

Beyond the Transatlantic Divide: Deepening Western Cooperation and Broadening Donor Engagement in International Humanitarian Assistance

Abby Stoddard



Raising the Bar

Enhancing Transatlantic Governance of Disaster Relief and Preparedness

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About this paper

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I. Introduction

Over the first decade of the 21st century, international humanitarian assistance has seen unprecedented institutional growth and significant improvements in cooperation between humanitarian providers and policy makers. In its funding, institutions and senior personnel, however, it remains a predominantly European and North American enterprise, rather than an area of broad global engagement. The homogeneity of its primary actors limits the potential of humanitarian action to grow in scope and effectiveness, and arguably endangers its mission, as some insurgency movements have tried to portray aid organizations as agents of Western domination and have increasingly targeted them for violence.

As a complement to the “Raising the Bar”-Project’s paper *Improving Humanitarian Assistance - A Transatlantic Agenda for Action*, which addresses policy gaps in U.S. and EU humanitarian cooperation, this paper examines some of the practical operational differences between the major donor governments, and suggests ways this small club can build on its recent cooperation gains to reach out to new, non-Western donors and partners.

Within the small group of official donors that provide the majority of international emergency response funding, the United States and the European Commission Humanitarian Office (DG ECHO) dwarf most of their counterparts not only in total contributions but also in their staff presence and operational capacity in emergency affected countries. Although American and European governments historically may have adopted different views regarding humanitarian assistance and its place within broader foreign policy, it is this divergence in capacity, rather than difference in view, that lies behind the more practical policy and operational differences between the major humanitarian donors.

Despite the considerable influence its size and resources would seem to confer, the United States has not sought a leadership position in the humanitarian arena. DG ECHO has also refrained from trying to coordinate other donors and lead common efforts in norm-setting and institution-building. Advances in humanitarian cooperation in recent years were pushed forward instead by a group of governments within the second tier of major DAC donors.¹ It was this group, spearheaded by the UK (whose contributions, when counting pooled funding, have now outstripped DG ECHO), that was instrumental in stepping up intergovernmental communication and cooperation on humanitarian issues, and in the 2003 adoption of a common set of principles of ‘Good Humanitarian Donorship’ to guide governments in their humanitarian policy making and donor practices. This group of multilaterally-oriented donor governments (for ease of reference to be dubbed in this paper as the top five multilateral donors) has occasionally found itself at odds with both the U.S. and DG ECHO over what good humanitarian donorship looks like in funding and field practice.

Further improvements in humanitarian cooperation will require not only creating stronger, more strategic links between the U.S. and DG ECHO, and between these two donors and other EU and Western donors, but also, and perhaps most importantly, between this entire assembly and the multitude of ‘non-traditional’ or ‘emerging’ donors that have yet to be brought into the humanitarian system in a substantive way.

¹ In descending order of their humanitarian contributions, these governments are: the UK, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Canada (DAC: Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).

II. Creating a common vision of the 'good humanitarian donor'

By the end of the 1990s, donor governments faced mounting criticism about their means of funding and supporting international humanitarian response. Donor behavior was lambasted by humanitarian actors and observers as being self-interested, uncoordinated, too little, too slow, and channeled in such a way that it fostered destructive competition between their aid provider grantees in the field.² Additionally, their funding modalities were blamed for humanitarian responses which were alternately wasteful, confused, and duplicative (Kosovo, East Timor) or scant and neglectful (D.R. Congo, Central African Republic). Donor governments had little communication and virtually no coordination on humanitarian policies, plans, and activities on either headquarters or field levels.

In perhaps the most significant recent exercise in international norm-creation in the humanitarian realm, the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative was launched by a group of donor governments in Stockholm in 2003. Midwived by the UK, the twenty-three principles and best practices that comprise the initiative have laid a crucially important foundation for further cooperative action by donors by defining the essential scope and purpose of humanitarian action, and by enshrining the core principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality. In funding practice, the GHD calls upon donors to ensure the impartiality and effectiveness of humanitarian giving by allocating humanitarian funding "solely on the basis of need;" "in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments;" and ensuring "predictability and flexibility in funding to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and to other key humanitarian organisations."³

The willingness with which the 17 original donors, including the U.S. and the European Commission, signed on to the principles, and the apparent seriousness with which they have worked together since 2003 to enhance and to track adherence to them, has been an agreeable surprise to many. The interpretation of some of the principles in practice, however, seems to differ between different groups of donors, and this has revealed some basic policy divides.

The strategic use of pooled funding mechanisms and other financing tools

GHD does not prescribe specific funding modalities, but speaks in general terms of the need for humanitarian funding to be "timely," "predictable," and "flexible." Some donors, in particular the UK, have aggressively promoted the idea that these objectives are best achieved through the use of pooled funding mechanisms, by which donors can contribute large amounts in un-earmarked grants to a common fund, which is then drawn down and allocated to providers and projects according to jointly determined priorities, on the basis of assessed needs. Pooled funding not only allows humanitarian practitioners in the field to direct the money where it is most needed, so the logic goes, but also serves to incentivize better humanitarian coordination in the field, since organizations must participate in common planning and prioritization if they are to receive any portion of the pooled funding for their projects.

The new pooled funding mechanisms consist of the expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Common Humanitarian Funds at country level (CHF). The CERF, originally a rotating loan fund

² Two seminal examples of these critiques: Joanna Macrae, Sarah Collinson, Margie Buchanan-Smith, Nicola Reindorp, Anna Schmidt, Tasneem Mowjee and Adele Harmer, *Uncertain Power: The Changing Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action* (London: Overseas Development Institute, December 2002); Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, *The Quality of Money: Donor Behavior in Humanitarian Financing* (Boston: Tufts University, April 2003).

³ Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship, endorsed in Stockholm, June 17, 2003 by Germany, Australia, Belgium, Canada, the European Commission, Denmark, the United States, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Switzerland.

for UN humanitarian agencies of \$50 million, was expanded in 2006 to include a grant facility 10 times larger. By the end of 2008, the CERF had succeeded in garnering \$453 million in donor contributions, as well as attracting an unprecedentedly wide and diverse assemblage of donors -- 107 governments altogether, many of which had never contributed to international humanitarian response efforts before. CHFs now operate in three countries: D.R. Congo, Sudan, and Central African Republic, with plans to continue to replicate them elsewhere. To date they have channeled over \$900 million in total. Funding to the CHFs comes predominantly from the UK (which accounts for half of the total allocations), along with nine other DAC donor governments, led in each case by the top five multilateral donors. In addition, smaller pooled funds known as Emergency Response Funds, or ERFs, have proliferated in the past few years, and now exist in 10 countries, where they have channeled a total of \$200 million to date for smaller or sudden onset emergencies within a humanitarian aid setting and other unforeseen needs. The ERFs have also attracted a broader range of donors than the CHFs, including contributions from Saudi Arabia and OPEC, in comparison to the larger CHFs which have been supported mostly by the UK and the other of the top five multilateral donors. Overall, the consensus of the external reviews and evaluations done on these mechanisms has been that, despite startup problems, they have contributed to measurable improvements in overall funding levels, timeliness, and more equitable and needs-based allocations.

It has been a point of some tension among donors that the U.S. Government and DG ECHO have for the most part remained aloof from the new pooled funds (both declined to participate in the CHFs, and while the U.S. has contributed a total of 15 million to the CERF, this is a comparatively small amount given the scale of U.S. humanitarian funding, and it has not contributed every year). Both USAID and DG ECHO have expressed a strong preference for their

traditional mode of bilateral funding -- meaning grants to agencies for specific programs or projects in specific emergencies -- as their primary channel.⁴ Feeling pressure from the UK and others, USAID and DG ECHO officials have pointed to continued administrative difficulties and transaction costs of the pooled funds. It is in fact better donorship, they argue, to assess the situation for themselves and to make earmarked grants which can then be individually monitored for better accountability.

In addition to being their accustomed way of doing business, bilateral donorship particularly suits these donors, who have the capacity to deploy staff in the field to undertake needs assessments and fact-finding, and provide on-site monitoring and evaluation of their grantees' projects. Their operational field presence has naturally begat cadres of veteran field officers and the prevailing attitude of knowing as much or better than the other humanitarian actors in the setting. Directing un-earmarked resources to a pooled fund managed by the Humanitarian Coordinator would be counterintuitive to these staffers and seem to obviate the need for DG ECHO or USAID field missions. Most of the other government donor bodies, in contrast, tend to have a much smaller presence or none at all in the field, with embassy officials often covering humanitarian responsibilities along with their political duties. Recent downward pressures on public service budgets, coupled with higher foreign aid targets have obliged these donors to do more with less, channeling ever greater amounts of grant funding while at the same time facing declining staff resources to manage grants.

In terms of the U.S. humanitarian donor body, USAID, and in particular its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), there are no regulatory constraints that specifically preclude the possibility of funding through these mechanisms. DG ECHO, on the other hand, points to the fact that it exists itself as essentially a "common fund" for EU governments, and

⁴ Bilateral funding still accounts for the largest share of aid flows, followed by the new pooled funds, with the smallest share of all in the form of grants channeled directly to the affected government. Some government donors have also channeled money in the form of commercial contracts with private sector actors for aid activities, but this practice has for the most part been restricted to larger scale reconstruction efforts.

would be going against its mandated responsibilities to turn over funding to another pool over which it had no program-level direction or oversight.

Lately it appears that donors are finding common ground in the notion that no funding modality should be relied upon as the sole and exclusive approach to humanitarian donorship, and that each has its strengths and weaknesses. What will be critical for donors going forward is to maintain flexibility in their approach, emphasize the modality that best corresponds to their funding and field capacity, and to more effectively coordinate with each other on funding strategies in order to use the diversity of tools to exploit their complementary strengths and fill gaps where they occur. For instance, a bilateral funder can coordinate with the CHF donors and Humanitarian Coordinator to use its funding for activities that fall outside the scope of the CHF (such as regionally-based and multi-year programming); or to fund those humanitarian providers who do not participate in common funding and country work plans (such as the ICRC and MSF) for reasons of independence and neutrality. It is not enough for a donor to say one type of funding is as good as another and to continue business as usual -- optimal results can only be achieved through collaborative and strategic deployment of these tools.

Even as it continues to emphasize bilateral funding arrangements, the U.S. should seriously consider increasing its support for multilateral funding channels, including upping its contribution to the CERF, and encouraging other nations to follow suit. The U.S. and other major donors have an interest not only in maximizing their own capacities for aid, but in widening the donor base and 'globalizing' the humanitarian enterprise. To date the pooled funds have shown the most promise for engaging non-Western governments in the international humanitarian system, and not only wealthy Gulf states and emerging powerhouse economies, but also developing nations -- including recent recipients of humanitarian assistance.

Ensuring adequate resources for preparedness and recovery

The GHD also reflected a growing donor interest in extending the definition of humanitarian action on either side of acute emergency assistance.⁵ On the pre-emergency side there has been renewed focus on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and building local capacity for preparedness and response, while on the opposite end, greater funding resources and project activities have been devoted to early recovery or "transitional" aid programming after a disaster or conflict.

The need for greater action on DRR was articulated in the Hyogo Declaration and has propelled initiatives such as the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). The proliferation of small and medium-scale natural disasters as a consequence of climate change has underscored the importance of DRR, and put some more urgency and intent behind long-standing rhetorical support of local capacity building for risk mitigation and indigenous response. Funding DRR is difficult for many donors, however, as it does not sit squarely within either the humanitarian or the development architecture. A similar funding gap has long been recognized in the area of early recovery, where the lack of resources to rebuild critical infrastructure and support fledgling civil sectors has been seen to imperil peace processes and leave populations more vulnerable to repeated crises. Recently humanitarian actors, supported by pooled funding, have begun to step into the void in both these areas (and early recovery in particular has seen a marked increase in resources thanks in part to pooled funding). However, situating these activities within the humanitarian sphere entails some downsides and difficulties. For one, international humanitarian donors may have legal constraints against direct funding to national authorities and local NGOs -- the necessary locus of DRR activities. Humanitarian actors, in addition, have not excelled at baseline data collection and crisis contingency planning, which this activity demands. And finally, when funding resources are limited, donors and providers will naturally prioritize

⁵ GHD principles 8 and 9 call upon donors to "Strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners" and "Provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development, striving to ensure support, where appropriate, to the maintenance and return of sustainable livelihoods and transitions from humanitarian relief to recovery and development activities."

acute, life-threatening emergency response activities over preparedness, creating a vicious circle of underinvestment in DRR. Early recovery has been increasingly assumed by humanitarian actors by virtue of their already being present in country at the tail end of emergencies, and possessed of the operational capacity and funding channels to begin programming during what is now seen as the crucial window for recovery. Funding and implementation for early recovery assistance is still a long way off from being predictable, systematically applied across countries, and adequate to needs.

From the starting point of recognizing the importance of DRR and early recovery aid, as their joint initiatives have articulated, the U.S. and EU donors must now seek solutions for how to most effectively mobilize and channel funding for these activities. Because national actors in the affected states are critical to the endeavor, it also provides an important opportunity for the donors to engage the G77 governments in the international humanitarian dialogue and potentially expand their ranks.

Strengthening operational security for humanitarian response

Aid worker security is a need shared by all humanitarian stakeholders. In the small number of emergency aid contexts in theaters of global jihadist insurgency (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia) humanitarian aid organizations have seen their personnel and operations specifically targeted and attacked by belligerents who see them as wholly in league with their political enemies. While this extreme polarization and danger is limited to just a handful of field settings, these also tend to be places of severe humanitarian need, and many aid organizations attempting to work in them are struggling in vain to find ways to counter the negative perceptions while keeping their personnel and partners safe.

Individually, donors have been responsive to the needs of organizations for increased resources for security. In addition to funding security line items in project budgets, USAID has funded NGO joint security initiatives, consortia, and training programs. DG ECHO has developed a useful body of research and guidelines for policy and practice in operational field security. These and other donor activities have also helped to foster a culture of security in the field by requiring prospective grantees to demonstrate that they have security policies and protocols in place in their proposals. What the donors still lack is a forum to discuss operational security amongst themselves, including issues of independence of humanitarian providers in contested areas, ways to clarify and standardize security budgeting across agencies, and how to improve security information sharing, tracking, and analysis by providers in the field. The GHD or another donor platforms working in conjunction with the new sub-working group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee would be appropriate platforms for this much needed dialogue.

III. Driving improvements in performance and coordination of provider-partners

In their funding of the UN humanitarian agencies, Red Cross movement entities, and NGOs (as well as, occasionally, private sector actors) donors seek not only to enable, but also to improve humanitarian aid provision to achieve better outcomes. Donor proximity to programming has not always proven beneficial or welcome, but there is no question that donor impetus and endorsement is essential for effecting system-level change in humanitarian action. For each type of institutional provider-partner, American and European donors confront a different set of operational issues and opportunities for coordinated action with each other to improve field performance.

UN humanitarian agencies and the International Committee for the Red Cross

With the introduction of the new pooled funding instruments in the second half of this decade, UN humanitarian agencies generally have seen their emergency contributions increase by a significant margin. At the same time, the Cluster Approach to humanitarian coordination has solidified their central role in the international humanitarian system as they assume leadership over sectors and act as coordinators for international humanitarian actors.

Despite their apparent gains from these developments, UN agencies have voiced concern and dissatisfaction with what they term the unintended consequences of pooled funding and clusters. These have mainly to do with the increased administrative burden brought by new coordination and sub-granting responsibilities, and the difficulties in reorienting their broad program framework to individual projects. The “projectization” difficulties they now face involve having to submit individual project designs/proposals and differentiating procurement, monitoring, and reporting systems as required under the common work plans created by the cluster system and funded by the CERF and CHF.

Donors, particularly those that have stressed multi-lateral funding, have an interest in making sure the agencies are not unduly burdened by transaction costs entailed in pooled funding, and that their cluster coordination roles do not amount to unfunded mandates. This may entail additional capacity building inputs to core budgets as one possibility. At the same time however, it is important not to confuse individual agency interests with what is in the interest of the system at large for the ultimate benefit of humanitarian response. When UN agencies complain, for example, that increased funding through pooled funds has detracted from predictability, they are speaking in terms of their own budgets, since they may not receive as much through the pooled funds as they did within some of their prior bilateral funding arrangements with donors. More important to realize, however, is that predictability for the system, for the emergency in question, is enhanced by a pool of upfront, un-earmarked funds to be allocated according to need. Donors should use the Montreux and other meeting platforms to work with UN agencies to determine their needs to fulfill their important role, and whether these can be met through additional resources or through restructuring of internal systems and budgets. U.S. and European donors are strongly represented on the agencies’ executive boards and act as their direct funders for core budgets and emergency responses, so concerted action in collaboration with their UN partners should be reasonably expected to yield results.

The special role and unique mandate of the ICRC in highly polarized and combat contexts has been highlighted in recent years as humanitarian aid has come increasingly under attack. While attack rates of aid workers rose by over 60% over the past three years -- driven by the extremely violent contexts of Afghanistan, Somalia, and Darfur, Sudan -- only the ICRC has seen a decline in their major security incidents.⁶

⁶ Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, and Victoria DiDomenico, *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update – Trends in violence against aid workers and the operational response* (London: ODI, 2009).

Some part of this good fortune, particularly in the Afghanistan case, can be attributed to the ICRC's determined and sustained efforts to reach out and communicate with armed opposition groups and other potential threat sources, emphasizing their historical role in warfare and political neutrality. With other aid organizations -- U.S., European, religious and secular alike -- apparently tarred with the same broad brush as agents of the West, the ICRC's aid work stands as an oasis of successful humanitarian access to be protected and given as much leeway as they need to keep operating.

Non-governmental organizations

Humanitarian response efforts benefit from a diverse multitude of non-governmental actors implementing assistance activities on the ground. While donors have an interest in making sure the NGOs coordinate effectively with the UN and the country coordination structure, they should also ensure that they are not hamstrung by having the better part of their funding and activities subsumed by them. Like UN agencies, international NGOs overall have seen their funding from governments rise in recent years, but with the onset of pooled funding mechanisms an increasing percentage of NGO grants for emergency response now pass through UN agencies. This can create efficiencies in programming, for instance when UNICEF handles all the procurement of equipment for its NGO partners working in the water and sanitation cluster that it leads. However, it can cause inefficiencies as well, such as cascading overheads and cumbersome contracting agreements.

Donors can use the complementarity of funding modalities to ensure that bilateral funding continues to be available for some NGO programming outside the coordinated humanitarian workplan when it adds value or is needed to fill gaps. Even when funding NGOs bilaterally, donors can still bring their influence to bear to strengthen coordination in the field, by insisting that their grantees coordinate their activities with the other humanitarian actors under the common work plan, despite their being funded outside it.

Notwithstanding longstanding rhetoric, neither the U.S. nor the European Commission has done particularly well by local civil society in humanitarian action. Pooled funding and better coordination in the field have gone some way to bring greater numbers of local organizations into a common planning process, but they have yet to see much benefit in the way of increased access to international funding. It would behoove donors to devise ways to increase funding for local NGOs through capacity building partnerships, as well as direct grants. One way to do this would be to dedicate some CHF funding for local NGO capacity building and efforts to increase local participation. This in turn would serve donor interests in the local capacity building for DRR.

Private sector actors

Recent research on commercial engagement in humanitarian response has shown that private sector engagement in direct humanitarian activities (as opposed to technical and logistical support roles), has increased slightly. Overall, however, it remains very limited, and for profit firms do not seem likely to take on significantly greater shares of donor funding and humanitarian service delivery in the foreseeable future.⁷ The U.S. engages in private sector contracting to a greater degree than most EU governments, and certainly more than DG ECHO (which is mandated to only engage not-for-profit actors for humanitarian response), but many donors were seen to reach out to the private sector for aid delivery only in certain types of humanitarian emergency, particularly large-scale and sudden onset natural disasters where there were no aid organizations operational on the ground at the time of onset. This too speaks to a need for investing in indigenous preparedness response capacity within a disaster risk reduction framework for local actors, who are invariably the first responders in such crises.

⁷ Andrea Binder and Jan Martin Witte. *Business Engagement in Humanitarian Relief: Key trends and policy implications*, HPG Background Paper (London: Overseas Development Institute, June 2007); Abby Stoddard, "E.C. and U.S. approaches to business engagement in disaster relief and preparedness: A Case Study on commercial business engagement in Humanitarian Response."

Engaging and encouraging the “emerging donors” and G77 countries

This paper has highlighted different practical areas of international humanitarian action in which U.S.-EU cooperation, and donor cooperation generally, can be enhanced to achieve shared interests. Yet even as these sorts of ties are strengthened between the U.S. Government and the European Commission and other European donors, it would seem a big part of the picture is still missing. In simple terms, international humanitarian action is not as international as its practitioners believe it is. Despite the universality of the humanitarian aid ethos, the international regime built around its funding and practice is fueled and peopled by Northern/Western nations, and it is this perception that permeates much of the world in which it operates.

In recent years there have been signs that humanitarian donorship has begun widening to embrace so-called “emerging” or “nontraditional” donors from countries outside of the traditional Northern/Western group (such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) as more and larger grants were reported from these governments. The extent to which non-DAC donors typically contribute to aid is hard to track and capture, and in all likelihood remains underestimated,⁸ but the available data point to a marked increase in both funding levels and in participation in the international system.

The number of donors contributing to international humanitarian response efforts has increased from an average of 67 per year to 94 per year following the UN-led humanitarian reforms described above. As of mid-2009, 107 governments reported humanitarian contributions, many of these made possible for the first time by the CERF mechanism. Unlike the U.S. and major European humanitarian donors, most of the emerging, non-DAC donors provide a large share of their humanitarian assistance in bilateral

grants directly to affected governments – an annual average of 38% of humanitarian contributions of the top 10 non-DAC donors for the years 2000-2008 compared to 2.5 % for the DAC donors. For some of these donors -- states such as India, Qatar, Russia, and Saudi Arabia -- government-government assistance represents over 50% of contributions. These donors tend not to be familiar with the pooled funds and other coordination mechanisms at country level, but they have been contributing in growing numbers to the global CERF. Some have also begun making significant grants to the World Food Program (including a landmark commitment of \$500 million from Saudi Arabia, which completed WFP’s appeal target of \$755 million to respond to the rise in fuel and food costs). In direct emergency response contributions, non-DAC donors have steered clear of funding international aid efforts in more politicized contexts such as Darfur -- yet their contributions to the CERF have indirectly supported those activities.

The current international regime for humanitarian action would benefit by increasing the participation of non-DAC donors, and non-Western actors generally, in its institutions and cooperative efforts. Truly universalizing international humanitarian assistance, however, cannot be a matter of simply changing the practices of the emerging donors to mimic those of the DAC donor club. In some instances the DAC donors may also want to take a page from the non-DAC donor playbook and look beyond the current constellation of UN agencies and Western-based NGOs. Particularly if humanitarian action is now expanding to include more preparedness and recovery activities, the DAC donors may need to find ways to more effectively assist local states and civil society directly. A recent research paper addresses this issue, tracing the evolution of international relief assistance to a model in which it was “implicitly assumed that governments were either too weak or too corrupt to manage large volumes of humanitarian aid.”⁹ While in some conflict or failed state scenarios this is

⁸ This is because funds and in-kind contributions may flow directly to host governments or to providers outside the system of UNHCR nongovernmental organizations that are typically reported to the central tracking mechanism.

⁹ Paul Harvey, *Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Disaster-Affected State* (forthcoming, 2009)

doubtless the case, in other humanitarian emergencies the default humanitarian response through international actors has resulted in some curious situations where the “DAC donors are still funding UN appeals and international NGOs to respond to disasters in countries where they are simultaneously providing direct budget support for development.”¹⁰

Conversely, in the more acute, complex humanitarian contexts where non-state actors are essential for providing neutral and impartial relief aid to war-affected populations, donor nations must allow them the “humanitarian space,” as clichéd as the term may seem, to do so, and provide their support at a distance – refraining from branding and other public relations advantage seeking. As seen in the security realm, a heavily Western oriented humanitarian response system has more serious implications than simply exclusivity and untapped resources. The Westernness of the enterprise has allowed belligerents in some settings to associate aid organizations with their political enemies, with deadly consequences. In Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Pakistan aid workers have been attacked, kidnapped and killed by armed groups who regard them as valid political targets in their struggle. The aid organizations have been perceived as tools of a western project to exert a new form of imperialism, disguised as ‘nation building.’ It does not help matters when U.S. Government officials describe the aid organizations in Afghanistan as “force multipliers” for the U.S. military (as Colin Powell did), or later (in the words of Richard Holbrooke) as the providers of “90 percent of the ground-level information” to the U.S. Government.

¹⁰ Ibid.

IV. Conclusion

The international humanitarian system, in the shape it has taken over the past three decades, continues to evolve and improve with the professionalization of providers, sophistication of tools and performance standards, and above all with the concerted action of the donor governments whose contributions serve as the engine for emergency response efforts.

In the area of international humanitarian assistance there are many differences between the U.S. Government and the European Commission, as well as many European governments, ranging from separate historical traditions of humanitarian assistance (the American Wilsonian vision of government extending aid for bettering both human and political outcomes vs. the European Dunantist tradition of humanitarian aid as necessarily apolitical and

wholly distinct from government action) to different attitudes toward military and private sector engagement in humanitarian response. Nonetheless, these underlying differences have not proven to be major obstacles to building a strong framework for practical multilateral cooperation, and areas for potential further improvement are evident. The task the donors face now is to continue to strengthen these institutions, while attempting in some way to de-Westernize them. Operational donors can't lose sight of the importance of independent humanitarian providers. Independence can be promoted by expanding the international humanitarian system to include donors and providers from the rest of the world and reaching out especially to Muslim nations and aid organizations. Donor cooperation must now extend outward, even as the U.S. and EU continue to strengthen and improve their own relationship.

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