

Future Positive International Co-operation in the 21st Century

by

Michael Edwards

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Chapter 5

Matters of Life and Death: The Record of Humanitarian Intervention

'Peace is a process, not an event'

Victor Reider¹

'I am convinced that the Serbs could have been stopped in October 1991 with three ships, three dozen planes, and 3000 men'

Jean Cot, Commander of UNPROFOR²

In Cambodia, a Buddhist prophecy tells of a white elephant in blue armour that will rescue the country from a terrible conflagration.³ After the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge and the instability that followed, UN forces arrived in Cambodia during 1993 to help the country prepare for democratic elections. Their white Toyota land-cruisers and blue UN livery convinced some Cambodians that the prophecy was about to be realised, but this elephant had a very short memory, pulling out as soon as the elections were over. After two decades of war, genocide, invasion and isolation, Cambodia deserved better than this. Four years later, the inevitable coup happened (led by Hun Sen and his party of former communists), followed in 1998 by another round of rigged elections only lightly supervised by foreign observers. Here as elsewhere, the 'international community' has been a fickle friend to those who need its help. Heroic deeds, battles against the odds and the occasional quiet success do form part of the story of humanitarian intervention in recent times, but overall the international response to conflict and famine has been tardy, piece-

meal and ineffective. Despite the commitments made in 1945 to nullify the 'scourge of war', 'we the people' stood and watched as genocide unfolded in Indonesia, Cambodia and Rwanda. We did little to prevent 'ethnic cleansing' in former Yugoslavia until it was too late, even though there were UN troops on the ground when 8000 civilians were slaughtered in Srebrenica. And 100,000 people have been butchered in the most brutal fashion imaginable in Algeria since 1992, with scarcely a hint of foreign intervention. The life and death of distant strangers never did have much political purchase.

When the cold war ended it seemed that this might change. The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and Cubans from Angola was followed by UN-brokered peace settlements in Central America, Namibia and elsewhere, supervised by a Security Council that, for the first time in 50 years, was veto-free.⁴ A new consensus had emerged on the need for intervention in zones of crisis.⁵ It was this optimism that underpinned the UN's historic decision to override national sovereignty in order to protect besieged Kurds in northern Iraq in 1991, and which greeted former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace' so warmly one year later. Just as well, for the fall of the Berlin Wall also released a new wave of ethno-nationalist conflicts and forced migrations from the former eastern Bloc and other regions no longer of strategic interest to those who had formerly policed them. These 'complex political emergencies' fuelled a rapid rise in the global number of refugees and internally displaced people, from 22 million in 1985 to 37 million ten years later.⁶ In 1995, the equivalent of one in every 115 people on the earth was forced into flight from war, starvation or genocide.⁷ However, the spirit of optimism did not last: the debacle in Somalia deterred international action in Rwanda, the Balkans and beyond, and the likelihood of concerted intervention is now highly circumscribed. Emergencies have always been complex and political. What is different about the post cold-war era are the politics of humanitarian intervention itself. They have certainly become more complicated, caught between those who insist on the primacy of universal human rights (enforced if necessary by overriding national sovereignty), and those who worry about the dangers of aggressive military-humanitarian intervention, especially when applied selectively by an international community that is ill-prepared and committed only in fits and starts. The result of this uncertainty is a dangerous muddle, and hundreds of thousands of lives wasted. How did this muddle come about, and what can be done to correct it?

WHAT MAKES EMERGENCIES COMPLEX AND POLITICAL?

People in all societies move in and out of situations where, for a short period of time, they are more vulnerable to a sudden crisis. Subsistence societies are more prone to these crises because there is less of a margin for error when the rains fail or communities are threatened by conflict. So are societies that undergo rapid change or sudden destabilisation, when both traditional obligations to support each other and government capacity to protect people tend to be eroded. Sometimes, as for example when there is a large-scale drought or a full-scale war, the crisis extends for much longer and affects a much larger proportion of the population. Such generalised periods of famine and dislocation have been a regular occurrence in history, though even when widespread their human impact tends to be selective. They have always had complex roots and political causes, and are part of the process of economic and social change, not isolated, abnormal or random events. As the experience of former Yugoslavia demonstrates, crises can reoccur even in industrial societies; they are not simply '*accidents on the highway of development and modernity*'.⁸ Peace and stability are more precarious than they appear, but there are reasons why societies break down, and solutions to these problems.

Avoiding large-scale famine and conflict is a matter of effective governance and institutionalised respect for civil and political rights. It is a cliché that democracies do not go to war with each other, but they also starve or kill fewer of their own citizens: only two million out of the 169 million people killed by their own governments since 1900 have been victims of democratic regimes.⁹ Democratic politics provide the best early warning of impending crises, the most effective channels for prevention and response, and the greatest likelihood that differences will be resolved peacefully. This need not mean the Western multi-party system, but any system that combines commitment from government with lines of accountability that enable public pressure to enforce it – what Alex de Waal calls an '*anti-famine political contract*'.¹⁰ The classic example of such a contract is India, which has successfully prevented famine since independence through an effective system of early warning (channelled through a dense network of civic organisations and a free media), and public intervention to protect people's livelihoods when threatened with collapse.¹¹ When this contract is eroded, crisis ensues.

Famine and war create winners as well as losers. The seizure of assets (like livestock) from vulnerable groups by political and military elites is a well-worn tactic which both government and rebel forces have used in Sudan and other countries to strengthen their position in the struggle for power.¹² Conflict may be exacerbated by the sudden injection of large amounts of cash and food aid, when it can be used as an instrument of war and a factor in fuelling the struggle between rival factions.¹³ In Bosnia, between 35 and 75 per cent of total relief assistance was captured by combatants.¹⁴ The Sudanese and Ethiopian governments invented another way of turning famine to their advantage by maintaining parallel exchange rates during the 1980s and thus wildly undervaluing all aid transactions. One estimate suggests that the Sudanese government could have financed half its military expenditure from such gains, while a defecting banker from Iraq claimed that UN relief had contributed at least US\$250 million to Iraq's President Saddam Hussein's treasury.¹⁵ In the absence of political solutions, continued humanitarian assistance can sustain conflict significantly.

Emergencies cannot be solved by technocratic means, standardised packages of food aid, or UN troops, because the processes involved are too local and deep-rooted for that. Food and other material assistance can be useful in plugging temporary gaps in people's entitlements, especially if they form a considered part of a broader strategy. But action on the causes of the crisis is much more important: saving livelihoods not just lives, supporting vulnerable institutions not just people, rebuilding social as well as physical capital, and improving governance not just government. All interventions need to understand and work with local solutions: research in Sudan and Ethiopia shows that people's first priority in a famine is not more food to eat, but preserving the assets they already have (like seeds for the next planting season) so that they can stave off destitution.¹⁶ The importance of outside assistance is usually less significant than it appears. Faced by food shortages in the Indian state of Maharashtra during 1973, government programmes were easily surpassed by the efforts of private individuals who imported more than one million tons of food from neighbouring states.¹⁷ People solve conflicts all the time without recourse to external intervention, but of course they do not make the headlines. The self-organised return of over 600,000 Rwandan refugees from Eastern Zaire – now the Congo – in 1997 is a recent exception.¹⁸

However, outside help is not irrelevant, and if provided in the right ways it can be crucial in helping to tide people over the worst of

times without increasing dependency by rebuilding assets, incomes and skills; supporting local mechanisms for resolving disputes; and strengthening effective institutions. Help must preserve as much autonomy, self-respect and self-determination as possible among those affected so that they can do what *they* think is right.¹⁹ The goal is not a society that never suffers a crisis and is always free from conflict (that is impossible), but one which can resolve conflicts peacefully and work together to protect the most vulnerable during periods of acute stress.²⁰ This is more difficult where conflict centres on ethnicity, ideology and control of government, and most difficult of all where a fundamental clash of values is involved.²¹ According to psychologist Anthony Storr,²² human violence is always bound up with relationships of power between rich and poor, old and young, men and women, and groups of different ethnic or religious identity, but these relationships are as much the result of socialisation as biology. Johan Galtung, the grand old man of peace research, once said half-jokingly that *'the major carriers of inconsiderateness are males, Protestants and economists, particularly when combined'*.²³ It may be impossible to eradicate the influence of testosterone, but at least we can have a go at the other two, and all the other factors that are amenable to change.

HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA: FROM BIAFRA TO RWANDA

Famine and conflict have been regular features of African life for centuries, so it is no surprise that the subcontinent occupies a central place in the practice and mythology of modern humanitarianism. Many relief workers cut their teeth in Sudan and Ethiopia during the 1980s, though the real veterans go back to the seminal experiences they shared together in Biafra in 1968–69. Those experiences marked the beginnings of what Alex de Waal calls the *'humanitarian international, a trans-national elite of relief workers, civil servants, academics and others'* which has since grown to be a powerful and controversial force in defining approaches to emergency intervention.²⁴ Sudan provides a classic example of how politics, war and famine interact with each other in a downward spiral that outside intervention leaves largely untouched. Since 1983, over 1.5 million people have died there as a result of famine, disease and military activity provoked by civil war between northern government forces and southern rebels.²⁵

These famines emerged from a long history of political struggle, and the provision of relief became increasingly entangled in these processes. In the 1980s, donors acceded to government requests to target relief at camps in northern Sudan and Ethiopia, instead of supporting the livelihoods of those who stayed in the south by providing clean water, fodder and guaranteed prices for livestock, temporary employment, and health services. As a result, people moved en masse to poorly-serviced relief camps where they died in large numbers, not from starvation, but from disease. The continuation of the war led government and rebels (under heavy external pressure) to negotiate a 'corridor of tranquillity' called 'Operation Lifeline Sudan', which allowed relief to be delivered to civilians on both sides of the conflict.²⁶ This worked well for a time, but as it became institutionalised the operating costs spiralled upwards. More importantly, the need for government support to keep the lifeline open made it impossible to return people from the camps (since this would be seen as aiding the rebels), and unlikely that international action would be taken to tackle the causes of the conflict – the consistent failings of domestic governance and a war economy based on foreign aid and the seizure of assets.²⁷ A qualified and increasingly unsustainable humanitarian success began to obstruct a political solution between the warring parties, leading Larry Minear, an international authority on humanitarian issues, to conclude that it was *'high time to pull the plug'*.²⁸ Fortunately, the plug wasn't pulled, otherwise the Sudanese famine which hit the headlines in the spring of 1998 would have claimed even more lives. Nevertheless, a power-sharing settlement between North and South remains the key to peace. Although foreign intervention has been instrumental in brokering a temporary cease-fire, international interest in pushing for this settlement is very fragile.

In Ethiopia the story has been similar, with relief aid being systematically manipulated by government forces fighting rebels in Tigray and Eritrea.²⁹ The Ethiopian famines of the 1980s were caused as much by the war and government attempts to starve the rebels into surrender as by poorly-functioning agricultural markets and lack of rainfall. International NGOs were very active, but the UN failed to support any cross-border operations into Tigray and Eritrea, despite the fact that the humanitarian wings of both rebel movements had a far-superior record in distributing relief and using it to promote long-term development.³⁰ They had what the Ethiopian government lacked – the 'anti-famine political contract' that comes from popular legitimacy. In contrast, feeding centres established inside Ethiopia helped to support government offensives by providing access to food for the

troops, keeping roads open for relief supplies, and making rebel forces more cautious about counter-attacks in case expatriates were killed or injured in the process. The ethical dilemmas involved in *not* providing relief in these circumstances are considered a little later, but without continued access to large-scale foreign aid it is unlikely that the regime in Addis Ababa would have survived for so long.

As the civil war in Ethiopia resolved itself and interest in Sudan declined, the focus of international attention in Africa moved elsewhere, first to the west, and then to Somalia. The crises that unfolded in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the late 1980s illustrate the difficulty of securing peace against a background of internal instability and partisan intervention from neighbouring countries, and the consequent fragility of agreements secured through external mediation – 14 in seven years in Liberia alone. The fighting in Liberia, sparked off by the overthrow of President Samuel Doe by Charles Taylor's forces late in 1989, shows what can happen when even a corrupt central authority is replaced by vicious competition between fragmenting ethnic and political factions: 200,000 people killed, a third of the population displaced, and the widespread deployment of children as soldiers.³¹ To stop the war (and prevent Taylor from winning it), 12,000 troops from other West African countries led by Nigeria and Ghana (and known as ECOMOG) intervened in Liberia in 1991. But instead of re-establishing law and order, ECOMOG allied itself with Taylor's enemies and joined in the wholesale plunder of Liberia's natural resources. The economy and administration collapsed as each part of the country was taken over by rival factions. Both regional 'peacekeeping' forces and the UN attempted to broker one settlement after another until agreement was reached in 1996 to hold foreign-funded elections the next year (subsequently won by Taylor). Liberian civic organisations pushed for these elections and took to the streets when it appeared they might be postponed.³² The same thing happened in Sierra Leone, where elections during 1996 were defended by an informal coalition of citizens' groups (especially the Women's Forum), professional associations and NGOs, which reformed after a military coup nullified the results in 1997.³³ They were supported by another Nigerian intervention and covert British help that landed Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in hot water for contravening UN sanctions against arms supplies to any side in the war. However, neither has halted the violence that continues to tear the country apart.

In Somalia, the roots of famine lay, as they did elsewhere, in years of misrule, corruption and low-intensity warfare against opponents,

this time by President Siad Barre. The toppling of his regime in January 1991 intensified fighting between rival clans which eventually turned into civil war, but at the same time relief was being organised by indigenous organisations at village level and in the capital, Mogadishu. Contrary to the perceptions of many outsiders (like Malcolm Fraser of CARE-International who described the situation as one of '*naked anarchy and the total collapse of social, economic and political structures*'),³⁴ there were many courageous individuals who kept going a semblance of a health service, primary schools, and other local institutions across clan lines through the height of the fighting.³⁵ Throughout 1991 and 1992, it was the Somali Red Crescent, in partnership with the ICRC and supplemented by a small number of international NGOs like Save the Children-UK, that fed two million people across the country. Even without a recognised state it might have been possible to develop a network of sub-national authorities – an elemental 'anti-famine political contract' – had these structures been built on. The same thing happened further north in the nascent republic of Somaliland, which had declared its own independence in 1991. Clan-based institutions of elders worked with a fledgling government and new NGOs to take responsibility for governance, reconciliation and reconstruction, but the UN refused to recognise the government or support its efforts at a critical time.³⁶

In stark contrast to the NGOs who stayed on, the UN was shamefully absent from Somalia, even after a ceasefire had been agreed between the two key players in the spring of 1992 (General Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed). An earlier resolution had been debated in the Security Council, but this was blocked by the USA, thus missing a crucial opportunity for intervention at a time when local conditions were propitious. It was only later in the year, when the first famine pictures were broadcast in the West by CNN and the BBC, that international interest began to mount and Mohamed Sahnoun was dispatched to Mogadishu as the UN special representative. He immediately set out to bring clan leaders together and encourage civic institutions to take more of a role in the relief programme. Almost alone among UN officials, he saw that peace-building was still possible in the absence of a recognised government, but this insight did him no good. Sahnoun was forced to resign in murky circumstances and replaced by the far more malleable Ismat Kittani. Kittani, in collaboration with Robert Oakley (the US special envoy) and Philip Johnston (seconded from CARE-USA to head the UN emergency programme), reversed Sahnoun's policy and adopted a much harder line on both military and humanitarian issues, aided by the arrival of

more UN troops and US marines at the beginning of 1993. They circumvented local structures, became embroiled in partisan support for clan leaders (first in favour of Aideed and then against him), and were unable to control the escalating violence that eventually claimed the lives of 83 UN soldiers, 18 American airmen, and at least 6000 Somalis.³⁷ It was during this period that Canadian, Italian and Belgian troops were themselves suspected of violating the Geneva Conventions by torturing civilians. US marines turned from the protection of Mogadishu to its virtual occupation, giving up in despair and frustration soon afterwards.³⁸

So much for Operation Restore Hope, which spent \$4 billion to deliver less than \$100 million worth of relief supplies,³⁹ ironically, the famine was all but over by the time the marines arrived.⁴⁰ Four years on, there has been no political settlement, no significant disarmament, and little help for reconstruction.⁴¹ The Somalia experience shows how, after missing the real opportunity for positive intervention in 1991, too authoritarian a mandate effectively disempowered local processes and exacerbated the conflict, a conclusion confirmed by the UN's own commission of enquiry in late 1993 which was suppressed by the Secretary General. *'The UN,'* it said, *'should abandon notions of peace enforcement'*, a reasonable conclusion in the circumstances but one which when applied across the board was to have tragic consequences elsewhere.⁴²

Stung by criticism of Operation Restore Hope in the USA, the Clinton administration passed a 'Presidential Directive' in May 1994 which laid out new conditions for US military intervention, including a 'sunset clause' which insisted on a specific end date for any new peacekeeping mandate. The difficulty of satisfying these conditions lay behind US reluctance to commit troops in both Rwanda and Bosnia, but all members of the Security Council ignored the warning signals that genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda was being meticulously planned by Hutu extremists throughout 1994, the latest chapter in a long and complex struggle between the two groups which stretched back through the colonial period.⁴³ Detailed intelligence reports about the preparations were passed to Western capitals and to UN headquarters in New York, but senior officials in the secretariat questioned their validity and made no worst-case contingency plans. Karel Kovanda, the Czech Government representative to the UN, said later that he learned more about Rwanda from NGOs like Human Rights Watch in New York than he did from the entire UN information system.⁴⁴ A small UN force had been dispatched to Rwanda at the end of 1993 to oversee peace negotiations between

the two parties, but France (a traditional supporter of the Hutu National Republican Movement) lobbied against sending reinforcements at a time when strong intervention would have sent a clear message to those who were planning the killings. In less than 100 days from the beginning of April, 800,000 people were massacred.⁴⁵ Many ordinary Rwandans tried to stop the slaughter, and many Hutus helped Tutsis under the most dangerous of circumstances, but their efforts were powerless in the face of the sheer scale and level of organisation of the murders.⁴⁶ While the UN dithered (actually reducing its forces on the ground at one point), France launched its own partial intervention ('Operation Turquoise'), which saved about 15,000 Tutsi lives, but did nothing to deter the rest of the killings. By the time a further detachment of 5500 UN troops was dispatched in late June, the genocide was almost complete. What stopped it was the advance of Tutsi troops from the Rwandan Patriotic Front, leading the UN to call without a hint of irony for *'a ceasefire to protect civilians'*.⁴⁷ Many of those who were protected turned out to be Hutu killers who fled with two million real civilians across the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) – the notorious 'Interahamwe' militias who continued to regroup, rebuild and spread propaganda about the fate that awaited anyone who returned home to Rwanda from their base in giant refugee camps like Goma. *'We have become the quartermaster for the Hutu militia'* was the conclusion of a senior American aid official.⁴⁸ Once again, humanitarian assistance had substituted for political action.

According to official evaluations, the relief programme itself was generally impressive.⁴⁹ Although about 80,000 refugees died in the camps during 1994, mainly from cholera and dysentery, this is not considered to be unusual in such a huge influx of people into areas with no clean water.⁵⁰ John Seaman, a relief veteran working for Save the Children Fund-UK, was more critical, at least of the many NGOs who *'threw all technical standards to the wall'*.⁵¹ This did not apply to every agency – Oxfam, for example, provided an efficient water supply and others laid on an innovative family tracing and reunification programme. It is easy to be wise from a distance and ignore the stresses and strains that faced decision makers on the ground. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of waste and duplication among the NGOs that poured into the refugee camps, with far too much energy expended on profile and publicity. This continued during 1996 when both the NGOs and the UN consistently exaggerated the number of refugees at risk of starvation in the Congo as the rebel leader Laurent Kabila and his forces moved closer to Kinshasa. Just as

negotiations to send an international military force to the Congo reached fever pitch in November, Kabila's army (supported by Rwandan Government forces) scored a decisive victory against the Interahamwe and 600,000 refugees organised their own return across the border.⁵² In a revealing reaction, some relief agencies concluded that the refugees had just been lucky, and continued to claim that millions more still remained at risk.⁵³ This was untrue, though both Kabila's forces and elements of the Rwandan government were certainly involved in the murder of Hutu refugees and displaced persons.⁵⁴

It is difficult to see anything positive in this saga, but both the official evaluation of the relief programme and Alex de Waal's highly-unofficial critique see Rwanda as a seminal event, *'the beginning of a solution for the people of central Africa but an increasing crisis for the humanitarian international'*.⁵⁵ The 'crisis' applies to the institutions that were found publicly wanting, both in the quality of the emergency work they undertook (honourable exceptions notwithstanding) and in their broader failure to intervene in Rwanda to prevent genocide and root out the killers. The 'solution' lies in the hands of a political alliance between civic groups and progressive leaders in the region willing to oversee a solution based on power sharing within the ethnic tensions and political manoeuvrings that still afflict Rwanda, Burundi and their neighbours – notably the Congo, which dissolved into further crisis during 1998. There is plenty for the international community to do in supporting this solution, but if the failings that produced the crisis go unheeded then further humanitarian tragedies are inevitable.

CLOSER TO HOME: HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

For politicians in Western Europe it was one thing for Africans to be killing each other in large numbers, and another for the same thing to happen on their doorstep. Yet far from energising the European Union (EU) to prove its worth on the wider stage, the 'death of Yugoslavia' confirmed the fragility of European resolve to work together on a common international agenda, even one of such magnitude so close to home. If this was a 'test for Europe', as researchers Hodge and Grbin put it, the EU failed, raising questions not only about Yugoslavia but about the prospects for future multilateral action in general.⁵⁶

When Josef Broz Tito died in 1980, the bonds that had held the Yugoslav Federation together since the end of World War II began to dissolve, enthusiastically encouraged by nationalist politicians in the different republics. One of those politicians – the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic – was elected President of Yugoslavia at the end of 1990, and promptly plunged the Federation into a period of economic and political turmoil from which it never recovered. Milosevic was opposed not just by separatists from other republics but by large sections of civil society (including trade unions, students and the media), who were determined to preserve the country as a coherent whole. Although what followed was portrayed as a civil war, it was really a war prosecuted by Serb politicians who used the conflict to fuel the fires of nationalist support for their own agenda. Atrocities were committed by all sides, but Serbian culpability was by far the greatest. The failure of external mediators to grasp this (and their consequent insistence on being even-handed) led eventually to the ethnic division of Bosnia and the over-rewarding of Bosnian Serbs in the Dayton Peace Accords. Serb actions, from ethnic cleansing and rape, through the concentration camps of Omarska and elsewhere, to the massacres of civilians in 'safe havens' like Srebrenica, went unpunished by the international community until American patience snapped and NATO forces took the upper hand. At the same time, local attempts to preserve some sort of co-existence were consistently ignored. In Serbia and Croatia, 90 per cent of people displaced by the fighting were accommodated in private homes, most without regard to ethnicity at all.⁵⁷ Even after the war was over, thousands of Bosnians defied the nationalist parties by voting to reverse the results of ethnic cleansing in the local elections of September 1997.⁵⁸ Yet the conflict was consistently reported as one in which different ethnic groups found it 'impossible' to live together.

By the middle of 1991 the Federation had collapsed. Croatia and Slovenia had declared their independence, and in response Serb forces had entered both, ostensibly to protect the Serbs who lived there. As fighting intensified, the EU attempted to broker one ceasefire after another (14 had failed by the end of September).⁵⁹ The UN appointed Cyrus Vance as its first special representative, and international sanctions were agreed – and extended across all parties to the conflict despite extreme inequalities in military capability. By the time UN troops were dispatched to Croatia in November, Serb forces were already redeploying to Bosnia, where they proceeded to take control of two-thirds of the Republic in a matter of weeks. Requests for international help from Alija Izetbegovic (the Bosnian President)

were rebuffed, and continued to be so until September of the following year when a small UN contingent arrived in Sarajevo, despite the widespread atrocities that had been committed by Serb forces against Bosnian Muslims during 1992. However, this force was too small to do much more than accompany relief convoys involving large numbers of NGOs under the ad hoc but fairly effective umbrella of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).⁶⁰ It was also too small to prevent the widespread theft of relief supplies, especially by the Serbs, but it was large enough to deter more forceful intervention in case the troops themselves became targets. This gave Western leaders (particularly Douglas Hurd, the staunchly non-interventionist British Foreign Secretary) and the Russian Federation an additional reason for blocking attempts to agree a more forceful response in the UN Security Council and the EU.

As the conflict escalated, more UN troops arrived, but their mandate was neither clarified nor extended as the '*hesitation waltz*' continued.⁶¹ It was only in September 1994 (when 69 people were killed by a mortar fired at Sarajevo market) that the Serbs were given an ultimatum to remove their heavy weapons from a 20-kilometre exclusion zone around the besieged city. This was ignored, and the UN then called for a further 10,000 troops to position themselves along the 600-kilometre border between Bosnia and Serbia. What they got were 135 unarmed civilians.⁶² Serb forces took full advantage, capturing Bihac and Zepa, tying UN troops to flagpoles as human shields, shooting down British and American aircraft, and massacring at least 8000 men in Srebrenica, the penultimate of the cruelly-misnamed 'havens'.⁶³ Only Goradze remained, guarded by British troops and protected under the terms of the London Peace Conference, the latest effort at mediation launched in July 1995. When that too failed to end the fighting, the Clinton administration forced NATO to initiate a series of air strikes against Serb positions, finally showing the kind of resolve which might have stopped the conflict four years earlier, and preparing the way for the Dayton Peace Accords in November of the same year.

That, of course, was not the end of the story. By the end of the conflict over two million civilians had been displaced from their homes or taken refuge in other countries, and under the terms of the Dayton Accords they were supposed to return to participate in the forthcoming Bosnian elections (only about 100,000 actually did).⁶⁴ There has been plenty of money from the international community for reconstruction projects, the establishment of a War Crimes Tribunal which belatedly began to show its muscle in 1997, and large-

scale military commitments to keep the peace. But the elections were pushed through too quickly, without the conditions necessary for real democratic process such as commitment among all the parties, an environment allowing people to participate without fear, and freedom of expression, information, and movement.⁶⁵ Too many resources have been wasted on poorly-designed technocratic quick fixes, and not enough on slower, longer-term initiatives designed to cross the ethnic divide and bring people together. Even the better of these projects (like support for independent media) have been fragmented among competing donors.⁶⁶ The Dayton Accords have been praised by some as the only workable response to the conflict,⁶⁷ and criticised by others as '*an expedient by which the international community sought to divest itself from the problem, rather than assist in its solution*'⁶⁸ – another example of a long-standing tendency to '*divide and quit*', as previously practised in India, Palestine, Cyprus and elsewhere.⁶⁹ This is a harsh judgement, but the half-hearted Western response to Serbian incursions into Kosovo during 1998 suggests that it is not too wide of the mark. When NATO did intervene as this book went to press, their strategy was poorly planned and poorly designed, leaving the Kosovars facing a dangerous and unstable peace with little prospect of longer-term security in the region.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO LEARN?

If the betrayals and the bungling are to be avoided in the future, we need to understand what recent history has to teach. The first lesson is this: responding more effectively to complex political emergencies requires a better balance between conflict prevention and long-term peace-building, 'developmental relief', and international political action. At present, all three are unacceptably weak, and support for relief far outweighs commitment to both of the others.

Preventing crises requires slow, careful, deliberate work on the underlying causes of insecurity: '*peace is an exercise in perseverance*'.⁷⁰ Equitable economic development (a secure livelihood for everyone), a polity that respects human rights, and effective governance reduce exclusion and provide more opportunities for differences to be resolved peacefully.⁷¹ However, these are very long-term goals in most societies. In the meantime it is important to focus on more specific initiatives like improving local security (such as by de-mining and arms control); strengthening systems of early warning

and timely intervention (like fact-finding missions and proactive negotiations); providing special assistance to communities affected by conflict; training in conflict-resolution, and supporting local dispute-settlement mechanisms (both functioning justice systems and the ways in which ordinary people solve disputes for themselves).⁷² The latter are often highly influential, albeit pursued quietly and away from the public eye. Groups like the Quakers, the Moral Re-Armament Movement and the Catholic Church have a long tradition of this sort of 'peace building from below', and have had some success in the Philippines (encouraging a non-violent transition from the Marcos regime to that of Corazon Aquino), Cambodia (the 'peace marches' of the Buddhist monk Ghosananda) and Nigeria (post-Biafra).⁷³ NGOs like International Alert, the International Crisis Group, and the International Negotiation Network have played a useful role in mediating between rival groups in Ethiopia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, though their impact is sometimes exaggerated for the purposes of public relations.⁷⁴ *Those who own the conflict will know the best approaches to ending it*,⁷⁵ so it is vital to encourage a spreading web of civic organisations and channels for dialogue between committed individuals.⁷⁶ When Cyril Ramaphosa of the African National Congress (ANC) and Roelf Meyer of the South African government embarked on a joint fishing trip in 1991, neither had much trust in the other, yet when Ramaphosa pulled a fish-hook out of Meyer's hand a relationship was set in motion that later played a central role in the negotiations that made free elections possible.⁷⁷

At a more fundamental level, peace building means a culture that values diversity and practises dialogue, thus reducing the opportunities for politicians and soldiers to manipulate small-scale conflicts into large-scale wars.⁷⁸ The absence of such a culture was a contributing factor in the spiralling violence of Cambodia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia. However, there is no universal model: every society must find its own balance between justice – using war crimes tribunals to punish the guilty – and reconciliation, working through 'truth commissions' like those established in South Africa and El Salvador to air abuses under amnesty, or the village ceremonies held in Mozambique to 'cleanse' returning combatants from both sides of the war.⁷⁹ Too much emphasis on judicial proceedings can provoke revenge, especially where a large proportion of the population has been involved in the conflict. Outside help can be important in all these areas, but few donors seem prepared to fund this sort of work on the necessary scale and length of time it needs to be effective. It is sensitive and difficult, provides few short-term returns or visible results, and offers only limited opportu-

nities for profile and publicity. So it is not well suited to the conditions and characteristics of foreign aid.

International political action

Long-term prevention is the best defence against conflict and famine, but to succeed in vulnerable societies it needs as much help as possible from an international climate supportive of equitable development and an international community willing to provide strong and coherent backing in times of need. Neither exists at present. Although diplomatic pressure is often exerted to bring warring factions together on an ad hoc basis (usually when the fighting hits the TV screens), there is no consensus on the criteria for intervention in order to address the causes of the problem, nor for upholding international law as part of the solution. The common perception of low stakes and high risks explains why no major power is prepared to commit large-scale forces to a crisis like Bosnia until it is too late.⁸⁰ In that sense it is not the UN's fault if peacekeeping is ineffective, but the responsibility of its member states. The current ambivalence about international responsibilities can only be corrected by the key players – is it peacekeeping, peacemaking, peace enforcement, or something else? It is certainly more than the traditional positioning of military forces between warring parties (as in Cyprus), but quite how much more remains dangerously uncertain.⁸¹ Regional peacekeeping forces (like ECOMOG in Liberia) do not seem to provide a sufficient answer, nor does the imposition of sanctions intended to lever a solution without committing troops. Sanctions against Iraq may have caused the deaths of 500,000 children aged under five since 1991, far more than were killed during the Gulf War.⁸² Yet Saddam Hussein is still very much in control. Sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa may have added to the pressure for change, but internal dynamics were decisive. External threats seem to work best in a 'middle range' between situations where local factions are strong enough to ignore them and where they are too weak to make threats necessary.⁸³ Putting enough troops on the ground early in a conflict can prevent an escalation, as when UN forces were dispatched to Macedonia at the end of 1992, but the same lesson wasn't learned in Kosovo six years later.⁸⁴

International help is also vital in the immediate post-conflict phase of an emergency, in order to support economic reconstruction, democratic elections or referenda, and war crimes tribunals. The

tribunals for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia have not functioned very effectively. In the Rwandan case this is more a matter of UN ineptitude, and in former Yugoslavia of broader political factors which (until US pressure forced the capture of key Serb military figures in mid-1997) kept the worst criminals safely out of reach.⁸⁵ But more resources and pressure would have helped both, just as the Rwandan government needed donors to honour their commitment to speed up a fair trial for the 90,000 genocide suspects languishing in its jails.⁸⁶

Developmental relief

Long-term peace building and solid international action will not do away with crises. When they do break out, it is important that humanitarian relief is provided in ways which also contribute to longer-term solutions – relief, in other words, that is ‘developmental’. All relief agencies pay lip service to the need to work with local institutions, to ensure their work is sensitive to gender issues and the environment, to involve people in decision making, and build on local solutions. But the evidence is less impressive. Research has shown that many NGOs in areas of conflict have few local roots, no inclination to act as peace builders, and little capacity to do anything except jump when their donors tell them what to do.⁸⁷ Although Western governments say they want to invest in a strong and pluralistic society, ‘*in Bosnia they have sought and found cheap service-delivery*’.⁸⁸ It would be far better to endow a fund for long-term development initiatives through a multi-ethnic NGO federation. Relief consultant Ian Smillie found ‘*NGOs in Sierra Leone stunted after five years of self-absorbed international NGO activity which has done virtually nothing to build the capacity of local organisations*’.⁸⁹ Much more support should go to rebuilding the structures that integrate people across factional lines, like markets and trade, schools and the media.⁹⁰ Despite the internal obstacles to reintegration in a case like Bosnia, we may find that large-scale, long-term support now is a better and cheaper solution than an unstable, divided peace settlement. Yusuf Jumale, a trader in Mogadishu, points out that ‘*the militia don’t go after business, they go for the aid – the things that are free...we are trying to make it too expensive for anyone to go to war again*’.⁹¹ Donors must pay attention to these economic basics and be flexible: ‘*rebuilding health posts is pointless if the nurses have given up and are peddling tomatoes in the market*’.⁹² The international relief system is still quite rigid in what it will and will not provide (lucky if

you want surplus American grain, too bad if you need something else). ‘*Misread, standardise the diagnosis, and standardise the response*,’ is how researcher Johan Pottier puts it.⁹³

It has always been thus. Writing in 1921, the Italian Senator Giovanni Ciraolo complained that ‘*assistance to those stricken by calamities is...slow, poorly-organised and inefficient*’.⁹⁴ But why does this continue to be the case 75 years later when there have been so many advances in the technology of emergency nutrition, health care and sanitation? First, because it is incredibly difficult to stick to best practice when ‘all hell breaks loose around you’; second, because technology is only a small part of the solution anyway; and third, because few NGOs or intergovernmental organisations are interested in co-operation when this may lose them precious opportunities for profile and publicity, the lifeblood of agencies that are competing for donations. These institutional imperatives lead NGOs to exaggerate successes and disguise failures, pretend that they are central to emergencies when they are not, cut too many corners on quality, and push for quick results.⁹⁵ The role played by the international media in triggering humanitarian action makes NGOs feel *they* must be in the spotlight. Such criticisms touch a raw nerve among relief agencies, not because they know the critics are wrong, but because they suspect that they are right and do not know what to do about it. The hurt and confusion will continue so long as NGOs see themselves as ‘*ladles in the global soup kitchen*’, cleaning up the mess left by state and market failures on contract to the UN, or dependent on shock tactics to lever money from a guilty public.⁹⁶ In response to their critics, NGOs like Oxfam and the Red Cross are trying to improve standards and strengthen accountability using self-regulation. But their codes of conduct lack proper enforcement mechanisms, and that has led some to call for more radical changes such as an international relief commissioner and a world relief corps.⁹⁷ This is probably essential to preserve advances in humanitarian assistance (and the agencies that made them) from being undermined by the reputation and performance of the mediocre and self-serving.

Timing

The second general lesson is this: there must be long-term commitment combined with the flexibility to act on ‘windows of opportunity’ – the secret of success lies in the timing. Because emergencies move

quickly, there are always points at which intervention is likely to be more effective, but it is difficult to identify them, still less respond, without continuous involvement. That is something the international community finds very difficult, regularly arriving too late and leaving too soon as crises pop up and disappear from the radar screen of political awareness. The causes of the problem are left unsolved, festering away until they ignite another crisis which prompts the reappearance of the international relief circus. Martin Woolcott of the *Guardian* captures the absurdity of this approach well:

*'the international formula for dealing with failed states...consists of troops, elections and money. The troops are to restore order, the elections to express the will of the people...and the money to revive the economy. What usually happens is that the troops do not stay long enough, the elections are held too early, and the money is stolen.'*⁹⁸

Insufficient effort is invested in rebuilding the civil administration, the justice system and the economy so that a polity might emerge over time to institutionalise democratic practices.

This fundamental lack of loyalty – the inability to stay the course – makes it more difficult to take advantage of windows of opportunity for outside intervention when they appear. The lack of a long-term presence on the ground dilutes early warning, and the disorganisation of the international community makes a timely response to warning signals unlikely. Recent history is full of examples of these missed opportunities, especially during the early phases of a nascent conflict or at the end when there is a 'peace dividend' to be exploited – as for example in the former Yugoslavia during 1990–92, when both Croatia and Bosnia were recognised without equal recognition of the rights of Serbs living there;⁹⁹ Rwanda in the early 1990s, when genocide was being planned; and Somalia in 1991 (*'the year of missed opportunities'*).¹⁰⁰

Consistency

It is not just the timing of intervention that is important, but impartiality – the application of the same criteria to all situations and every party to a conflict, except where one group is guilty of demonstrably greater human rights abuses.¹⁰¹ To be effective, any system of rules must be applied consistently – otherwise, why should one party make

sacrifices if others do not reciprocate? This is exactly what happens in international intervention, where accusations of bias abound: Hutus over Tutsis, Serbs over Muslims, and UNITA over the MPLA government in Angola, where the Western powers seem to bend over backwards to accommodate rebel leader Jonas Savimbi despite his having broken every peace agreement since 1991.¹⁰² US aid to Israel far outweighs support to Palestine despite Israel's violation of the Oslo Accords in its settlements policy, so it is hardly surprising that Washington finds it difficult to play the role of 'honest broker' in the peace process. Croatia achieved international recognition (in circumstances which promoted insecurity), but Somaliland did not (when improved security depended on it). ECOMOG favoured Charles Taylor's enemies in Liberia, the USA took sides between warring clans in Somalia, and the UN's feeble response to pressure from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia strengthened their position in the run-up to elections. Even the prosecution of war criminals has been partial, allowing the worst offenders off the hook and excluding crimes committed by the interveners themselves.¹⁰³

The problem here is that partiality undermines the willingness of rival factions to support future international action. *'We don't trust them, I can tell you that,'* said Mwenze Kongolo (the Congolese Interior Minister) of the UN in 1997, although in this case he was covering up human rights abuses committed by Tutsis on Hutus which the UN was trying to investigate.¹⁰⁴ So if the international community is part of the solution to this puzzle, it is also part of the puzzle itself, damned when it does intervene (as in Somalia) and when it does not (as in Rwanda). The only way through this maze is to be more sensitive to the conditions under which intervention is likely to be effective, and then implement these criteria consistently. Unfortunately, that requires outsiders to be clear and unambiguous about what they are trying to achieve, and then stick to principles once they have been agreed collectively. In the real world of foreign policy-making this is unlikely.

Do it properly, or stay away?

That brings me to the final lesson to be learned, and the most uncomfortable: if you cannot intervene systematically, it may be better not to do so at all, since half-hearted action can exacerbate conflict and prolong the crisis. There *are* examples of long-running stand-offs between factions where a continued international presence is proba-

bly essential (like Cyprus), but few cases where external intervention has been instrumental in gaining a lasting settlement. The exceptions to this rule, like the Mozambican peace accords of 1992¹⁰⁵ or the end of civil war in Guatemala and El Salvador, are situations where deep-rooted ethnic conflicts are absent or the parties involved have themselves been ready to reach a settlement.¹⁰⁶ Even then it took US\$ 2.5 million to bribe rebel leader Alfonso Dhlakama into participating in the 1994 Mozambican elections – money well spent given the largely successful reconstruction of the country since then. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the UN and its 'Group of Friends' (including Mexico, Colombia and Spain) played an important role in bringing the different factions together, fostering trust, disbanding the rebel forces, demobilising two-thirds of the national army, smoothing the way for peaceful elections, and getting the 'truth commissions' up and running.¹⁰⁷ Significantly, UN forces arrived there in sufficient numbers to be credible before the peace settlement, and did not leave until 1995.¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately these conditions are rare; most conflicts are much more difficult to resolve until the internal dynamics have worked themselves out. The dilemma they present is stark: do we intervene in the messy way that international realities dictate, sure in the knowledge that this will complicate matters even further; or stay away while people suffer on the ground because we know we cannot do the job properly? The veteran American diplomat George Kennan answered this question in the context of Somalia by admitting that since '*our action holds no promise of correcting the situation*', US marines should not have been sent.¹⁰⁹ They could neither resolve the problem by achieving victory for one side over the other, nor secure a lasting peace through mediation. Instead, they left behind a permanently unstable middle ground – a grey area stained with red. To various degrees this has been the situation in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Sudan, Rwanda and Iraq and now the Balkans. Should we therefore leave people to fight it out among themselves, as Kennan's advice suggests? While attractive to some, this sits uneasily with humanitarian ethics and the dilemmas of real-time decision-making, hedged around by politics, media pressure and other influences. If we were to decide what to do solely on grounds of the problems that might result from doing it, we would end up doing nothing at all, and that would not be a viable basis for a co-operative future. However messy they are, we have got to get to grips with the practical issues of making intervention more effective.

CONCLUSION

It may seem obvious that prevention is better (and cheaper) than cure, but this message has not yet convinced those who need to hear it most. In Angola, the largest peacekeeping force in history cost US\$5 million a day,¹¹⁰ and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia cost the USA more than its entire foreign aid budget for Africa.¹¹¹ Had this money been invested in a standing international intervention force of sufficient size, and in long-term peace building to limit the need for its deployment, millions of lives might have been saved. They might not, of course, especially where the internal dynamics of conflict are so fierce, and certainly not in the absence of clear and consistent criteria for intervention. However, not to try is equivalent to moral surrender, and leaves all of us with blood on our hands. A more forceful and intelligent response is essential, but the two must go together – the ethical defence against criticism is not to abandon intervention but to undertake it having analysed all the ifs and buts, made the most informed judgement possible, and struggled long and hard to get things right – '*to be faced with the hardest of choices and still protect human life in ways which constantly challenge evil*'.¹¹³

'Citizens must ultimately rebuild their own societies, but they need breathing space to do so', and that, at the very least, is something international co-operation can help to provide, by securing the foundations people need to build their own solutions before they start killing each other in large numbers.¹¹³ In the short term the key is to secure a window for peace – like a ceasefire – guaranteed by international forces for long enough to be effective in finding common ground. In the longer term, peaceful societies are those that celebrate differences when they are healthy and attack them when they are not, and if international co-operation is not encouraging these things, then what is it doing? Each component of the humanitarian trilogy is vital, but thus far relief has been a substitute for peace building and international political action. '*We have chosen to respond to major unlawful violence not by stopping that violence but by trying to provide relief to the suffering...but our choice of policy allows the suffering to continue*'.¹¹⁴ Reversing that policy requires robust diplomatic and military action as well as humanitarian relief in a coherent overall framework. What is needed is not just a better military response, but global co-operation to address the increasing divisions that lie at the root of insecurity and obstruct the peaceful resolution of differences. That requires a depth, continuity and courage of engagement that has

defeated the international community for 50 years. And that represents a poverty of the imagination that disgraces all of us at a time when so many resources and opportunities are available.

Chapter 6

Summary: Sticks, Carrots and Room to Manoeuvre

'We want them to own the programme, of course, but they must do what we want. If not, they should get their money elsewhere.'

Senior World Bank official,
talking about the Tanzanian Government¹

'If appropriate aid is put to good use in a satisfactory policy context, and if all the other components of growth are present, the statistical relationship between aid and growth will be positive.'

Robert Cassen et al²

In the early 1990s, Western governments financed an exhaustive study of foreign aid. Its conclusions, summarised in the second of the above quotations, don't exactly set the pulse racing, but they do capture the reality of outside help, and not just foreign aid. There may be little similarity on the surface between the experience of a country like South Korea, the work of NGOs such as PREM in India, and the complex political emergencies examined in Chapter 5, but the lessons they teach are remarkably alike. External assistance is never the key factor in promoting internal change, and always a blunt weapon in the fight against poverty and violence. Nevertheless, the right sort of help at the right time can be very influential in creating more space for local forces to get things right. US aid and trade preferences with South Korea and Taiwan in the 1950s, or the support given to PREM by international NGOs in the 1980s, were important in giving early development efforts the extra push they needed. When

local efforts break down, outside help can be even more important in fostering the basic conditions required to get them going again. The support provided by the UN and its 'Group of Friends' to the nascent peace process in Central America is a good example. So we *can* help in important ways, even though our help is never the deciding factor. Finding better ways to resolve this paradox is the central challenge facing international co-operation in the 21st century.

DOES MY MONEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Everyone wants a simple answer to this question, but because of the complexities involved it is impossible to provide one. Let's take foreign aid first. There are lots of methodological problems which make it difficult to generalise between different countries, donor agencies and types of assistance.³ Aid with ill-defined objectives (like most programme aid) is almost impossible to evaluate anyway.⁴ Scandinavian aid comes out best among government donors in terms of its quality and focus on the poorest countries, the USA the worst,⁵ and Japan somewhere in the middle.⁶ NGO aid tends to be more poverty-focused than official aid, but faces increasing questionmarks about its own impact that replicate doubts about aid on the wider stage. Emergency assistance and food aid have a more obvious function in times of acute need, but they rarely play a decisive role in the longer term.⁷ *'Negative elements loom rather large'* in the record of food aid according to Robert Cassen and his colleagues,⁸ *'a marginal positive effect with huge transactions costs'* is the judgement of the EU.⁹ Technical assistance has fallen out of favour since a series of critical evaluations in the early 1990s showed that most expatriate advisers had little positive impact on local institutions despite the huge costs involved, for example US\$4 billion a year in Africa alone.¹⁰

An enormous amount of research has been carried out to test the aggregate impact of these different types of aid, and the conclusion is always the same: where the objectives are clearly and unambiguously developmental, good aid works when it is well used in the right climate over a sufficient length of time.¹¹ Under these conditions its effects will be *'positive, not insubstantial, but not dramatic'*;¹² *'all things being equal, good aid helps'*, as the Dutch government puts it.¹³ However, in the real world all things are rarely equal, so the correlation between aid, economic growth, and poverty-reduction tends to be weak, especially in the most aid-dependent economies. Here, there is more evidence that aid goes to finance consumption

rather than investment, displaces domestic savings, and acts as a disincentive to local producers or decision makers facing tough choices.¹⁴ In Bangladesh, for example, *'policy-makers continue to wait upon decisions in Washington before they formulate their budgets...or even decide how many children should be born'*.¹⁵ In such aid-dependent countries the capacity to absorb more aid and use it effectively is very limited, so much so that at the end of the 1980s the Swedish government was holding undisbursed funds for Bangladesh equivalent to five times the value of the country's annual allocation.¹⁶

The influence of political and commercial considerations, lack of co-ordination between donors, and the tendency to keep on adding new conditions make failure almost a self-fulfilling prophecy where recipients are weak. World Bank research shows that non-developmental objectives among donors reduce economic growth among recipients by as much as 1.5 per cent.¹⁷ Aid is more effective when dealing with temporary gaps in financing than with deep-rooted social and political problems, but it could do more to eradicate poverty if this was made the overriding objective.¹⁸ At present only about 20 per cent of total aid is used to finance activities which benefit poor people directly.¹⁹ Overall, the record is bad enough to lead US Senator Patrick Leahy to conclude that foreign aid is *'exhausted intellectually, conceptually and politically'*.²⁰ *'The truth is that debt, not economic development, has been the legacy of 40 years of foreign aid.'*²¹ This judgement may be too sweeping, but donors have themselves to blame for foreign aid's shortcomings.

If evaluating the impact of foreign aid is difficult, calculating the net effect of international co-operation as a whole is even more so. Yet those who have tried to measure the impact of trade concessions, debt relief and so on find the same pattern. *'Development co-operation generally does not seem to have had a decisive influence on the evolution of developing countries'* is the European Commission's conclusion.²² Despite European rhetoric that the Lome Convention is the *'finest and most complete instrument of development co-operation ever'*, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries who are members actually lost market share in their trade with the EU between 1976 and 1994.²³ At the same time, the administrative burden of implementing the Convention on the ground has become *'a nightmare'*.²⁴ There is also evidence that the ACP countries' dependence on the EU has stifled the growth of trade among themselves, marginalising their economies from world markets and tying them too closely to a single consumer.²⁵

Elsewhere, the influence of trade pacts varies. As we saw in Chapter 3, concessions were vital in the early growth of East Asia; NAFTA is too young to judge; and arrangements between equals (like MERCOSUR in Latin America) may do better to strengthen less competitive economies in the early stages. In all cases it is not trade concessions by themselves that make the difference, but how they interact with other factors at home and abroad. Chapters 2 and 3 showed how these interactions determine the net cash flow to and from developing countries, and how this has fluctuated markedly over the last 50 years. It was negative throughout much of the 1980s even for the stronger economies of Latin America, because the losses from falling export prices and rising debt repayments outweighed the gains from foreign aid, loans and private investment.²⁶ UNCTAD estimates that the developing world lost US\$42 billion from the terms of trade alone between 1982 and 1986.²⁷ Since then, trade and investment have improved for some but debt relief has yet to bite, and the net benefits of international co-operation for the poorest countries (especially in Africa) remain precarious.

A charitable conclusion would be as follows: international co-operation in the form we have known it has been more important to successful performers than its critics have claimed, but more damaging to bad performers than its defenders have admitted. What explains this paradox is the ability of local institutions to incorporate external opportunities into their own long-term development framework – the very thing that co-operation is supposed to strengthen but often erodes.

WHY DOESN'T CO-OPERATION WORK BETTER?

Why hasn't international co-operation produced the desired results? The easy answer is because we haven't tried it, preferring to intervene, impose and interfere instead. Nearly all 'co-operation' is based on the use of 'sticks' – threatening countries with aid cuts, sanctions of various kinds, military intervention, and commercial or diplomatic retaliation; and 'carrots' – the promise of more aid, trade concessions, a seat at the international negotiating table or protection by foreign troops. Sticks and carrots are applied according to the recipients' performance in doing what has, theoretically at least, been agreed with the donor – like cutting public expenditure or holding elections. All help is conditional on one thing or another. The conditions may be milder among some agencies than others, but they will be there

somewhere, if only in the form of specified reporting requirements, demands for information, or project targets. In all cases the conditions are set by the more powerful of the parties, and the sticks and carrots are there to encourage these conditions to be observed. Most recipients know this and are quite willing to play the game, so long as the benefits outweigh the costs. But do they? Conditions work best when they approach the *spirit* of co-operation – agreed jointly, implemented collectively, and involving sacrifices on all sides. Then they have the legitimacy required to make them work. Otherwise, conditionality becomes a '*ritual dance around the Tower of Babel*',²⁸ incapable of generating any ownership over change and corrupting the relationships on which authentic partnership is based.²⁹ That spells disaster for lasting results.

STICKS AND CARROTS AT WORK: STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The classic example of conditionality is 'structural adjustment', along with its close companion, 'economic stabilisation'. The debate that has grown up around these policies has consumed acres of paper and gigabytes of numbers for crunching by computer. Because they illustrate so much that has gone wrong with international co-operation in recent years, it is worth taking a closer look at the theory and practice of how they were applied. First of all, let's be clear on what this debate is not about. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, successful economies adjust all the time to the changing international and domestic contexts. At times they may run a rising budget deficit or protect an overvalued currency, but in the long term they practise prudent macro-economics to ensure the stability that growth and investment require. Both 'economic stabilisation' (correcting short-term domestic imbalances by curbing demand and cutting public spending) and 'structural adjustment' (aligning the domestic economy with the demands of international competitiveness over the medium term) are normal aspects of managing any economy that wants to keep on growing. As David Knox (ex-Vice President of the World Bank) once told me, '*If you've been on the bottle you'll have a hangover, and if you don't learn from the hangover you might become an alcoholic.*'³⁰ Economic reform was supposed to cure the headaches caused by years of overspending, and wean countries away from the drink – the bad economic habits that lay at the root of the problem.

A cold shower (stabilisation), followed by a period in rehabilitation (adjustment), would do the trick. Like conditionality, the real question was never 'do we stabilise or adjust?', but how such changes were implemented – who decided what was done when, how the programmes were designed, who paid the costs and enjoyed the benefits, and how fast things were pushed through. And that's where the problems arose.

The IMF and the World Bank began to lend money to countries experiencing severe economic difficulties in the early 1980s, with the Fund concentrating on stabilisation and the Bank on adjustment.³¹ In both cases, loans were made on condition that recipients undertook a wide-ranging programme of reforms designed to stabilise the economy and promote future growth. That meant deep cuts in public expenditure, devaluation and other measures to promote exports, higher crop prices and the freeing of agricultural markets from government control, and privatisation. The results of these reforms varied from one social group, country and time period to another, and these comparisons are still the subject of considerable debate. It will take many years before the long-term impact on growth and poverty can be assessed, but overall things have not worked out as the Bank and Fund expected, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.³² As of 1993, only six (out of 29) adjusting countries in Africa had achieved '*decisive improvements in macro-economic policies*'.³³ Internal studies stuck to the line that short-term pain would produce long-term gain, but almost all the independent research that has been carried out disagrees: there is little evidence of significant structural change in the economies of adjusting countries, the competitiveness of non-traditional exports, the efficiency of production, or levels of savings and investment – all the things that would have to change to make the economy stronger in the long run.³⁴ In some of the more successful cases (like Ghana), imbalances are starting to re-emerge after a period of growth.³⁵ The only cases where adjustment has stimulated a return to sustained growth are those where it was self-imposed (as in parts of East Asia), or in a few middle-income countries where initial conditions were favourable (like Colombia).³⁶

If the economy returns to long-term health, then the short-term social costs that result from reform might be an acceptable price to pay.³⁷ But since the key economic indicators have shown no lasting improvement it is hard to make this argument for most countries, especially when there were less painful alternatives available. These social costs were immense. Inequality increased in nearly all cases and poverty in most, especially among very poor people in rural areas who

lacked the assets and skills to take advantage of market incentives, and in the cities, where the axe fell heavily on people in government jobs and on others whose wages fell in real terms against a background of rising food prices. Those who did not have relatives to fall back on were affected especially badly, and women bore the brunt of coping for their families.³⁸ When the scale of these social costs became apparent, the World Bank launched a series of welfare projects to create a temporary safety net for the poor. Their impact varies, but generally they came too late to stop the worst damage or provide protection on a scale that was sustainable.³⁹

What was going on here? Why did the reforms not have the effects that were intended, and why did international institutions insist on persevering with them in the face of so much contrary evidence? At the most basic level, the adjustment paradigm was not based on empirical evidence but on economic theory, regardless of whether the conditions existed for the theory to work.⁴⁰ It was weakest in the areas where all neo-liberal thinking is weak – regarding long-term change simply as a series of unconnected short-terms; obsessed with securing stability by deflating demand; retrenching states while ignoring market imperfections; bypassing local institutions, culture and social realities; and getting the politics of change completely wrong.⁴¹ More compensation should have been provided to those who suffered in the short term, since they were able to organise political opposition to continued reform.⁴² Adjustment relied on theoretical stabilisation effects that never arrived; links between growth, employment and poverty that didn't work; local commitment that rarely materialised; and regulatory and supervisory mechanisms that didn't exist.⁴³ The sequence of the reforms was poorly-designed, and complementary measures to protect poor people and the environment were not incorporated at the right time.⁴⁴ In the words of one leading authority on the issue (Professor Lance Taylor) the '*prescriptions were simply ridiculous*'.⁴⁵ Does this sound familiar? It's one thing to have unwelcome guests, but quite another for them to take over the housekeeping and insist that they know best.

So what was the alternative for economies that were faced by bankruptcy? The consensus is that macro-economic policy should have been less deflationary (to preserve more growth), social policy more active (to protect the poorest and maintain political support), reform carefully graduated, control kept in the hands of local institutions, and poverty reduction central to everything.⁴⁶ In the longer term, adjustment needs to be integrated into the strategies explored for Africa in Chapter 3, with temporary de-linking based around agriculture and

rural industrialisation while the preconditions for international competitiveness in non-traditional exports are developed.⁴⁷ Then it might be adjustment to poverty-reducing growth rather than growth-reducing poverty – structural transformation, as some have called it.⁴⁸

CONDITIONALITY GONE MAD

The IMF and World Bank did not invent conditionality (the Marshall Plan had some conditions attached to it and President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in the 1960s had many more),⁴⁹ but since 1980 the number and severity of the conditions have increased enormously, and with them, the level of responsibility assumed by outsiders over other people's affairs.⁵⁰ The old conditions have been joined by new ones based around gender equity, environmental sustainability, poverty focus, democracy and 'good governance'.⁵¹ Less emphasis is now placed on the sticks, and more on the carrots – giving more aid if the conditions are met.⁵² Some countries (like France) ignore the politics so long as the economic conditions are respected; others (like Germany) only apply them when recipients are weak. As the conditions multiply, the time frame for meeting them tends to shrink, imposing an impossible burden on local institutions.⁵³ The overall picture is one of increasing complexity and disorientation on the ground. The World Bank, an organisation with '*plenty of ideas but no priorities*', set 111 conditions in its policy framework paper for Kenya alone.⁵⁴

On the surface, these new conditions might sound positive, but the real test lies in their impact. If there is no single route to eradicate poverty it is difficult to see how more focused pressure from aid agencies will help countries to succeed, unless there are much deeper changes in the kind and level of support provided. Do societies become determined to eradicate poverty because loans or grants contain a clause to that effect? Unlikely, isn't it? There is increasing evidence that 'progressive' conditions only increase the influence of international institutions over recipient countries – a charge recently levelled at international NGO coalitions in their attempts to persuade the World Bank to adopt tougher social and environmental criteria.⁵⁵ This is fundamentally incompatible with local ownership over the changes which do promote equitable growth in different contexts. The evidence on conditionality shows this to be true. In a recent study of aid and democracy, political scientist Gordon Crawford concluded that 18 of the 29 cases of conditionality he studied were '*wholly ineffective*'; there were only two (in Malawi and Guatemala) where

threats to withdraw aid had any impact at all.⁵⁶ *Plus ça change* – 20 years earlier, research on economic conditionality imposed by USAID found no impact in 22 out of 25 examples.⁵⁷ Other studies have found slightly more evidence that conditions can influence economic policy more than social and political change, and that 'positive' conditions (the carrots) work better than 'negative' ones (the sticks). But these conclusions only hold true where local groups are already committed to the changes required – in which case the conditions are redundant.⁵⁸ Overall, the links between outside influence, internal compliance, and results on the ground are generally weak.⁵⁹ Where outside assistance is of little importance to the recipient (or can be replaced easily by other sources of funds), or where it is so important that withdrawal would do significant damage to the loan portfolio of the donor (like the World Bank and the IMF in Mexico), sticks don't work anyway.⁶⁰ Examples of the former include China, Indonesia (where Dutch pressure on human rights was ignored, partly because other Western donors continued with their support),⁶¹ Burma, where Western withdrawal was nullified by the 'constructive engagement' policies of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN),⁶² and Kenya, whose government kept agreeing to conditions about democracy and corruption, banked the resulting aid, and then found plenty of reasons for non-compliance.⁶³

As a result of these disappointments, some donors (like Canada) have abandoned conditionality completely.⁶⁴ It is not difficult to see why. Most conditions require a local support base, which isn't there, to see them through, and as conditions multiply, a technical capacity, which is usually weak, to ensure compliance. There is no necessary link between the different conditions that donors think are related – economic reform and Western democracy for example, or market liberalisation and poverty reduction. In any case, everyday resistance – James Scott's famous '*weapons of the weak*'⁶⁵ – is used all the time by recipients to play the conditionality game to their advantage, frustrating the impact of conditions long after they have been officially 'accepted'. To have any chance of success, donors must agree to work together: this they rarely do in practice.⁶⁶ Conditions have to be applied consistently to be legitimate, but political and other interests make their application selective. There are four conditionality clauses in the Lomé Convention, but the EU has only applied them to the poorest ACP countries in Africa, not to more strategic 'partners' like Algeria, China and Indonesia.⁶⁷ In any case, the incentive of more aid, or less, is rarely strong enough to convince a recalcitrant government to implement painful reforms.⁶⁸

To summarise, one can have unanimity among outsiders without sufficient local leverage to be effective (like Kenya), leverage without the unanimity to apply it (like Burma), neither of the two (like Iraq), but very rarely both. Where conditionality is necessary it probably won't work, and where it might work it is usually unnecessary. Why should governments need to be bribed to persuade them to do things that are supposedly in their interest?⁶⁹ Sometimes external pressure can tip the balance in favour of progressive local forces (like Malawi during the fall of President Banda in 1992–93),⁷⁰ but home-grown recipes are still the best. The only conditions that are truly effective are those that are recognised as legitimate by all the parties involved, and that requires a level of dialogue that hardly exists anywhere.⁷¹ The key – taken up in Chapter 7 – is a system of mutually-agreed performance standards for all the parties, not ideological conditions set by one for the other; 'light but firm' criteria, not 'heavy but loose' arrangements in which conditions multiply but are never implemented consistently.⁷² Good riddance to the sticks – they never work in the long term. But positive conditionality in its present form is no solution either: no more carrots, please!

HOW CAN WE HELP?

If the stick-and-carrot approach doesn't work, what does? As we've seen in previous chapters, the transmission mechanisms between outside help and results on the ground are immensely complex. Peace and prosperity come from three interrelated levels of causes. The first is the appropriate mix of policies in a flexible economy – constantly adjusted between self-reliance and openness to the outside world: competition, co-operation, and an active state. The second is an intelligent polity – the capacity and willingness to identify what mix is appropriate in different circumstances and secure the political support to see it through. The third consists of all the things that vary so much from one society to another, like culture, leadership, geography, and the prevailing international context. Each one determines success at the next level up – the 'right policies' require a polity to sustain them, and a strong polity requires the right underlying conditions to support its development. Yet, as the stick-and-carrot approach demonstrates, the dominant approach to this complexity has been incredibly simplistic, focused overmuch on the first of the three levels, wedded to standardised solutions imposed from the outside, and (when war or famine hits the headlines) pushed into

partial and ineffective intervention. Standardisation implies that we can predict how internal and external forces will combine over time to produce the best net outcome, but we cannot know such a thing in advance and it does not fit the evidence we do have. If that is true, the standard approach won't be effective, and if it is ineffective it cannot be ethical to enforce it through conditionality. Personal experience tells us that nothing changes in any lasting or meaningful way unless the internal conviction exists to carry change forward. We don't need vast amounts of research to confirm this, but we have it anyway, and the results are the same.

What is it, then, that determines whether external help is genuinely supportive of these deciding factors? Experience across the board reveals three principles: consistency (with local realities), continuity (over the long term), and coherence (between different types of help). Consistency implies a full and sensitive understanding of culture, social structure and political realities, and a willingness to fit into and around them even where they differ from outside expectations. Dudley Seers, a pioneer in development studies, pointed this out 35 years ago in his article *'Why Visiting Economists Fail'*, and his strictures are just as necessary today.⁷³ The architect Stewart Brand observes that:

'evolution is always and necessarily surprising. You cannot control adaptability. All you can do is make room for it. Let the mistakes happen small and disposable. If you let things flourish, you get a wild ride, but you also get sustainability'.⁷⁴

Not for nothing is the word 'development' translated as 'chaos', and 'planning' as 'dream of the white man' in Cameroon.⁷⁵

Continuity means a commitment to work together over the long term, de-linked from the volatile selectivity imposed by shifting foreign policy concerns, ideological fashions, and disagreements along the way. This doesn't imply slavish adherence to partnership, but it does require the flexibility to respond in different ways at different times. Getting things right on the ground sometimes requires U-turns or unforeseen compromises that do not fit into predetermined contracts and agreements. In real life, politics rarely converges on an unchanging set of policy options, and success comes from lots of small changes interacting with each other over time.⁷⁶ The transformations development requires (especially in culture, social norms and institutions) take generations to evolve. In that respect the East Asian story

is unique. Expecting results in Africa in a matter of years is absurd, 'as if the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution were all telescoped into a single lifetime' as Arthur Toynbee puts it.⁷⁷ Except in this case even a lifetime seems too long to wait. Most donor agencies have little sense of loyalty, abandoning adult literacy and community development in favour of micro-credit in the 1990s, for example; pulling out of Latin and Central America as soon as the cold war ended; and switching aid funds from sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean region to stem the expected 'flood' of immigrants into the EU from North Africa and the Middle East.⁷⁸ By contrast, the most successful helpers are those who stay in for the long haul, accompanying people and organisations as their efforts evolve. That was what underlay the success of the Rockefeller Foundation in helping to strengthen national agricultural research capacity in India between 1953 and 1990. It helped that, as a private foundation, it didn't have to show quick results.⁷⁹ The World Health Organisation says leprosy will be eradicated by the year 2000, so aid agencies can then withdraw. Let's hope someone discussed it with the bacillus, unlike the uncooperative germs and mosquitoes that have brought tuberculosis and malaria back to Africa when officialdom said they were finished too.

The third principle is coherence. Coherence means a unified framework for all development-related decision-making in donor countries, including aid, trade, debt, investment, diplomacy and domestic policies that have a knock-on effect internationally – this is the 'full span of government instruments', as the Canadians put it.⁸⁰ At present, losses from some outweigh gains from the others – the lopsided 'humanitarian trilogy' described in Chapter 5 is a classic example; aid, trade and debt another. In the 1980s, over 50 per cent of the US\$210 million provided in aid to the government of Corazon Aquino in the Philippines each year came straight back to the USA in the form of quotas on imported sugar and textiles; in the Dominican Republic such trade losses were even higher.⁸¹ Political and strategic interests have long dominated development goals in the US aid budget, with aid to Egypt and Israel taking four times the total amount allotted to sub-Saharan Africa in 1994.⁸² Coherence is written into the EU Maastricht Treaty and forms a key plank of the Green Paper on the future of EU development co-operation, but this message hasn't yet made it through the minefield of European domestic politics.⁸³ Reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), described by UK Development Minister Clare Short as 'crazy economics',⁸⁴ would do more for developing-country growth than

increasing the aid budget, but not according to French farmers. At present the EU is providing aid to encourage beef production in Namibia while simultaneously restricting imports of Namibian beef into Europe and exporting subsidised European beef to the whole of southern Africa.⁸⁵ Coherence at the policy level is one thing. On the ground, increasing co-ordination between different donors is also essential to reduce the administrative burden on recipients. There is no reason why Burkina Faso should have to endure 350 separate aid missions a year,⁸⁶ nor why Africa needs 22 different aid instruments from the same government in the Netherlands, nor why EU emergency aid should be put in the same basket as fish and mad cows instead of being integrated with the European Development Fund.⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Consistency, continuity and coherence: put these three principles together and you have the foundations for good help. Good help assists people to solve problems with fewer costs to themselves and more benefits to the rest of the world by expanding the range of choices available, illuminating alternatives, and providing more opportunities to develop and apply win-win solutions. 'Every nation must solve its own problems,' said Senator Robert Taft in 1945, 'but we can help them over the worst',⁸⁸ by expanding the room to manoeuvre decision makers need when faced by difficult choices. How can this principle be made the centrepiece of the international system?