
Clinton Presidential Records Mandatory Declassification Review

This is not a presidential record. This is used as an administrative marker by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

Documents from this Mandatory Declassification Review were released in full.

PROPOSED "WHITE HELMETS" HUMANITARIAN FORCE

The Problem: Sudden, massive refugee flows and devastation precipitated by ethnic wars have severely tested the world's capacity to respond rapidly to humanitarian crises. The flight of Iraq's Kurds to Turkey, the exodus of Rwandans to Zaire, the flow of Cuban and Haitian refugees toward U.S shores, and the horror inflicted on civilians by war in Bosnia and Somalia have combined to stretch thin the international community's existing capabilities to respond.

The current system is an ad hoc hodge-podge of civilian voluntary groups supported by a few international agencies and some governmental capabilities. The fallback instrument has inevitably been various national militaries, particularly the U.S. military. The shortcomings of the current system include its lethargy, lack of large-scale logistics capabilities, paucity of specialized personnel at the ready, inequitable financing, and over-reliance on U.S. armed forces.

Proposed Solutions: With humanitarian relief capabilities taxed to the breaking point, several proposals have emerged to relieve the overburdened *status quo*.

President Menem's "White Helmets" Initiative (WHI): Argentine President Carlos Menem has proposed the formation of "an international body of volunteers."

Denominated "white helmets," the group would be composed of national peace corps-type volunteers trained to undertake purely humanitarian operations -- provision of food, health care, potable water, etc. -- on short notice. The various national elements, which would concentrate on their respective domestic humanitarian problems between international crises, would combine into a fully inter-operable, multinational force when needed.

Menem foresees the "white helmets" being placed at the disposal of the UN. He proposes the creation of a UN agency -- or relying on the existing UN Volunteers program -- to serve as a clearinghouse for information concerning capabilities and personnel and to coordinate deployments during humanitarian crises. Financing would derive, in Menem's view, from "voluntary contributions of funds" to "supplement and augment possible budgetary allocations."

The strength of Menem's proposal is also its principal weakness: voluntarism. While large numbers of volunteer "white helmets" could doubtless be assembled on paper, the capacity actually to train, equip and rapidly deploy them in a coordinated manner depends on substantial funding, organizational structure, a sophisticated logistics network, and a cadre of professionals with experience to manage the complex operations associated with humanitarian relief operations.

Carnegie's International Crisis Group (ICG): In contrast to WHI -- which posits the creation of legions of humanitarian volunteers -- the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace suggests a more modest effort. Carnegie believes the current system merely needs a "catalyst" in the form of a private group of international humanitarian relief experts that would be available for immediate dispatch in an emergency. This International Crisis Group (ICG) would perform several functions, including early

warning, field monitoring and evaluation, advice, advocacy, grant-making, research, analysis and training.

Funding for an initial two-year pilot phase for the ICG -- some \$12 million -- would come from "a diversified base" of governmental and private sources. The terms of follow-on funding would have to be worked out.

The key problem with the Carnegie proposal is that it dramatically underestimates the nature and extent of the current system's flaws. Able managers, expert forecasters and sophisticated private fundraisers are certainly necessary but are not sufficient to remedy the ills that plague the current approach. A parallel "force structure" of humanitarian relief personnel -- trained, equipped and on call -- is the likely predicate to an adequate international response to humanitarian crises.

Kofi Annan's UN Humanitarian Assistance Teams (UNHATs)

UN Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Operations Kofi Annan has proposed the formation of UN Humanitarian Assistance Teams (UNHATs). The teams would be "an international corps" of military and civilian personnel available for rapid deployment to crisis areas. UN members would be invited to earmark "trained and equipped components of their military forces and/or other standing organized governmental bodies." The UN would provide permanent central authority to coordinate the deployment and field operations of these disparate national components.

UNHATs continued reliance on national military organizations is its chief disadvantage. Military readiness for missions only armed forces can perform -- deterrence, multinational intervention and peacekeeping -- could be severely degraded if those forces are also assigned the task of undertaking humanitarian operations. Further, UNHAT does not leverage the efficiencies that attend private, non-governmental mechanisms, such as private contractors and risks generating another layer of UN bureaucracy to deal with crises that require flexibility and innovation.

NSC Staff's Humanitarian Relief Contractors (HRCs): The NSC Staff posits that neither an entirely voluntary nor wholly managerial nor UN-centered solution will likely be sufficient or effective. Rather, what is needed is a program that incorporates the best of the "White Helmets" Initiative (personnel), the ICG proposal (expertise), and the UNHAT proposal (organization), while supplementing these with a fully-funded program to retain commercial Humanitarian Relief Contractors (HRCs). The HRCs would be responsible for procuring and stockpiling materials needed for relief operations, arranging for transportation of these stockpiles and personnel to crisis areas, and serving as mid-level managers that would perhaps direct "White Helmet" volunteers in the field and implement directions given by ICG-type experts.

To UN or not UN: The UNHAT proposal is grounded in the formation of a new UN agency. President Menem would also create a new UN coordination agency, but proposes his "White

Helmets” retain their independence. Carnegie points to the flexibility of its purely private approach. The advantage of a UN-sponsored, contractor-based program is that it offers private sector flexibility and responsiveness but does so as part of an integrated UN response to a given humanitarian crisis. Only the UN, for example, can successfully manage the transition from “Blue Helmets” (peacekeepers) to “White Helmets” (relief-keepers) once a crisis situation has been politically and militarily stabilized to permit humanitarian relief operations. The UN connection also provides political access, financial and economic resources, and organizational structure that would likely not be present in a purely private effort. Use of independent, private contractors would minimize potential for bureaucratic bloat and institutional rigidity -- conditions fatal to any rapid reaction, highly efficient humanitarian relief effort.

Further study: President Menem, the Carnegie Endowment and Undersecretary General Annan have done a great service in highlighting the flaws in the current international humanitarian relief system and in laying the foundation for a systemic repair. The optimal solution will doubtless build on their suggestions. Further study and discussion among the UN, member governments, and private relief organizations is clearly justified. A particularly important issue will be how to accommodate eclecticism -- use of volunteers, contractors, private experts, and UN bureaucrats -- within the framework of a coherent, organized international response to humanitarian crises. One possible aim of these initial discussions would be generating recommendations for consideration by Heads of State at the upcoming UN Security Council Summit in January 1995.