

BOOK REVIEW

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# Review of “The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention” by Don E. Scheid (ed.) and “Aid in Danger: The Perils and Promise of Humanitarianism” by Larissa Fast

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## Book details

Don E. Scheid (ed.)

*The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; 2014. ISBN: 978-1107610675

Larissa Fast

*Aid in Danger: The Perils and Promise of Humanitarianism*, Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press; 2014.

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Humanitarian action has seen considerable change over time. However, the current literature pays little attention to these new facets of humanitarian action in the early twenty-first century. Based on two insightful volumes, this review reveals three factors shaping humanitarian action in the early twenty-first century, i.e., moral space reserved for armed humanitarian intervention, violence against humanitarian workers and agencies, and involvement of private military/security contractors. Moreover, the two volumes investigate the current humanitarian action's limits and advance alternative policy options for the foreseeable future.

## Moral space reserved for armed humanitarian intervention

Some critical voices (e.g., the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) believed that armed humanitarian intervention has “gone so far as to use the Security Council as a platform to encourage armed interventions against sovereign states and peoples with a view to promoting the poorly named regime change” (United Nations 2013). It

changes the more traditional dictum that “a state loses its moral shield against military intervention only when it has wrongly attacked another state” (Tesón 2014, p.63). The critics' position is based on the norm of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states and the non-use of military intervention in any form (United Nations 2013).

However, the moral space reserved for armed humanitarian interventions is not closed off. The editor of *The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, Don E. Scheid (Professor Emeritus at Winona State University), believes that there are stronger reasons to intervene and protect vulnerable populations from violence, with or without permission of the targeted state. Scheid considers that armed humanitarian intervention should be taken under the claim that all people and their states have duties to “refrain from violating anyone's human rights,” and to “protect and enforce everyone's human rights against violations” (Scheid 2014, p. 10). To put it differently, in the words of Fernando R. Tesón, people are entitled to “defend others who are victim of unjust attacks,” and armed humanitarian interventions can be conducted to prevent “the most seriously wrong acts of coercion perpetrated by governments” (Tesón 2014, pp. 65, 67). In this regard, sovereignty is conditional, that is,

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“a state’s legitimacy and the enjoyment of its sovereignty depends on the protection it provides for the human rights of its population” (Scheid 2014, p.13).

From the perspective of humanitarian ethics, *The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention* explores the normative issues related to armed humanitarian intervention, which means “a military intervention into the jurisdiction of a state by outside forces for humanitarian purposes” (Scheid 2014, p. 3). In this collection of essays, 14 essays analyze the dynamics of armed humanitarian interventions in the past decades and explore the normative issues related to armed humanitarian interventions around the world.

This edited volume has three parts. In part I (chapters 1–3), Don E. Scheid, George R. Lucas, Jr., and Tzvetan Todorov sketch and order the literature on armed humanitarian intervention during the past 25 years and the approach of “responsibility to protect” in the context of humanitarian intervention in the Libyan Civil War. In the following part (chapters 4–7), from a moral perspective, Fernando R. Tesón, Ned Dobos, C.A.J. Coady, Helen Frowe, and James Pattison explore whether armed humanitarian interventions would be permissible in specific contexts, particularly vulnerable population are persecuted or exploited by their government. Lastly, the contributors (i.e., Michael Blake, Luke Glanville, Alex J. Bellamy, Michael W. Doyle, Jennifer M. Welsh, Brian Orend, and David Rodin) stress the competing arguments related to armed humanitarian intervention, including but not limited to human rights abuse, justice, regime change, and human sovereignty.

In the view of the reviewer, the most thought-provoking arguments to readers are put forward in Chapter 4 by Fernando R. Tesón, Chapter 5 by Helen Frowe, and Chapter 9 by Luke Glanville. As Tesón suggests, just cause (e.g., self-defense) is a necessary but not sufficient justification for armed humanitarian intervention, which “may be impermissible because of its bad consequences” (Tesón 2014, p. 73).

In the opinion of Scheid, conditional sovereignty depends on whether a state’s population is threatened by genocide, ethnic cleansing, or another kind of violence against humanity. At present, an armed humanitarian intervention should only be authorized by the UN Security Council, with or without the targeted state’s permission. In this regard, the 2011 intervention in Libya represents the most significant example where the concept of conditional sovereignty was applied.

Tesón suggests that armed humanitarian intervention can be justified as “a defense of persons (the persons within the targeted state) against their government,” if such intervention does not greatly increase civilian casualties or significantly changes the social and political structures in the targeted country (Tesón 2014, p. 63).

Frowe’s argument goes a step further. For instance, Frowe stresses that “intervening for self-interested reasons, but in a way that secures humanitarian goods, is better than not intervening at all” (Frowe 2014, p. 112). In a similar fashion, Glanville gives possible reasons to embrace armed humanitarian interventions. Against fears that the idea of armed humanitarian intervention could facilitate abusive interventions, he contends that since the end of the Cold War the number of interstate wars has actually been on the decline (Glanville 2014, p. 161).

### **Why humanitarian workers and agencies were targeted**

In history, humanitarian workers and agencies often work in the toughest situations. During the past decade, it has been increasingly hard to ignore the repeated violence (e.g., murder, kidnapping, and injury) against humanitarian workers and agencies in various contexts.

According to the preliminary records of the Aid Worker Security Database, 270 humanitarian workers were killed, kidnapped, or seriously wounded in 2014. The majority of the humanitarian workers killed (67 out of 105) were victims of targeted attacks or crossfire while delivering assistance. Improvised explosive devices and complex attacks accounted for 20 % of humanitarian workers killed. Ninety percent of the victims (244 out of 270) were national staff, who account for the majority of humanitarian workers (United Nations 2015). Although this represents a decrease of roughly 30 % compared to 2013, it was “due mainly to reduced or reconfigured operational presence in these countries, with fewer humanitarian workers deployed to field locations deemed insecure” (Aid Worker Security Database 2015).

In the most serious cases, violence against the humanitarian workers and agencies would disrupt the provision of assistance and essential services (United Nations 2015). The murder of Margaret Hassan (the then-country director of CARE in Iraq) in 2004 is one of the watershed events in the contemporary humanitarian action. After 2004, the humanitarian agencies hired more local staff in conflict-affected areas, while the violence against humanitarian workers remains to a large degree unresolved.

Why did the humanitarian workers become targets of violence? The literature has been focusing on some approaches of explanation such as processes of politicization, militarization, or securitization of humanitarian action that emphasize external factors. From an alternative perspective, Larissa Fast’s *Aid in Danger* succeeds in contextualizing why the humanitarian workers became targets of violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia; explores the competing narratives to interpret the underlying causes of violence against humanitarian workers and agencies; and reveals the internal

vulnerabilities of humanitarian workers and agencies in high-stress environments and conflict zones.

*Aid in Danger* features an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. In the introduction, Fast provides an overview of the current literature of violence against humanitarian workers and agencies and illustrates the outline of the chapters. The core assumption of this book turns to internal vulnerabilities in that the violence against humanitarian workers is to some extent “self-generated” and a result of their own actions and decisions (Fast 2014, p. 145). Feeding this narrative, she provides accounts of “questionable and sometimes unethical behavior of aid workers [...] lending credence to critiques of the aid system as exploitative and predatory” (Fast 2014, p. 135).

Chapters 1–5 reveal that most of the humanitarian workers killed or injured were national staff. In such cases, Fast calls for a better accounting of the internal vulnerabilities of humanitarian workers and agencies. In the following pages (chapter 6 and conclusion) and parts of chapters 1–2, she analyzes the dynamics and mechanisms of protecting humanitarian workers and agencies, highlights analytical and practical challenges facing the humanitarian cause, and provides recommendations for reasserting humanity.

According to the mercy-oriented values and principles of humanitarianism (i.e., neutrality, impartiality, and independence), *Aid in Danger* makes notable three contributions to the literature of humanitarian action.

First, it criticizes humanitarian exceptionalism which separates humanitarian workers and agencies from the populations they assist and downplays “how individual or organizational actions might have played a role” (Fast 2014, p.47). As Fast suggests, the existing literature shows little concern about the fact that humanitarian workers and agencies were attacked, while others were not. Second, it uncovers the evolution of violence against humanitarian workers and agencies. Third, Fast stresses the “context-generated threats,” which are caused by the humanitarian workers’ and agencies’ behaviors and lifestyle choices and the ways in which some aid agencies operate. In the eyes of Fast, humanitarian workers “represent all types of people” and make various responses to the high-risk working environments (Fast 2014, p. 137). In some cases, the humanitarian workers’ deviant behavior is considered as “immoral, unacceptable, or culturally insensitive,” creates tension in local communities, and ‘tarnish[es] the reputations of all expatriates in the eyes of the local community” (Fast 2014, p. 146).

#### **Private military/security contractors: pros and cons**

It is noteworthy that private donors (e.g., individuals, corporations, foundations, and companies) provided “nearly one-quarter of all international humanitarian

assistance” (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2015). In 2014, the 31 UN-coordinated humanitarian appeals identified 122.7 million people in need and aimed to assist just over 71 % of them (87.5 million people). An estimated US\$24.5 billion was provided, a rise of 19 % from the previous record high of US\$20.5 billion in 2013 (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2015). It is evident that the current funding did not keep pace with growing demand, just 62 % of requirements were met in 2014, a drop from 65 % in 2013, and below the average of 65 % over the past decade (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2015). In the meantime, the donors “privilege and support specific projects for predetermined and often short periods of time” (Fast 2014, p. 161).

If the victims and humanitarian workers are threatened, and the governments have limited resources to provide assistance, private military/security contractors can be considered an alternative option in offering service of logistics, transportation, and security in conflict-affected countries (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia).

Fast holds that involvement of more private military/security contractors in humanitarian action will “challenge the independent and impartial basis of traditional humanitarian assistance” (Fast 2014, p. 119). In the case of Iraq, many private military/security contractors were accused of their “rogue behavior,” even caused significant harm to civilians who supposedly be protected by the private security contractors against threats of violence (Burns 2007). In April 2015, a former Blackwater security guard was sentenced to “life in prison and three others to 30-year terms for their roles in a 2007 shooting that killed 14 Iraqi civilians and wounded 17 others” (Greensboro News & Record NC 2015).

In *Aid in Danger*, Larissa Fast discovers an ethical dilemma of hiring private military/security contractors in humanitarian action. On the one hand, some aid agencies did maintain co-operations with private military/security contractors, especially “in the case of armed escort,” which would probably breach the principles of neutrality (Fast 2014, p. 103). On the other hand, if humanitarian workers and agencies act impartially, their actions would be “constructed on a battlefield as providing direct support to the enemy” (Fast 2014, p. 104).

Moreover, James Pattison, in his contribution to *The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, insists that the private military/security contractors violate the targeted state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its own territory. For instance, private military/security contractors could be hired by non-state actors (e.g., para-military groups, militias, and transnational companies) on a case-by-case basis (Pattison 2014, p.120). In addition, David Rodin finds two fundamental constraints for private military/security contractors. First, the contractors should not provide sustained military supports to any

belligerents. Second, any contractors must not become “participants in a civil war” (Rodin 2014, p. 250).

### Whither humanitarian action?

Wither humanitarian action in the foreseeable future? The answers are context-sensitive as, in principle, the UN General Assembly is “not voting on or for a resolution that directly or indirectly or through interpretation or re-interpretation can be used as the basis for the removal of a government, military intervention or other acts against the Charter of the United Nations in letter or in spirit” (United Nations 2012). At the same time, Bellamy offers a more nuanced assessment by interjecting that “although regime change should never be allowed as the legitimating primary goal of armed humanitarian intervention, regime change is sometimes necessary as a means for the protection of populations terrorized by their own government” (Bellamy 2014, p. 167).

An alternative solution is to establish “a consolidated UN agency to assist and protect war victims,” as well as investigate the belligerents that must be held accountable for attacks against humanitarian workers and agencies. Furthermore, Alex J. Bellamy proposes five tests that ought to be fulfilled when armed humanitarian interventions are conducted against genocide and mass atrocities (Bellamy 2014, p. 185): (1) Security Council authorization, (2) recognition of humanitarian duties, (3) an obvious connection between justifications and known facts, (4) the calibration of ends and means, and (5) evident commitment to long-term peacebuilding. In the eyes of Fast, any solution to improve humanitarian action should pay more attention to the degree of acceptance as well as the belligerents “who have the capacity and motive to harm humanitarian workers or agencies” (Fast 2014, p. 190). However, the resources to perfect humanitarian action are often limited in quantity and scope, so there is no optimal solution. In such a case, as she proposes, a community-policing model would be a second-best solution available, in which “police live in and interact regularly with the community” (Fast 2014, p. 244).

### Conclusion

The findings of the two books serve as a solid basis for the study of humanitarian action and push further research on humanitarian action, not only in a strictly humanitarian context but also with respect to a broader theoretical scope. *The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention* provides a comprehensive and critical approach to the norm of non-intervention and offers a good overview of the recent studies regarding armed humanitarian intervention in the context of conditional sovereignty. The essays in the edited volume are a valuable source to use in classes devoted to ethics of armed

humanitarian intervention. While impressively argued, Larissa Fast’s *Aid in Danger* critically examines the reasons why humanitarian workers and agencies become targets of violence and offers possibilities for further explorations of the proper approaches adopted to protect humanitarian workers and agencies from violence.

Taken together, the books unearth as many questions as they resolve and the problems produced by interventions will probably “never be completely resolved” (Glanville 2014, p. 165). Regarding the motivations of armed humanitarian intervention, it remains difficult to distinguish between those who use a political cause to pursue humanitarianism and those who pursue humanitarianism for political interests. Moreover, if an armed humanitarian intervention is justified, how are the costs of potential damage accounted for? In addition, are humanitarians and their organizations responsible to vulnerable populations or the donors? How is it possible to avoid violence against humanitarian workers? Further inquiry into these questions is called for in research on humanitarian action.

To conclude, both publications are certainly to be recommended for general readers who are interested in humanitarian action as well as professionals of humanitarianism, international security, and international relations. Without doubt, they will appeal to a wide audience of scholars, policy-makers, humanitarian workers, and students for many years to come.

### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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