

(TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 7)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This monograph has examined humanitarian action in the Republic of Georgia from 1990 to 1995, particularly in its interaction with peacekeeping activity. The Georgian case has illuminated not merely generic problems faced by humanitarian actors in armed conflict but also the specific problems of working in the new terrain represented by the former Soviet Union. The experience also contains useful lessons about the interaction between universal and regional organizations in the quest for regional security.

In the realm of humanitarian action, specific problems emanating from the local Georgian cultural and political environment have been identified. The collapse of the Soviet planned economy and the uneven transition to a market economy exacerbated the humanitarian consequences of the conflicts. The Soviet bureaucratic legacy handicapped the Georgian government's response to humanitarian problems. A culture of criminality made it difficult to rely on local structures for delivery of assistance. The proscription of independent organized economic, social, and political activity during the Soviet era left post-Soviet Georgia with no real private sector base. Consequently, the ability of aid providers to rely on local NGOs in identifying needs and implementing programs was substantially limited. Caucasian traditions also made it difficult for local organizations to address specific humanitarian problems, as in the case of women victims of rape.

The interplay of factors such as these suggests that experience gained and lessons learned from humanitarian crises in developing countries may offer an inadequate base for charting and implementing humanitarian strategies in the post-Soviet context. At a minimum, approaches successful in certain Third World settings will require considerable adaptation before application to the special circumstances of the Newly Independent States.

Regarding the relationship between internal armed conflict and humanitarian assistance, the rapid (if somewhat
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belated) response of the international community to the dramatic deterioration of the political and the military situation in Georgia in late 1993 was effective in preventing a massive disaster. Since then, humanitarian action has provided succor to the conflicting communities while they seek a political settlement. However, the question of how long such action can be sustained in the absence of progress on the political front is unclear. Moreover, the speed of the response created problems of coordination both among humanitarian actors and with peacekeeping forces that have yet to be adequately resolved.

The most serious problems in the humanitarian sphere lay less in the actual delivery of assistance than in its politicization. The UN, centerpiece of the international response to the crisis, proceeded in a manner situated humanitarian activities firmly within a political rubric. Reflecting a now-familiar structural bias toward UN member governments in its political support of the Georgian authorities, the UN displayed questionable judgment in promoting the rapid return of refugees. Facilitating their return reflected the imperatives of the political process, to which the UNHCR through its role on the Quadripartite Commission lent its institutional weight, to the detriment of their safety and protection.

The politicization of humanitarian action was also evident in the denial by the UN of access

on the part of populations in insurgent areas to outside assistance, a stance that had serious humanitarian and political consequences. The humanitarian responses of NGOs and governments showed a similar bias toward civilian populations that found themselves in Georgia proper. Only the ICRC and a handful of NGOs established presence and activities in the insurgent regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where they faced serious problems of security as well as difficulties in importing relief supplies over routes other than through Georgia proper. UN strategies were reinforced by the approaches of donor governments such as the United States, which for political reasons proscribed expenditure of funds in the conflicted areas themselves. By contrast, the European Community through its Humanitarian Office (ECHO) allocated funds to ensure a more even-handed approach toward civilians in the breakaway regions.
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The issues of repatriation and assistance to areas outside the effective jurisdiction of the Republic of Georgia highlight the intimate relationship between resolution of the politico-military crisis and a solution to the humanitarian emergency. On the whole, the interposition of regional peacekeepers was successful in calling a halt to the conflicts. The presence of UN and OSCE monitoring missions enhanced transparency and was reasonably effective in constraining regional peacekeeping operations. Yet UNOMIG contributed little to the protection of vulnerable civilian populations or to addressing specific human needs through strategic cooperation with assistance providers. The humanitarian mandates of both CISPKEF and UNOMIG were narrow and were thus interpreted. As a result, interaction with humanitarian actors was sporadic, unstructured, and generally unsatisfactory.

The Georgia experience also shed light on Russia's capacity to act constructively as a peacekeeper in the former Soviet region. Its behaviour in Georgia was clearly not impartial, as its earlier role of fomenting conflict to weaken Georgian resistance to Russian influence suggests. Peacekeeping itself was one instrument in a self-interested regional hegemonic policy. Nevertheless, Russia's role was constructive overall in limiting conflict and its humanitarian consequences. Russian peacekeeping was hardly an ideal solution to civil war in the region because the conduct of its troops in the field left a great deal to be desired. However, with the reluctance of the international community to engage, there were no alternatives. In the final analysis, the world cannot lament problems associated with Russian presence and yet refuse to step into the breach itself.

The basic conclusion is positive. International and regional actors achieved considerable success in the suspension of hostilities in Georgia and in forestalling further human tragedy, despite the many problems and difficulties analyzed in this study. Yet the future is anything but secure. The danger now is that the current situation cannot be sustained in the longer term. There is a serious risk that, in the absence of a political resolution of the conflicts and despite significant unmet needs of large segments of the Georgian population, the international community gradually will lose interest and contribute to a further radicalization of the country's politics.
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Uncertainty about how long the various peacekeeping mandates can be renewed increases the potential for a reversion into chaos. The humanitarian consequences of renewed bloodshed would doubtless dwarf those experienced so far.

Recommendations

1. Humanitarian Action

-Internally displaced persons should not be returned to their homes until adequate security structures have been established and local willingness to receive them is evident. A decision by humanitarian organizations to support such returns will require discerning judgments by professionals knowledgeable about the local contexts and drawing on relevant experience from other settings.

-Where and when the return of persons to their homes is encouraged, international assistance should be provided in balanced fashion to both returnees and needy local populations to avoid the rekindling of intercommunal tensions.

-UN agencies, bilateral donors, and NGOs should abandon discrimination against Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their aid programs and delivering assistance. The integrity and credibility of the humanitarian enterprise depends on fidelity to the allocation of assistance that is based on need and devoid of political preconditions or agendas.

-The deep dependency of Georgia on humanitarian assistance and the continuing absence of recovery in the Georgian economy suggest that programs that provide a bridge between emergency assistance and rehabilitation should be expanded and receive adequate international resources.

-Efforts to strengthen the resources of the Georgian government at the central, regional, and local levels to coordinate and implement assistance programs should be accelerated and augmented.

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-Efforts to enhance the capacity of local nongovernmental organizations should likewise be expanded. Particular stress should be placed on organizations attempting to address the needs of currently underserved groups (for example, victims of rape and populations in the conflict areas).

-Higher priority should be given to monitoring the distribution of international assistance.

-In light of the serious problems in interagency relations, coordination should be strengthened in the UN's Tbilisi office and between the UN mission there and UNOMIG. The UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs should assume its in-tended role.

2. Peacekeeping

-UNOMIG and CISPKF should implement more energetically and systematically the human rights component of their existing mandates.

-Substantial repatriation should be accompanied by the expansion and extension of peacekeeping mandates to include police functions. Consideration should be given to the deployment of civilian police (CIVPOL).

-Greater international involvement in the preparation and monitoring of CIS peacekeepers is essential. Lapses in the performance and deportment of CISPKF personnel might be reduced by tighter links between UNOMIG and CISPKF (for

example, the stationing of UNOMIG liaison officers, ideally at company level, with CISP KF). A similar approach should be considered for OSCE interactions with peacekeeping units in South Ossetia. The contrast between UNOMIG, OSCE, and CISP KF in humanitarian action suggests that CISP KF should be encouraged to take humanitarian tasks more seriously.

-Language problems facing UNOMIG should be addressed by increasing the proportion of Russian-speaking officers in the mission.

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-In view of the possibility that the presence of UN, OSCE, and Russian peacekeepers may freeze indefinitely the political status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a firm time limit on all mandates should be established. Without political agreement and repatriation of IDPs, the regional and international peacekeeping forces should be withdrawn. The interval before withdrawal should be a time of intensified diplomatic activity.

-Acknowledging Russia's difficulty in sustaining its peacekeeping operations, serious consideration should be given to contributing to its costs, in return for a combination of the following:

-acceptance of international norms concerning rules of engagement;

-inclusion of non-Russian units in CIS and SOAO peacekeeping operations (in the latter case in addition to or in place of Osset and Georgian units);

-closer monitoring of and liaison with Russian peace-keepers;

-Russian compliance with the setting of a firm time limit beyond which peacekeeping forces would be withdrawn in the absence of significant movement on political and IDP questions;

-Russian good offices in pressuring the Abkhaz and Osset sides to compromise on a political settlement retaining the territorial integrity of Georgia.

3. Interactions

-Greater conceptual clarity is needed regarding the connections between, and separation of, humanitarian assistance and political and peacekeeping issues.

-More regular, structured, and effective coordination and information exchange should be established between humanitarian actors and peacekeepers. In this regard, the existing OSCE approach provides something of a model.

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-Priority should be given to informing the Georgian public, including the populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, about the nature of the mandates of the various international organizations involved.

-The international community should be encouraged to understand better the

complexities of the circumstances in Georgia and to stay the course in its support for humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping activities.

4. Conflict Resolution

-A more balanced approach should be taken to the broader international effort in Georgia, giving increased priority and resources to conflict resolution efforts, from which both humanitarian and peacekeeping activities stand to benefit.

-Paralleling greater attention to conflict resolution at the political level, greater emphasis should be placed in international efforts on confidence-building at the societal level across the lines that divide communities. Humanitarian organizations should be encouraged to explore ways of making a contribution through their own activities and personnel.

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