

Can military force promote humanitarian values?

Government, Army



Abstract

Recent years have seen an increase in humanitarian interventions which have involved military operations. However is it feasible that the two operations, military and humanitarian are compatible This paper investigates whether this is the case and, to do so, assesses military force in terms of the values which underpin humanitarianism. This paper utilises a case study from the Libyan conflict to assess whether there is a politicised nature in the push for military led humanitarian operations, and examines whether there is a political undertone in the increased usage of military forces. It is argued that this undertone serves to undermine the possibility that military forces can promote humanitarian values.

Introduction

For several decades, humanitarian intervention has been a factor in military operations. This paper examines whether military forces can promote the values of humanitarianism during aid operations. To do so this paper will examine a number of elements and seeks to define humanitarianism. In doing so, the question of what role military forces can play is considered. This includes, for example, where military forces are deployed to affected regions or states and the role which they have been asked to conduct. This paper investigates whether the underlying aims of military forces are compatible with that of humanitarianism. This paper argues that they are not and that recent years have seen developments where military action has been wrongly justified on the grounds of humanitarian intervention.

What is Humanitarianism?

The concept of humanitarian intervention which utilises military force can be classed as a subjective one. Whilst some commentators class military led humanitarian interventions as being “ the use of military force to protect foreign populations from mass atrocities or gross human rights abuses” (Waxman, 2013), others such as Marjanovic (2012) define the action as being “ a state using military force against another state when the chief publicly declared aim of that military action is ending human-rights violations being perpetrated by the state against which it is directed”. Yet despite the subjectivity, there is a series of components which can be extracted from these various definitions. These components include: a form of war or conflict, the potential that non-combatants will be negatively affected by this conflict; and where human rights abuses are considered to be taking place

In essence, there are a number of factors which should be present when military led humanitarian assistance is being considered. Weiss (2012: 1) argues that there is an underlying notion of a “ responsibility to protect” and that this has a tendency to dominate modern geo-political thinking, but instead it is arguable that the global community can be accused of cherry picking where it seeks to intervene. Weiss had previously argued that any intervention should incorporate aspects of post conflict redevelopment programming (Minear & Weiss, 1995), yet since the perpetuation of military led humanitarian interventions, he has reconsidered his perspective to argue that such actions should now constitute “ activities undertaken to improve the human condition” (Weiss, 2012: 1). This latter inclusion indicates that the shift in conflict dynamics, from one which is largely based on

conventional warfare to the usage of non-state actors and combatants in an asymmetric conflict zone has been a party to Weiss's new perspective.

Where values are considered, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2013) argue that these incorporate aspects of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Essentially, therefore, it can be argued that where military forces are deployed to support humanitarian operations that it is essential they act according to these guiding principles.

Role of the Military in Humanitarian Interventions

Recent years, particularly since the end of the Cold War (Pattison, 2010), have seen military operations to support humanitarian interventions in a number of collapsed or failed states. These include, but are not limited to, Iraq, post-Gulf War One (1991 - 2003), Bosnia - Serbia (1995), Kosovo (1999), East Timor (1999) Somalia (2002), Haiti (2004), and Libya (2011) whilst other humanitarian interventions which have required military assistance can be considered to have taken place in post conflict Iraq and Afghanistan (Pattison, 2010). Weiss (2012) argues that the concept of humanitarian intervention has increased the potential for interventions into states in order to protect non-combatants from conflict. Contrary to this, the earlier reference to cherry picking provides a casing point when the political discourse which took place at the United Nations (UN) Security Council in relation to the ongoing conflict in Syria can be considered to be a case where the window of opportunity for intervention has now closed, particularly since this conflict has led to the involvement of Islamic State and the Kurdish Peshmerga (Dagher, 2014).

Increase in Military led Humanitarian Operations

As stated, recent decades, particularly since the end of the Cold War, have seen a rise in the numbers of ethnically charged conflicts and where humanitarian interventions have been considered as necessary (Kaldor, 1998). In a review of this era, Kaldor noted that there had been a change in the dynamics of conflict and that the underpinning issue was of a series of belligerents and combatants which were not constrained by international regulations, such as the Geneva Convention protocols, Laws of Armed Conflict or relevant United Nations Charters (Kaldor, 1998). This changed dynamics has perpetuated and has spread to a number of conflict zones around the world, but has also seen a rise in the usage of conventional forces to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Similarly, Christoplos, Longley, and Slaymaker (2004) also noted a changed emphasis in humanitarian aid provision during this era. They argued that the underpinning programmes have been utilised to create a tripartite system of humanitarianism which incorporates rehabilitation (for both state and society), development of state and social infrastructures and relief programmes which provide for maintaining civil society during crisis periods. This particular perspective reinforces a belief that military interventions can help NGOs deliver aid by providing security (Seybolt, 2007). Nevertheless the incorporation of military activity into this mix has also resulted in a further complication since military operations deploy to aid zones with a preposition of maintaining operational security. This includes the potential for combating belligerent forces where such a need exists (Davidson, 2012).

Stability Operations

Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA) (2013) argues that the first decade of the twenty first century has seen a near trebling of military support for NGOs in countries which have been affected by war, natural disaster or where the state infrastructure has been affected sufficiently that it is unable to assist with recovery programmes. GHA also note that peacekeeping operations have increased at a similar rate, particular in the years discussed earlier by Kaldor (1998) to the present day. UK military doctrine emphasises that any military activities which has a humanitarian focus should incorporate stability operations (Ministry of Defence, 2011). In clarifying this position, the UK Ministry of Defence added that: “ The peacekeeper fulfils a mandate with the strategic consent of the main warring parties, allowing a degree of freedom to fulfil its task in an impartial manner, while a sustainable peace settlement is pursued.” (Ministry of Defence, 2011: 1. 1). Such a perspective indicates that the simple inclusion of additional personnel to assist NGOs is not the primary role of military forces but instead is indicative of a more political role which is intended to shape the political landscape of the affected region or state where assistance is being provided. This aspect does not sit comfortably with the principles of humanitarianism as espoused by NGOs such as the ICRC (2013). This perspective is further enforced when it is noted that the Ministry of Defence cannot rule out military action during humanitarian operations.

Doctrinal papers evidence that military operations will also incorporate war fighting components as well as security duties. This was the case in Afghanistan, which was a stabilisation operation during which the UK military

“ had the consent of the host nation government but no other warring party (Afghanistan: Taliban 2001 - present) [...] A military force may decide in such situations that the defeat of a specific enemy is essential to the success of the operation.” (Ministry of Defence, 2011: 1. 1). Essentially, therefore, there is a political perspective which can serve to undermine any arguments of altruism during a humanitarian operation which is supported by military efforts.

Should Military led Humanitarian Interventions be justified?

The UN backed military operation in Libya during its recent uprising and civil conflict was arguably mandated via humanitarian intervention based upon aid relief and assistance (United Nations, 2011). However it is arguable that this particular intervention was politically motivated since it is evident that the Gaddafi regime had previously irked those states (USA, UK & France) which were at the forefront of the military aspect of intervention (Boulton, 2008). The argument put forward by the trio of states sought to ensure a quick resolution to the conflict and that a perpetuation of the conflict would lead to a humanitarian crisis. Kuperman (2011) notes that Resolution, 1973 allowed for a number of additional practices by military forces. These included, for example, allowing intervening forces to stabilise the Libyan conflict, to assist the undermining of the authority of the Gaddafi regime and to help bring the conflict to a swift conclusion. To achieve this Kuperman (2011) notes that Libyan state financial and economic assets were frozen, the regime was also subjected to an arms embargo (Kuperman, 2011). It is also to be noted that the USA, France and the UK also operated

outside of the mandate provided by the UN by deploying private military contractors to fight alongside insurgents seeking to overthrow the Gaddafi regime (RT News, 2012). That said, the Libyan conflict has not ended and continues to dominate local Libyan politics and society. This outcome serves only to undermine the utilitarian role of humanitarianism.

It is fair to suggest that the actions by military forces were more political than humanitarian and served only to perpetuate the US led policy of regime change. This is a factor which Williamson (2011) argues has resulted in military planners utilising military force within humanitarian relief efforts and which has served only to muddy the political and societal dynamics of any affected zone. Williamson's (2011) argument can be considered in tandem with the British military doctrine which refuses to rule out combat efforts but in relation to the post-Cold War era which has seen non-state combatants realign the battlefield to one which compares directly to a counter insurgency warzone (US Government, 2012).

Legal Issues

Where the Libyan case study is considered, it is worthwhile noting that, previously, Goodman (2006) had argued that there is a clear contradiction between military interventions into any state using a guise of humanitarian purposes. Goodman (2006) furthers his argument by stating that there is no legal justification for a unilateral humanitarian intervention into another country, and that it is highly unlikely that such a move will ever be likely. The rationale behind this argument is that states then have the potential to militarily intervene in other states using humanitarianism as a justification

for regime change or some other ulterior motive. It is to be noted that Goodman bases his arguments upon the dynamics of recent interventions in Kosovo and Iraq as well as the refusal to intervene in the Sudan or in Rwanda (Goodman, 2006). Similarly when attempts were made to intervene militarily under the auspice of humanitarianism in Syria, this was rebuffed by the UN General Assembly since it was suggested that those who sought to intervene (again, the USA, UK and France) were doing so out of a political motive which involve a war fighting phase as opposed to relieving suffering on the ground, indeed a part of the proposal was to arm anti Assad militias which were aligned to the al Qaeda franchise (Benotman and Blake, 2013). The outcome of this particular policy has been the evolution of Islamic State.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the incorporation of a military force to benefit humanitarian operations can serve to benefit the potential for aid relief via the provision of security escorts for NGOs when operating in hostile environments. However with recent decades seeing a vast increase in the preference for military led humanitarian operations, the potential for a conflation between humanitarian principles and the advancing of political aspirations of donor states cannot be denied. This has been the case in Libya where humanitarianism was presented as a causal justification for military interventions which were mostly politically or ideologically led. With the vales of humanitarianism incorporating impartiality and neutrality it is hard to see how military forces can promote humanitarian values, particularly when their presence may result in engaging with potential belligerent forces in order to stabilise a country or region so that NGOs can conduct their own operations

successfully. Essentially, therefore the aims of military forces (and their political masters) are vastly different from aid agencies, this serve to provide confirmation that military forces cannot promote humanitarian values, purely by virtue of their own activities and nature of their work.

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