

Minear, Larry, and Thomas G. Weiss. *Humanitarian Action in Times of War: A Handbook for Practitioners*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993.

The moral disparity of wanton human degradation and butchery occurring in so many bloody conflicts throughout the world challenges the very meaning of civilization. Who are we, the human race, that not only dominates and plunders the world, but also feeds on itself?

We are also striving to assert moral standards and effect humanitarian relief and assistance to the unfortunate victims of war. It was only 140 years ago in 1854 that the first field hospital for soldiers was established by Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War. Now the victims of war are overwhelmingly civilian and they number in the millions. Fortunately in today's world there are hundreds of non-governmental and governmental agencies responding to their needs. While regrettably there is no adequate correspondence between the degradation and humanitarian assistance, the latter action is significant testimony to the moral essence of civilization.

How does it work? How could it best serve the needy and the hopeless victims of war? These are the subjects of the analyses and recommendations of *Humanitarian Action in Times of War: A Handbook for Practitioners*. It is short, succinct and solidly based on the testimony of experience of many organizations, such as UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecines Sans Frontières, coupled with widespread consultation and thoughtful argumentation. Its table of contents includes a set of guiding humanitarian principles, legal, logistical and operational modalities, and the development of a general code of conduct.

This is not as simple as it may sound. Relief agencies vary in national and ethnic origins, in religious or secular principles. Some are fully independent while others are sponsored by governments. Some follow political as well as humanitarian agendas, while others adhere to strict codes of neutrality. Yet they all meet in chaotic conditions of war where co-ordination becomes an almost insuperable task. Trying therefore to develop a set of common principles and codes of conduct is a very difficult task.

Minear and Weiss are to be complimented on the clarity of presentation of the central issues that invariably arise in the delivery of humanitarian aid in times of war, such as intervention at the fear of intended violation or just intercede when the hurt has been inflicted; advocacy of social change yet remain non-partisan; management of the media and satisfying supporters while sustaining legitimacy among the parties in conflict; stay or leave when aid workers are threatened or killed as in Somalia or Bosnia; and/or operate under a UN military cover to forcefully deliver aid.

These issues are carefully analyzed and guidelines suggested while wisely avoiding the proposal of uniform rules. Having participated in an international

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conference in Zimbabwe in 1989 of African and international aid agencies and UN peacekeepers on the subject of armed escort, I am aware of how difficult and sensitive these issues are.

This work is not unique, (there is a very helpful bibliography) but it is comprehensive, coherent and most practical; practical not only for the practitioner, but also for the donor and the general public who are moved to give, and should give; and also, I might add, to students of international relations who are all too often captivated by analyses of war and conflict resolution and know little of the global efforts to heal the wounds of war.

Few in academic study of international relations probe the nature of crises from the viewpoint of humanitarian assistance. Most deal with the characteristics of war and conflict resolution. This volume draws us closer to a regard for people in contrast to the analysis of events.

Henry Wiseman
University of Guelph

Jean, Francois, ed. *Life, Death and Aid: The Médecins Sans Frontières Report on World Crisis Intervention*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Based upon its overseas humanitarian operations in many of the world's regional crises, an international medical non-governmental organization (NGO) has produced – with detail and brevity – an incisive book surveying ten of the world's worst humanitarian failures in 1993. This book rises above the plethora of repeatedly heard but nevertheless accurate NGO complaints about international responses to humanitarian crises, such as the lack of governmental funding or political will or both, the need for more public support, and so on. The writers in this collected survey have provided original analyses of the emerging patterns which the transformation of world affairs – resulting from the collapse of the Cold War international system in 1989 – has had on dealing with regional humanitarian crises in the 1990s. In their perspective as a medical assistance NGO, the world community has failed the people who are in need and oppressed because of timid diplomatic initiatives, economic sanctions that hurt only the poor, peacekeeping operations that have turned partisan, and more concern for holding elections than human security survival. This is due to the “contradictions between the restoration of peace ... [with] a clearly defined political strategy and humanitarian aid which demands strict impartiality and independence.” (p. 10)

Founded by French doctors two decades ago, the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF – Doctors without Borders) currently has an international membership of over 5,000 volunteer doctors, nurses and other professionals in 80 countries. The writers of the case studies and analyses in this book – either MSF members or