" the humanitarian outcome, talking "at" locals instead of learning from them and stepping aside when appropriate.<sup>45</sup> Fortunately military doctrine is gradually adapting to the complex requirements of humanitarian action. Military forces are rapidly gaining experience in Civilian-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), which helps them forge better working relationships with NGOs. CIMIC is best described as

"the coordination and cooperation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including national population and civil authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organisations, and agencies . . . The immediate purpose of CIMIC is to establish and maintain the full cooperation of the NATO Commander and the civilian authorities, organisations, agencies and population within a commander's area of operations in order to allow him to fulfill his mission. This may include direct support to the implementation of a civil plan. The long-term purpose of CIMIC is to help create and sustain conditions that will support the achievement of Alliance objectives in operations."<sup>46</sup>

An integral part of the overall military plan, fully aimed at ensuring mission accomplishment, CIMIC does not shift priorities from military to humanitarian objectives. It undoubtedly enhances the synergy between NGOs and military forces, improving the exchange of information, prioritizing and coordinating efforts for best effect. While CIMIC also enhances interpersonal relationships and goodwill, military-

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<sup>43</sup> John Mackinlay, "Armed Relief", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 85-96 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 91.

<sup>44</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 105.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Plunkett, "Rebuilding the rule of law," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 207-228 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 223.

<sup>46</sup> NATO Document, Allied Joint Publication, *AJP-9 NATO Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC) Doctrine*, (Brussels: NATO, June 2003), 1-1 - 1-3.

NGO links can unfortunately lead to excesses, such as the contract with CARE Canada to recruit spies as staff during its operations in Kosovo.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, military concerns over potential security leaks and NGO links to terrorist networks also undermines CIMIC.<sup>48</sup> NGO reaction to CIMIC can vary considerably; some only operate alongside military forces and thrive amid the additional support, while others are highly concerned about perceptions and totally shun such support.<sup>49</sup> During relatively recent relief operations in northern Iraq, poor communication network compatibility, competition over local resources, mutual tendency to operate in isolation and unwillingness to use common reporting chains of command made CIMIC relations very testing.<sup>50</sup> Still, CIMIC significantly helps overcome barriers to military-NGO interaction and enhances the effectiveness of humanitarian action. Peacekeeping training and improved military doctrine better prepare military forces for MHO however, they cannot replace the years of field experience needed to fully address today's complex social and humanitarian problems.<sup>51</sup>

### **NGO-MHO Overlap**

At the tactical level, CIMIC benefits both NGOs and MHO, however it does not prevent their substantial humanitarian mandate overlap. This is a major source of

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<sup>47</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 141.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 145.

<sup>49</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 246.

<sup>50</sup> Lorraine Elliott, "The United Nations and social reconstruction in disrupted states," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 257-278 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 267

<sup>51</sup> Lorraine Elliott, "The United Nations and social reconstruction in disrupted states," in *From Civil Strife to Civil Society*, ed. William Maley et al., 257-278 (New York: The United Nations University, 2003), 267-271.

concern for NGOs, since it undermines the perceived neutrality that is so essential to safe civilian relief operations in volatile environments. As mentioned, MHO primarily support the larger mission objectives, of which humanitarian considerations only form a secondary aspect. Even more detrimental are simultaneous MHO and counter-insurgency operations; the apparent conflict between peace-support and combat activities potentially undermines the positive impression left by military humanitarian efforts on the local population, in addition to blurring the distinction between relief work and "hard" peace-support tasks. This is particularly exacerbated when locals become aware of covert military operations employing civilian-dressed personnel, while other military units conduct relief work in uniform. Since warring parties and insurgents forcefully oppose all attempts to reduce their power, both civilian and military humanitarians are then seen as targets; this ambiguity has directly contributed to kidnappings and executions of civilian contractors, drivers and security agents in recent theaters of operations.<sup>52</sup> A much-polarized humanitarian environment results, whereby some NGOs insist on military presence and/or armed escorts to conduct relief activities, while other NGOs carefully avoid any close association with MHO. To avoid being viewed as agents of the military, their collaboration over security, logistics, patrols, finances, escorts, and evacuation operations then highly suffers.<sup>53</sup> While it can be argued that insurgents aim to create terror and destabilize authorities to increase their own power, and would likely target NGO staff anyway, the correlation between MHO and attacks on humanitarians cannot be ignored. NGO personnel often find their position untenable, unable to travel

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<sup>52</sup> Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, Relations entre humanitaires et militaires en RDC et au Burundi, in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, 146.

for lack of security, mistaken for civilian-dressed soldiers and private security contractors, blamed for slow progress, and accused of squandering money.<sup>54</sup> While NGO-military cooperation has improved with CIMIC, MHO frequently blur the line between civilian and military interventions, which definitely undermines the safety of humanitarian assistance in conflict zones.

At the strategic level, MHO also hinders humanitarian efforts in the political arena. As mentioned, governments increasingly tie humanitarian efforts to foreign policy objectives; senior leaders even treat NGOs as a force multiplier of their combat teams, as done by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in October 2001.<sup>55</sup> Close cooperation between the U.S. Administration and the UN now lead many people to erroneously associate humanitarian assistance to the global war on terror (GWOT).<sup>56</sup> Even the UN and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), despite their size, their means and vast experience, have also seen a major rise in violent fatalities in recent years.<sup>57</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières temporarily withdrew from Afghanistan in 2004, concerned over U.S. statements that it was an ally in the GWOT.<sup>58</sup> This forces large NGOs to re-organize themselves as virtual military forces, using robust command and control networks, enforcing travel SOPs, hiring armed escorts, even limiting their interventions to areas and activities clearly separate from those of military forces and other NGOs.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 153.

<sup>55</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 148.

<sup>56</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 172.

<sup>58</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, "Je t'aide, moi non plus," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 121-148 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 145.



After a temporary absence from Iraq, the ICRC is now back, with much more robust safety procedures, such as avoiding the displaying of its official symbols for own protection!<sup>60</sup> MHO therefore play a substantial role in militarizing humanitarian action, while forcing NGOs to reshape into quasi-military organizations to better survive the challenges of the New Humanitarianism.

### **Humanitarianism and the Canadian Forces**

Canadians pride themselves in their country's long peacekeeping tradition and humanitarian contributions in disaster areas around the world. Despite such a distinguished past and self-declared humanitarian leadership,<sup>61</sup> the extensive overlap between Canadian MHO and NGO activities must be emphasized, given the aforementioned negative impact this creates. An exhaustive analysis of the CF doctrine for Peace Support Operations exceeds the scope of this essay, however the spectrum of military tasks pertaining to PSO clearly covers several humanitarian assistance and peace building activities routinely performed by NGOs, such as providing direct distribution of goods and services, transporting relief personnel, and restoration of civil infrastructure.<sup>62</sup> The 2005 Defence Policy Statement confirms this overlap, stating: "our military must be prepared to perform different missions - humanitarian assistance, stabilization operations, combat."<sup>63</sup> The Defence Policy specifically endorses land forces conducting

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<sup>60</sup> Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 173.

<sup>61</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Humanitarian Affairs*, [www.international.gc.ca/foreign\\_policy/human-rights/ha1-human-en.asp](http://www.international.gc.ca/foreign_policy/human-rights/ha1-human-en.asp); Internet; accessed 21 Apr 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Department of National Defence, *Peace Support Operations*, B-GJ-005-307/FP-030 (Ottawa: DND, 06 Nov 2002), 4-11 - 4-13.

<sup>63</sup> Department of National Defence, *Defence Policy Statement 2005*, dated 25 July 2005, available from <http://www.washtimes.com/op-ed/20050724-101302-5685r.htm>; Internet; accessed 18 Nov 2006, 3.

humanitarian relief and reconstruction operations within the context of the new three-block war model.<sup>64</sup> Although using the CF for disaster assistance, peacekeeping and stabilization operations is entirely appropriate, discussing rapid transitions from humanitarian missions to combat operations brings much concern.<sup>65</sup>

The CF website makes good use of terminology distinction however, describing our current contributions to humanitarian and developmental assistance in Afghanistan mostly as supportive activities:

... to facilitate the delivery of programs and projects that support the economic recovery and rehabilitation of Afghanistan; and assist in addressing humanitarian needs of Afghans by supporting Canadian governmental organizations and NGOs whose efforts meet Canada's objectives.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately this distinction is mostly lost on the ground, as the death toll rises for aid workers and military personnel alike. Despite the reality of being at war against locally supported insurgents, the CF still actively promote its humanitarian role, both in Afghanistan and in Canada. The required distinction between military and humanitarian objectives seriously suffers from engaging into "hearts-and-minds" activities, such as hosting a major soccer tournament in Kandahar.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, Canadian government support for enlarging the definition of humanitarianism to include military and security aspects is clearly worrisome.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Department of National Defence, *Defence Policy Statement 2005*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Department of National Defence, *Defence Policy Statement 2005*, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Canadian Forces. "Why are we there?," [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/afghanistan/why\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/afghanistan/why_e.asp); Internet; accessed 06 Feb 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Canadian Forces. "Kandahar: 2nd Annual Boys' Soccer Tournament Kicks Off," [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Feature\\_Story/2006/11/15\\_f\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Feature_Story/2006/11/15_f_e.asp); Internet; accessed 06 Feb 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Marco Labrie, *Guerre et aide au développement*, CyberPresse, dated 16 Jan 2007, available from

Although Canada recently pledged 1B\$ over ten years for Afghanistan, most of this money will actually be channelled through the CF, given that several Canadian NGOs will no longer operate in Afghanistan over safety concerns arising from ambiguous military participation in humanitarian and developmental assistance.<sup>69</sup> Insurgents who actively seek to destabilize Afghanistan would unlikely endorse any type of intervention, however emphasizing proper NGO-military distinction and closer adhesion to NGO ideal of impartiality would potentially reduce the negative impact of Canadian MHO. Major relief organizations such as CARE Canada even go further, suggesting that risky missions and patrols are not essential in preparation for Provincial Reconstruction Teams to work alongside NGOs.<sup>70</sup> Despite an enviable record and respectable doctrine, it appears that current CF operations as well as Canadian government endeavours both adversely affect humanitarian relief efforts in volatile theaters.

### **A New Model for Humanitarian Action**

The New Humanitarianism context has created significant adverse consequences as MHO intervene in historically prime NGO areas of responsibility. With humanitarian action becoming more subject to opposition, one-sided and militarized, better guidance is needed for the conduct of NGO and MHO, both of which offer essential and complementary capabilities. Yet the required leadership and comprehensive direction to

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<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070116/CPOPINIONS/701160715&SearchID=73275774910975>;  
Internet; accessed, 15 Feb 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Marco Labrie, *Guerre et aide au développement*, CyberPresse, dated 16 Jan 2007, available from  
<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070116/CPOPINIONS/701160715&SearchID=73275774910975>;  
Internet; accessed, 15 Feb 2007.

<sup>70</sup> A. John Watson, *Feedback at Gunpoint*, CARE Canada. Dated 12 Sep 2006, available from  
[http://care.ca/work/hot\\_issues/Afghanistan/SPEECH\\_Medusas\\_Head10-12-06.pdf](http://care.ca/work/hot_issues/Afghanistan/SPEECH_Medusas_Head10-12-06.pdf); Internet; accessed 20  
Mar 2007, 18-20.

all stakeholders is sorely missing. The UN can hardly provide the sort of central authority required for addressing the numerous challenges of the New Humanitarianism, given its structure as a "loosely organized system of independent, specialized agencies."<sup>71</sup> In the absence of an agreed-upon oversight mechanism, both military-NGO mission clash and the sheer number of actors significantly complicate humanitarian action, which can ultimately derail the efforts of even the most skilled military forces and NGOs.<sup>72</sup> Not only is a new model clearly required for humanitarian action, but its urgent need must be emphasized. As the GWOT spreads, the perceived distinction between MHO and NGO work is quickly fading; delays in finding more appropriate means to address the New Humanitarianism directly translate into skyrocketing attacks on military and civilian humanitarians. Additionally, the aforementioned CIMIC challenges negatively impact relief operations, ultimately contributing to higher death rates in suffering populations. With over 45 million people urgently requiring humanitarian assistance in war zones in 2003,<sup>73</sup> a comprehensive and effective solution to this problem of epic proportions is critically needed.

Developing an appropriate model to account for all the aforementioned problems will undoubtedly be very difficult. No ideal solution exists, and the process will most certainly require several iterations, if not forever remain a work in progress. In the quest for an improved humanitarian action model, an initial avenue to consider pertains to the excessive emphasis on classical humanitarianism, which creates a significant impediment

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<sup>71</sup> James Ingram, "The Future Architecture for International Humanitarian Assistance," in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 171-193 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 175.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas E. Seal, "Managing future chaos...," 94.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 189.

to NGO-military synergy. The New Humanitarianism has arrived and will affect relief efforts for the foreseeable future; its changing nature and impact on the humanitarian context must therefore be considered. Although NGO relief work might strictly aim at alleviating human suffering, its political repercussions cannot be ignored, such as belligerents taking advantage of humanitarian aid to further their own cause.<sup>74</sup> For example, insurgents sometimes receive food aid, new roads help their logistics, and new schools and medical clinics enhance their local influence. The challenge is to avoid "belligerent funding", where the hand that gives actually feeds the fist that strikes.<sup>75</sup> Governments, NGOs and donors must therefore recognize that all relief work intersects with a population's loyalty to a belligerent, potentially leading to terrorism and reprisals against groups and individuals collaborating with humanitarian organizations.<sup>76</sup> The U.S. readily applies this lesson, with relief efforts in Afghanistan primarily aimed at preventing insurgents from taking advantage of the humanitarian crises.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, NGOs should acknowledge the political impact of their interventions and stop hiding behind the veil of neutrality. All humanitarian actors must readily accept the political ramifications of their humanitarian actions, including NGO-military collaboration, then deal with their moral and practical consequences.

Another potential avenue for improvement lies in mitigating adverse effects of MHO. NGOs have little concern over military humanitarian contributions in consensual

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<sup>74</sup> Gayle E. Smith, "Relief Operations and Military Strategy", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 97-116 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 101.

<sup>75</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 181.

<sup>76</sup> Gayle E. Smith, "Relief Operations and Military Strategy", in *Humanitarianism Across Borders*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, 97-116 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993), 107-109.

<sup>77</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 97.

theaters. When consent lacks however, MHO face significant challenges since their military objectives often preclude complete neutrality towards all parties to a conflict. The strategic endstate effectively prevents a "pure, neutral and impartial" humanitarian response, undermining the legitimacy and credibility of military relief efforts. The New Humanitarianism requires that MHO sacrifice "pure" neutrality to confront the roots of humanitarian crises, such as poor governments or subversive groups. At the operational level, this requires a flexible mandate for CPKO, allowing military forces to rapidly adapt to the evolving humanitarian context, which changes with the security situation, population needs and NGO capabilities. Military planners must therefore prepare for rapid transition to a NGO-supporting role while rebuilding a secure environment for everyone.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the MHO must strive to overcome adverse perceptions by attempting to appear as even-handed as possible on the ground. Pure humanitarianism requires complete impartiality, and good conscience dictates that the suffering of all victims should be alleviated, regardless of their affiliation. Apparent impartiality would significantly help obtaining and maintaining the confidence of locals, which is a definite asset for CPKO. While this approach may initially undermine some of the immediate military goals, it offers much potential for winning the hearts-and-minds of the local population. Favourable perceptions would also result from having the local population feel ownership of the aid programs; MHO should include locals on their team and give them meaningful responsibilities. Using this approach, military forces could ideally work towards mission accomplishment while mitigating neutrality and impartiality concerns over their humanitarian activities.

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<sup>78</sup> Olga Oliker et al., *Aid During Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2004), 98-100.

Another area of improvement for MHO lies in emphasizing NGO-military distinction. The negative consequences of overlap in volatile environment must be minimized. Since many undertakings easily fall under the "humanitarian" umbrella, drawing the line is extremely difficult. Efforts must therefore focus on avoiding ambiguous activities; specific examples include leaving all humanitarian assistance to NGO staff, unless emergency or operational considerations dictate otherwise. Ensuring complete distinction is nearly impossible for military forces simultaneously involved in forceful stabilization campaigns and humanitarian operations, as seen in Afghanistan; whenever possible, other forces from states not involved in previous forceful interventions or combat operations in theater should be given the MHO mandate, to enhance the distinction between military and humanitarian objectives.<sup>79</sup> As NGOs gradually take over their humanitarian assistance duties, military forces should clearly signal the transfer of responsibilities, providing the necessary CIMIC support to facilitate the transition. MHO should proportionally decrease in importance, shifting priorities back to the military-specific tasks of theater and local security, and protection of key infrastructure, lines of communication and essential services. While flexibility is absolutely essential, such measures would create the much-desired distinction between humanitarian and military "space", allowing NGOs and military activities to complement each other and ultimately help both organizations achieve their objectives.<sup>80</sup>

The need to improve CIMIC is the last suggestion towards a better humanitarian

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<sup>79</sup> Marco Labrie, *Guerre et aide au développement*, CyberPresse, dated 16 Jan 2007, available from <http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070116/CPOPINIONS/701160715&SearchID=73275774910975>; Internet; accessed 15 Feb 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Lt-col. Charles Marquez, "Nous avons appris à nous connaître," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 71-77 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 77.

action model. Many NGOs have a strong tendency to operate in isolation from MHO, as well as from each other. Military response to NGOs has covered the entire spectrum in the past, from totally ignoring civilian relief workers, to taking unfair advantage of NGOs for intelligence purposes.<sup>81</sup> Despite such highly uneven relationships, NGO-military cooperation appears to be improving, especially as many ex-military personnel join civilian relief agencies and quickly rise to senior leadership positions, where they can exert favourable influence to overcome individual and organizational inertia.<sup>82</sup> Better networking also develops between CIMIC nations, despite high turnover of military personnel.<sup>83</sup> Yet much work remains to ensure full cooperation and eliminate serious obstacles to the free flow of information between the various groups. The need for security must be balanced against the valuable information that NGO personnel may offer on remote areas, as they sometimes venture much further than their military counterparts.<sup>84</sup> Regular coordination meetings help provide a reliable avenue for mutually beneficial information exchange, which CIMIC staff should implement at the earliest opportunity. Good cooperation also requires military forces to respect the NGO space and demonstrate some trust in their counterparts' operating procedures; to ensure their individual security, NGO personnel often value the confidence relationships they build within the local population much more than military firepower and force protection

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<sup>81</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 141.

<sup>82</sup> Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l'humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, 111.

<sup>83</sup> Lt-col. Charles Marquez, "Nous avons appris à nous connaître," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 71-77 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 76.

<sup>84</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, Relations entre humanitaires et militaires en RDC et au Burundi, in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, 134.



measures.<sup>85</sup> Mainstream NGOs successfully employ alternative safety procedures, such as using safe houses, distinctive signs, reliable local and international means of communication, etc. In fact, some of these procedures are similar to those used by military forces, each party sharing more field experience than they realize.<sup>86</sup> This does not suggest that universally applicable procedures can be developed however, since each theater and each operation will present its own unique set of characteristics and challenges to which both military and NGO missions must adapt. "Although approaching war from opposing philosophical positions, their respective organizations share at least one thing: they excel when they learn about local conditions and adapt operations accordingly."<sup>87</sup> The challenge therefore is to capitalize on these shared strengths to better coordinate each other's activities while respecting intrinsic differences.

Having demonstrated the need and urgency of a new model for humanitarian action, a process by which it can be developed will now be presented. First, key stakeholders must have a voice in this effort, to include representatives of the UN, NGOs and military forces; staff from the Pearson Peacekeeping Institute could play a key role in this process, given their extensive CPKO expertise and their close association with both the humanitarian and military communities. The selected group of people should attempt developing a comprehensive yet flexible overall strategy for humanitarian action, considering the requirements of conflict resolution, social rebuilding and relief activities. They would have the complex task of integrating capabilities and limitations of military

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<sup>85</sup> Alain Kassa, "Mutinerie, représailles et isolement des acteurs humanitaires," in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, ed. Xavier Zeebroek, 39-46 (Bruxelles: Editions GRIP, 2004), 46.

<sup>86</sup> Xavier Zeebroek, Relations entre humanitaires et militaires en RDC et au Burundi, in *Les humanitaires en guerre*, 129.

<sup>87</sup> Hoffman and Weiss, *Sword & Salve*, 189.

forces and NGOs, CPKO requirements, lessons learned from successful and failed humanitarian missions, while considering the evolving characteristics of the New Humanitarianism. The primary objective would be to produce a useable model to best guide MHO and NGOs in a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution, such as the 3-D framework. This highly complex and challenging task will undoubtedly be iterative, and may forever remain a work in progress. However it will certainly offer worthwhile insight, potentially enhancing the safety and effectiveness of upcoming humanitarian missions.

## **Conclusion**

Providing humanitarian assistance has become extremely challenging in the last two decades, given geopolitical power shifts, the rise of ethno-nationalism and religious extremism. Widespread regional instability and the pursuit of national interests have led the international community to place increasing demands on military forces, with MHO used more than ever before. The New Humanitarianism evolved from complex dynamics that make humanitarian action more militarized, more biased towards strategic goals, and more subject to violence and opposition from parties to a conflict and insurgents. This directly translates into skyrocketing numbers of military and civilian humanitarians falling to attacks, with worsening trends associated with the GWOT. As MHO and NGOs struggle to adapt to this new reality at the tactical level, significant overlap in their spheres of activity reduces their effectiveness despite best efforts at CIMIC.

Additionally, poor NGO-MHO distinction substantially blurs the line between civilian and military interventions, which extensively weakens the NGOs' safety-enhancing neutral status. At the strategic level, MHO reinforce the tendency to militarize

humanitarian action, thereby forcing NGOs to reshape into military-like organizations. Overall, the unavoidable conclusion is that MHO considerably undermine the safety and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance efforts amid conflict. Based on a limited review, it would also appear that current CF operations and Canadian government endeavours also adversely impact humanitarian relief efforts in volatile theaters, despite Canada's respectable humanitarian record and doctrine.

As both the number and severity of humanitarian crises rapidly increases, the urgency of solving this complex problem must be emphasized. Several elements should be considered in the quest for a more comprehensive model to guide humanitarian action: first, acknowledging the political impact of all humanitarian activities; second, the need for MHO to appear as even-handed and distinct from NGO as possible; and third, the requirement for improving CIMIC. Key representatives of the UN, NGOs and military forces rapidly should be tasked with developing this model, potentially along with Pearson Peacekeeping Institute staff. This complex process would ideally integrate past lessons learned, capabilities and limitations of the various humanitarian actors, while considering the full spectrum of humanitarian action, from emergency relief to conflict resolution and social rebuilding, within the context of the New Humanitarianism. Hopefully timely and practical guidance would emerge from these worthwhile efforts.

Finally, the challenges of the New Humanitarianism are no excuse for turning a blind eye to the millions of victims desperately waiting for relief amid war zones, as currently seen in the Darfur region of Sudan. Governments worldwide should therefore abandon their self-serving agendas and immediately provide unconditional assistance, while supporting long-term stability and social rebuilding efforts for a lasting peace in the

affected regions.

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