

Humanitarian assistance



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

Humanitarian assistance, whether provided in emergency, rehabilitative or development scenarios, is invariably delivered in unstable environments. The area of operation may be unstable for various reasons including: it is a pre, current or post conflict zone; it is in a pre, current or post, natural disaster zone; and a chronic lack of development, particularly infrastructural and in basic service delivery, leads to the heightened vulnerability of personnel in the field. Therefore humanitarian agencies are continuously balancing the provision of assistance to beneficiaries, alongside the duty of care they owe their personnel to secure their safety. It is also important to note, that no humanitarian agency, regardless of scale or profile, operates inside the borders of a state without their express consent and invitation, and that in fact this is imperative to securing an operation (UN GA Res. 46/182, 1991: Part I Para 3). In effect, the government, or those parties with effective control over an area, and humanitarian agencies, are in a co-dependent relationship.

Although, in theory, humanitarian aid is meant to be delivered in a politically neutral manner, this can be very difficult to achieve in practice. This may result in the people delivering assistance becoming the target of a terrorist attack, which has been categorised by some as a significant threat to the work of the UN, INGOs and NGOs (Weiss, 2006: Webpage). Other authors argue that aid workers are highly vulnerable to becoming victims of violence and not enough has been done to ensure their safety and security (Brabant, 1999: 7-10). Responsibility for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel is shared amongst many: host government, employing agency,

third parties with effective control over areas such as opposition or militant groups, private security firms, and the individuals themselves. However for the purposes of this study it is the relationship between the state and humanitarian agencies, examined from a SRM perspective, and how this contributes to securing the safety of humanitarian personnel from the threat of terrorism, that is of particular interest.

As one of the most integral institutes associated with the humanitarian sector, the UN acknowledges the difficult, sensitive and risky position their personnel are placed in when executing their duties. In remarks made to CNN in September 2000, when entering the UN Headquarters in New York, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated:

What is unacceptable and really appalling is that these young men and women who go to these areas to help — to assist — then become targets. They are not at war with anyone. They went because they wanted to help, they went because they have compassion, they went because they understand the human condition and want to do whatever they can to help. It is unforgivable that these human beings would then become targets of either rebels or government forces which are at war with each other.

Summary

Following the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and in more recent years, there has been a prolific growth in the number of humanitarian agencies working to assist states in the event of a crisis; whether it's brought on by a natural disaster, man-made conflict, or a lack of internal development preventing the state from being able to address the situation

alone. These agencies operate at various levels: internationally, nationally and community-based; and increasingly undertake more varied activities than could ever have been anticipated during the formative years of the United Nations (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000: 89).

Although there may be protagonists who criticise the UN as a behemoth unable to properly execute its basic functions, there are continual attempts made to better address the shortcomings of the organisation, and to redress the imbalances caused through unprecedented growth in the sector. In a letter addressed to all UN Heads of Agencies, to Senior Officials within MFAs, to all UN DOs, and then copied to all CSAs and SAs with country-level responsibilities, Sir David Veness, then USG, of the UNDSS, wrote about securing the safety of UN personnel:

The need for enhanced support from Member States has been a consistent recommendation in recent discussions both with member states and in senior in-house consultations. While many states will already be meeting some of the suggested actions, a focused discussion...should provide an opportunity to identify the gaps and weaknesses and provide impetus to address them. (2008)

This statement essentially inspired the development of the research problem for this dissertation, since in principle both the humanitarian agencies at large, and the host state within which they operate, acknowledge their responsibility to provide a safe operating environment for their personnel, however, there are some alarming variances in their abilities to deliver this service in practice for a multitude of complex and interdependent reasons.

Research has shown that the observable increase in the number of operators in the humanitarian sector has coincided with a perceived deteriorating security environment which is effectively limiting ‘humanitarian space’ (Wagner, 2008: Webpage). The term essentially refers to “the ability of humanitarian agencies to work independently and impartially without fear of attack in pursuit of the humanitarian imperative” (Sida, 2005: 5). It has been widely observed by expert commentators that the simultaneous terrorist attacks on the United States, of September 11, 2001, represented a “shift in the international security environment” (Muraviev, 2004: 112). Whilst there has been a “flood of literature on international terrorism” (Shearman & Sussex, 2004: 1), there is far less material dedicated to considering the impact of terrorism on humanitarian personnel, and even fewer papers isolating specific relationships to investigate their contribution to securing humanitarians working in the field. This presents an important opportunity to further develop the existing understanding of the significance of cooperation and collaboration in the mitigation of terrorist attacks against specific targets, such as humanitarian personnel and assets.

Terrorism

Whilst the term ‘terrorism’ has become entrenched in our language, there remains today no UN convention definition that has been broadly agreed upon by a majority of states. Since it is not particularly useful to drift between multiple versions it will be necessary to settle on a definition for the purposes of this research paper. In recognition of the need to promote a common understanding of the term for military purposes, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) adopted the following definition: “The unlawful

use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives” (NATO, AAP-6(2008): 2-T-5). The term will be employed in this context throughout the paper.

For the purposes of this study it will be necessary to consider the nature of the terrorist threat against humanitarian personnel. Commentators have argued that there is ‘apparent fear’ that humanitarian intervention can be utilised as a political ‘Trojan Horse’: infringing upon state sovereignty and independence, influencing policy, potentially diluting previously entrenched dogma, and spreading liberal democratic ideals; so that there is a perceived need to reinforce the security of the nation-state, whilst simultaneously recognising the imperative to invite foreign humanitarian organisations to assist in times of crises (Loehr & Wong, 1995: 491-506) Effective SRM strategies are therefore necessary to safeguard the security of aid workers however such measures should be sufficiently ‘flexible and adaptable’ to terrorist threats, which are increasingly transnational in nature (Hawley, 2005: 1). Whilst agencies are often begrudgingly invited to aid the state, the effectiveness of the relationship between the two is critical to their work as they are limited by the terms of the agreements made with the host state and they impact greatly upon the conditions in which the agencies are able to operate (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000: 89).

To evaluate the relationship between agencies and host states as a contributor to the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, both the relationship in theory and in practice will be examined. The research undertaken has included consideration of primary and secondary source

<https://assignbuster.com/humanitarian-assistance/>

documents in addition to surveying and interviewing key personnel from both the agency and government sectors. From the identifiable gaps, a series of recommendations have been made to contribute to amplifying the knowledge and profile of SRM in the humanitarian sector, and to further enhance the relationships between states and agencies in recognition of the imperative role this plays in the protection of humanitarian staff in the field, particularly against the threat of terrorism. This dissertation will demonstrate that whilst significant improvements have been made to secure the safety of humanitarian personnel in cooperation with states, the measures taken may have contracted the humanitarian space in which programs operate, and where any decision is taken to increase programmatic access or remain in insecure environments, the decision-making process must reflect that staff safety is paramount and will not be sacrificed in favour of other imperatives, in order to avoid future losses

Literature Review

In order to conduct a thorough examination of the nature of state and agency relationships in securing humanitarian staff against the threat of terrorism, it is necessary to contemplate the SRM premises which international humanitarian organisations operate from, realising crucially that they are then adapted to the country and regional context. To this end, primary source materials have been considered which include letters, press releases and news articles, memoranda of understanding and operational agreements, conventions and treaties, interviews with key humanitarian personnel and survey data contributed by both government officials and humanitarian SMs. Legal cases reinforcing the concept of ‘duty of care’

owed by employers to secure the safety of their personnel, are also touched on briefly. Key secondary source materials formulating the SRM practices of humanitarian agencies are referenced and include the UN Field Security Handbook, UNDSS MOSS and MORSS, and RedR-IHE best practices, in addition to reports undertaken in the wake of key attacks such as the UN Ahtisaari and Brahimi Reports. Through the exploration of current best practice procedures and policies, and observable gaps in implementation, areas for improvement become identifiable, critical to formulating recommendations (Gould, 2004 Webpage).

Research to date, either obtained through interview and surveys or compiled by organisations, has shown that the increased threat to humanitarian personnel operating in the field is both perceived by the SMs and proven through statistical compilation; however it does also fluctuate through peaks and troughs, especially depending on the data being isolated. Whilst past and present studies exploring the terrorist threat against humanitarian workers and the steps taken to manage the risk, are reviewed, the material referring specifically to humanitarians is limited in comparison to the vast amount of literature dedicated to the subject of terrorism in general. For example whilst authors such as Kelly & Maghan (2005) contribute to the general understanding of the nature of terrorism, more specific studies relating to certain aspects of humanitarian personnel as the targets of terrorist attacks are mostly limited to journal articles, governmental, think tank or other policy development institute reports.

Governmental reports investigating humanitarian operations in insecure environments, such as those tabled by the British DFID, whilst useful, are <https://assignbuster.com/humanitarian-assistance/>

written from a perspective of justifying the spending of public monies to improve governance in insecure states. Think Tanks such as the ODI and their Humanitarian Policy Group have produced useful studies focusing on the trends in violence against ‘ aid workers’, however the material covers many of the challenges without focusing specifically on relational aspects such as those existing between host states and humanitarian agencies. In another report, published by the Feinstein International Centre, the overall ‘ State of the Humanitarian Enterprise’ is assessed, and whilst the security of humanitarian personnel is considered, the relational aspect explored is that existing, or causing tensions between, expatriate humanitarian SMs as “ outsiders” and the local communities benefiting from assistance (Donini et al, 2008: 3). Therefore there appears to be little material dedicated specifically to considering the role of the relationship between host and agency as a mitigating element protecting humanitarian personnel in hostile environments.

The need for mutual understanding between host states and humanitarian agencies to promote improved security-related practices, and enhanced opportunities for collaboration, is recognised by Roach et al (2005: 8) who state “ Good practice is difficult to co-ordinate and to share nationally and internationally if it lacks a common descriptive language which also allows for adaptation to local contexts”. In part this is achieved through the development of operational agreements, MoUs and by documenting relationships between host states and agencies to regulate the manner through which agencies secure their staff and how states intend to co-operate to achieve this end (De Montclos, 2001: 1). However, De Montclos’

evaluation of the humanitarian operations in Africa also observes deviations from intention, where the state is identified as a contributor to insecurity, escalating threats of terror through divisive policies, which may serve to provoke opposing groups into utilising ‘ deadly’ force, highlighting the importance of access to government counterparts and open lines of communication.

Understanding the nature of the risk is critical to SRM studies (Decker, 2001: 1) which is why it is imperative to examine the types of terrorist attacks perpetrated against humanitarian personnel, focusing particularly in a post ‘ 9/11’ context for the purposes of this research paper. Recent examples and their implications improve the understanding of the nature of the risk to be mitigated and how state and agency relationships can both contribute to, and detract from, staff safety; such as in the case of the deceptive misuse of the Red Cross emblem for the purposes of the ‘ Ingrid Betancourt’ rescue to free FARC hostages in early July 2008, giving rise to further concerns of retaliatory attacks against humanitarian staff and assets, and reiterating the need to protect the use of humanitarian ‘ symbols’. Therefore the research approach for this paper builds like a set of SRM stepping stones, not unlike Gills multiple foci for risk management decision-making (1998: 15), from considering how the SRM processes are used to minimise the risks to humanitarian personnel, via an examination of the different models utilised, to considering their effectiveness through current evaluations of recently conducted reviews, such as by the UN following attacks in Iraq and Algeria (Durch et al, 2003: 21).

Whilst, the abovementioned focus on the precise nature of the terrorist risk against humanitarian personnel is the beginning point, general SRM and CRM models are highly adaptable and useful theoretical benchmarks, which assist during the examination of state and agency relationships, especially in assessing how they contribute to SRM. This adaptability can be credited to the common thread in security management, which recognises all manner of risk as inherently unpredictable, as evidenced by Nalla and Newman's definition of CRM: "anticipation, recognition and appraisal of a risk and the initiation of some action to remove the risk or reduce the potential loss from it to an acceptable level" (1990: 92). Other theoretical perspectives useful to the study include Gill's security 'management techniques' (1998: 14-15) which are clearly detectable in the general UN practice of emphasising security as the responsibility of every staff member, from the recruitment phase onwards, as a frontline mechanism to deter and mitigate risk (United Nations, 2006: 4-2). Therefore, by utilising a SRM perspective in examining state and agency relationships as a key contributing factor in securing the safety of humanitarian personnel from the threat of terrorism, this research will provide important insights into the conditions required to keep staff safety central in decision-making processes during the conduct of humanitarian operations