Examination paper for GEOG3516 – Humanitarianism: Theory and Practice

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Examination period: Autumn 2013, from 18\textsuperscript{th} November (08:00) to 25\textsuperscript{th} November (16:00)

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Other information: Please read the instructions on page 2.

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Home exam GEOG 3516 Humanitarianism: theory and practice autumn 2013

The exam question will be made available on GEOG 3516’s It’s learning page under the folder ‘Exam’ at 8.00 (in the morning) on the 18th November.

The exam should be submitted before 16.00 on the 25th November.

When submitting the document, please do the following:

- To maintain anonymity of each candidate, please send an email with your exam paper attached as a pdf-file to Rita Hokseggen at the Department of Geography: rita.hokseggen@svt.ntnu.no.
- On the first page of the document: Write your candidate number and the number of words (and please remember to insert page numbers in the document)
- When saving the document, give it the following name: “GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]"
- When sending the document write the following in the subject line: “GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]”

Rita will save the document and delete your email so that no-one can trace your name attached to the document

It will not be acceptable to submit the exam paper too late. If you should have any problems in meeting the deadline, you must get in touch with the department, but generally late submissions will not be accepted.

The exam paper should be between 3500 words and 4500 words, references, figures and tables come in addition.

Remember to refer to sources and literature used according to academically accepted standards. You can, for example, follow the guidelines distributed on the It’s learning pages for this course

During the exam, you cannot receive any supervision from staff in the department, but if you have questions regarding the question of the exam and formalities, we will try to answer collectively by making responses available on It’s learning.

I may not be available on email in the last hours before the submission deadline so any questions should come before this last day. If there are any last minute issues regarding the submission, please contact Rita Hokseggen (phone 91774 566).

Good luck with your writing!
The humanitarian crisis in Syria shows that there are limits to humanitarianism. Despite humanitarian instruments and principles, humanitarian workers on the ground face a situation that in many ways restricts them from doing their intended work. Where one person’s life (the humanitarian worker) may be valued more than the lives of the people humanitarians are set to save, the result is withdrawal of international actors.

The two attached texts from the ICRC (2013a, 2013b) help to illustrate the dilemmas humanitarian organizations are faced with in saving lives in crises such as the Syrian one. Take the attached texts as a starting point for explaining the main tensions between theory (principles) and practice of the changing field in which humanitarian organizations operate. By integrating different themes discussed in the course literature we want you to show what limitations of the humanitarian system such tensions make visible. Discuss to what extent the limits to humanitarianism require new principles to be developed and new actors to be integrated in the humanitarian system.

Attached:


Syria and beyond: Humanitarian challenges in today's conflicts

18-06-2013 Feature

The right of the wounded and sick to receive timely medical care and be protected from attack is spelt out under international humanitarian law. Yet in Syria and elsewhere, intimidation of health workers and attacks on medical facilities are taking place regardless.

To mark the 150th anniversary of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, ICRC director of operations Pierre Krähenbühl recently briefed Members of Parliament and of the House of Lords at Westminster. He described the ICRC's activities in Syria, now the organization's largest operation in budgetary terms. He also discussed the changing nature of modern conflict and the challenges it presents for humanitarians working in conflict zones.

Focusing on the crisis in Syria, he stressed that one of the ICRC's biggest concerns is the systematic targeting of health workers and facilities by armed groups. He noted that 20 Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society members have lost their lives since the start of the conflict. In many cases they were victims of the deliberate targeting of vehicles clearly marked with the Red Crescent emblem.

Equally worrying is the rise in deliberate attacks on health workers and facilities, which are protected under international humanitarian law. Other practices, such as placing military equipment within hospital grounds, endangering staff and patients, or carrying out reprisal attacks against health workers suspected of informing on opposition activity, have added to the burden on the health system.

As a result, medical staff have fled abroad, leaving women to give birth in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, or people suffering chronic conditions unable to access treatment, noted Mr Krähenbühl. It is a repeat of the patterns seen in Iraq, where medical staff began to flee the country en masse in 2003.

Mr Krähenbühl addressed the issues for humanitarian organizations in the aftermath of major conflict in a second London appearance, at the Royal United Services Institute. He noted that attention often turns away from countries when international forces leave. But conflict continues, often at a lower intensity, or with less sophisticated weaponry, but with just as deadly effect.

In Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, the ICRC is responding to the impact on populations of continued insecurity and violence. The humanitarian response is as protracted, long-running and complex as conflict itself.
Why are modern conflicts lasting so long? Part of the cause, Mr Krähenbühl stated, lies in the loss of the UN system as a legitimate platform for resolving conflicts between States, for the simple reason that most wars today are internal. What is needed, said Mr Krähenbühl, is a decisive return towards more active political management of conflict by the international community. A failure to respond politically can result in the destabilization of whole regions over time, as seen in the Sahel and around Syria. But there is difficulty here in knowing who exactly to bring to the negotiating table, and with what incentive.

An additional difficulty for the ICRC and other organizations working in conflict is that there is not normally one front line, but many.

Since the end of the Cold War era, we have seen a massive growth in the number of armed groups involved in a given conflict, Mr Krähenbühl observed. In eastern DRC, the ICRC needs to have a dialogue with 50 separate groups to be able to work. As the ICRC is mandated to talk to all sides wherever it works, it finds itself working across the spectrum from the best equipped and most sophisticated armed forces to the most improvised and ramshackle.
Syria: Humanitarian situation catastrophic
15-02-2013 Press Briefing

"The situation in Syria is nothing short of catastrophic," announced ICRC director of operations Pierre Krähenbühl after a four-day visit to the country. Civilians are being killed and injured. Millions have been displaced and thousands have gone missing or been arrested.

Mr Krähenbühl was speaking at a press conference during which he and Walter Cotte (Under Secretary General for Programme Services at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) reported on their recent visit to the country.

This is a summary of the information that Mr Krähenbühl and Mr Cotte provided at that event.

General situation

After two years, and with no end to the military confrontations in sight, the situation for the population is catastrophic.

See also our press briefing on the situation in Yemen
Civilians are being killed and injured. Millions have been displaced and thousands have gone missing or been arrested. In areas of rural Damascus, property and infrastructure have been destroyed, adding to the misery of the Syrian people. ICRC teams carrying out fieldwork around the country speak of the despair of civilians who have had to flee time and time again as the frontlines shift.

Women and children have taken shelter in mosques, schools, sports centres and other public buildings. Many more struggle in parks and makeshift shelters. They survive for weeks on minimal support, often without electricity or running water.

Medical facilities and personnel continue to suffer acts of violence. There are widespread reports of patients arrested inside hospitals, of reprisals against doctors and nurses, of attacks on ambulances and of misuse of these vehicles. While it is difficult to verify every such act of violence, the pattern is widespread and is of grave concern.

Humanitarian operations in Syria are highly complex. There are numerous constraints, the most daunting being the extreme lack of security, the fluidity of the frontlines and the multiplicity of armed actors, including government security forces and various groups of the armed opposition.

What the ICRC and the SARC are doing

The ICRC has been able to carry out a significant number of field activities with its partner the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and has also been able to carry out such work in areas under the control of the opposition.

In 2012, the ICRC and the SARC made over 100 trips to different parts of the country. We distributed food and hygiene parcels to 1.5 million people, many of them displaced, who had not had access to basic commodities or services since fleeing their homes.

Our water projects helped millions of people, in all provinces, regardless of where they were living. These projects included pipeline repairs carried out with local contractors in Aleppo, the installation of a generator in Homs, providing water for 800,000 people, and deliveries of water by road to IDP centres. Throughout the country, water chlorination has ensured that the water remained safe to drink.

In addition, we have been improving living conditions and water supplies at 290 centres, where 88,000 IDPs have taken refuge, in towns such as Aleppo, Homs, Sweida and Deir Ezzor.

We have also been distributing medical supplies at many locations around the country.

For the SARC, the change of pace has been dramatic. In Damascus, for instance the SARC coordination centre used to handle about 25 ambulance operations a day. That number has doubled to 50, which brings with it the need for increased resources. In addition to working with the ICRC, the National Society is providing psycho-social support, especially to children. The SARC has 11,000 highly committed, dedicated volunteers working on the ground, close to the community. Eight of them have paid for their dedication with their lives while on duty.

Challenges

Cross-border versus cross-line operations

There has been much debate in recent months about the impartiality of aid delivery and about other ways of reaching people in areas under opposition control. Cross-border operations have been suggested. The ICRC sees it as legitimate to look at different ways of ensuring that aid reaches those in need, but we have opted for cross-line operations. That does not mean that the ICRC excludes the possibility of cross-border operations, but we would only carry out such action with the agreement of all concerned – the Syrian government, the opposition and the governments of the neighbouring countries concerned. Our recent visit to Al-Houleh has shown that we are able to cross frontlines to bring aid.
Mounting cross-line operations is challenging, not least because – as in every conflict – neither side is keen to see us crossing into the area held by their enemy. But this is our way of providing humanitarian aid, building acceptance and trying to reach the regions most affected. In my meetings with the Syrian Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hossam Eddine Alaa), I emphasized how important it was for the ICRC and SARC to have better access to all regions with urgent needs, including those under opposition control.

Need to expand operations

After a difficult period between July and October 2012, where field movements were extremely limited, the number of ICRC/SARC teams accessing delicate regions has been on the rise again over the past four months. At the end of January, we were able to deliver aid to Al-Houleh, a locality under control of the opposition, and that is a sign of improvement. I have come back from Syria convinced that we can and must expand our operations in the coming weeks and months and that we can and must build on our increasing presence in the most delicate regions, including those under opposition control.

Detainee welfare

Detention visits have not progressed as we would have wished over the last six months.

The ICRC has carried out two visits since 2011, to the central prisons in Aleppo and Damascus. That was good, but it is not enough. Of course, some places of detention are in areas too dangerous for us to enter. But this limited access means that there is no monitoring of the situation of detainees. That would be very worrying in any armed conflict and it is certainly a serious concern in Syria.

During his meeting at the Foreign Ministry, Mr Krähenbühl requested concrete action from the authorities on a plan of visits to several prisons over the coming weeks, based on the commitment they had made and reconfirmed at that meeting. It is vital that the ICRC be able to resume prison visits quickly, in order to ensure effective monitoring of conditions and treatment in accordance with the standard procedures that the ICRC applies worldwide. The ICRC will continue to press the Syrian authorities on this issue in the coming days.

Finally, there is the devastating impact of attacks on medical facilities, health personnel, etc. We have recently heard about an incident in the north of Syria, in which wounded people were arrested inside a hospital and medical staff were later killed because they were suspected of having supplied the information that led to the arrests. Incidents like this are turning what used to be an efficient health system into a wasteland in parts of the country. Some hospitals have been taken over by armed groups and many dedicated doctors and nurses have fled the most dangerous areas.

The future

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, many have asked whether working inside Syria is not a case of “mission impossible,” fraught with constraints and risks of being instrumentalized. There is a need to step up the collective humanitarian response significantly, and the ICRC and the SARC are working on that. There have been comments to the effect that the ICRC is naïve to believe it can mount a truly impartial operation from inside Syria with outreach to civilians on all sides. The ICRC accepts that this debate keeps us on our toes and that there are many dilemmas. But we have always preferred the dilemmas associated with being present, with trying to reach as many people as possible. And the ICRC is doing exactly that.