Foreign policy and humanitarian action: an agenda for inquiry

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1 Introduction

The state is a key stakeholder in the humanitarian sector: it is states that are responsible, in law, for ensuring the protection and welfare of people in crisis – whether in their own or other countries. In practice, the roles that states perform in humanitarian crises vary: they are aid financiers and donors, service providers, aid recipients, partners to humanitarian organisations but also often conflict parties, obstacles to humanitarian access and violators of international humanitarian and human rights law. For the purpose of this research agenda, the state is considered primarily in relation to its role as a donor/financier, diplomat or an otherwise potentially benevolent third-party actor in humanitarian crises.

Although a relatively insignificant area of activity and interest, including compared to development aid, states' engagement in international humanitarian action is intrinsically linked to global, regional and national politics. How a state seeks to achieve or promote its interests or objectives in relation to other states is a key driver of its involvement in humanitarian action; and how a state views itself in the evolving global or regional order has a substantial impact on its aid decisions and practices.

Over the last decade or more, the international community of states engaging in humanitarian action – long dominated by the United States and Europe – has evolved significantly, in line with shifts in global power dynamics. Following rapid economic growth, many states not previously particularly active in this sphere are increasingly becoming global humanitarian actors and have been challenging traditional 'Western' approaches and leadership of the international humanitarian system. Between 2006 and 2015, the share of publicly reported international humanitarian assistance from non-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors trebled, to 12% (DI, 2016). The result has been an ever-widening diversity of states' aid objectives, priorities and approaches to humanitarian action.

Much of the recent academic and policy discussion of the rise of developing countries and new powers on the international scene, and their role in international

Box 1: Humanitarian action

With regard to humanitarian aid, this paper refers to assistance and activities that include 'the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods' and which aim 'to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations' (GHD, 2003).

humanitarian action, has been negative. Analysis has focused on the differences between states, while offering limited consideration of the *similarities* in how states engage in humanitarian action overseas and what this may mean for international and non-governmental humanitarian organisations. In reality, though it varies over time and in relation to different crises, there is one principal commonality amongst *all* states engaging in humanitarian action – the influence of their foreign policy agenda on their international humanitarian strategies, policies and decisions.

Theoretically, the rationale for humanitarian action by third-party states is clearly defined in international law and policy: Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions asserts, in relation to situations of armed conflict, that states are required to 'ensure respect' for international humanitarian law,[1] and in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991 and subsequent resolutions member states have repeatedly committed themselves to the principle of 'humanity' and to addressing human suffering in disasters and emergencies around the world. However, notwithstanding their long-held commitments to upholding humanitarian law and principles, it is

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1 See for example Dormann and Serralvo (2014).

clear that foreign policy considerations, including national security, the economy and trade, and the desire for regional and global recognition or power, are crucial factors in determining a state's international humanitarian aid priorities, objectives and approaches.

Whilst the relationship between a state's foreign policy and its role in humanitarian action is not a new subject of debate, developments in recent years highlight the increasing complexity of the relationship between these two spheres of state action – particularly in relation to the dynamic changes in the global and regional order and evolving threats to global, regional and national security. This complexity can perhaps be considered as a conflict between *interest*-based and *values*-based decision-making: the tension between a state's national interests and its international legal – and even moral – obligations. This conflict plays out for example in the tensions between states' commitments to international humanitarian law and the pursuit

of national security and economic objectives. This increasing complexity offers both opportunities and challenges to humanitarian organisations that wish to engage these states for financial, political or diplomatic support in achieving their own humanitarian objectives. A greater understanding of this relationship is essential if humanitarians are to overcome the significant challenges and exploit the opportunities that come with state engagement in humanitarian action.

This paper is part of a larger research project conducted by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI into the links between a state's foreign policy and humanitarian action. This preliminary paper outlines the state of current knowledge in this field and highlights key research gaps. It then sets out a series of research themes aimed at supporting increased understanding of the connections between humanitarian action and foreign policy, the challenges posed and the opportunities offered to enhance global humanitarian action.

2 The foreign policy environment

We are now in a new, fast evolving multipolar world economy – in which some developing countries are emerging as economic powers; others are moving towards becoming additional poles of growth; and some struggling to attain their potential within the new system. Robert Zoellick, President of the World Bank, April 2010 (cited in Wade, 2011).

In the last decade, there has been a profound shift in traditional global hierarchies (Amar, 2012). The US and Europe have lost global influence as a number of states with emerging or re-emerging economies have sought to obtain regional and international power and to challenge the hegemony of these long-dominant Western states (Kausch, 2015: 2; Scholvin, 2010). The BRICS countries in particular – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – have gained prominent roles on the international stage in line with their growing economic power and resource wealth, and have sought to collaborate around a common objective of reshaping global governance (Scholvin, 2010; Kappel, 2014). Recognising this, the European Union (EU) is forging partnerships with the BRICS (Kappel, 2014). Old rivalries, such as those between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Russia and the West, have intensified, while other relationships have improved, such as between Iran and the West. External and internal factors, including the UK's Brexit decision, have raised serious doubts as to the future of the EU and its global role.[2] There is also significant uncertainty about the trajectory of US foreign policy under the presidency of Donald Trump.

These new power configurations have become particularly prominent in relation to a series of global and regional political, economic and security developments. For the last five years, the international community has been grappling with a number of international crises: the Arab Spring and resulting internal armed conflict and political instability in a number of countries, including Libya; the armed conflict in Syria and its regional spill-over effects;

the global financial crisis and its impact on major Western economies; and the conflict between Russian separatists and Ukraine. Non-Western countries have asserted themselves as significant actors in, and in some cases leaders of, the international community's response to many of these crises. In particular, many of these states – including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Turkey and Brazil – are challenging traditional Western approaches and Western leadership of the international humanitarian response (Binder and Meier, 2011; White, 2011).

Humanitarian policy and academic debates have tended to treat these non-Western states as 'new' or 'emerging' in this field, and have made unfavourable comparisons with the 'traditional' Western states that engage in humanitarian action, considering them largely through the lens of 'realist' rather than 'liberalist' international relations theory (Dreher et al., 2011; Fuchs and Klann, 2012; Binder et al., 2010; Kragelund, 2008). Realist approaches focus on the concept of competition between states, and the rational pursuit of national interests to ensure their survival and power (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013). In analysing the role of these 'rising global actors', it is important to argue different frames of reference. In particular, liberalists use the framing of international cooperation and ethics to argue that conflict is not inevitable, but something that can be mitigated through social relationships. This is built on the idea of an international community which pursues democracy, human rights and free trade, whether through informal or formal collective and multilateral structures such as the UN (Weber, 2005).

While a useful lens, relying on the dichotomy of 'realist' versus 'liberalist' theories of international relations is simplistic for several reasons. First, non-Western donor states such as China, Brazil, Russia, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have engaged in international aid for many decades, and many have long histories of charitable giving (Krebs, 2014; Kragelund, 2010; Li, 2012; Barakat and Zyck, 2010; Brezhneva and Ukhova, 2013; White, 2011). Their terminology and definitions of aid and their aid practices may not reflect Western policies or

2   See for example Politico (2016); Banks and O'Mahoney (2016); Chonghaile (2016); Irwin (2016).

concepts, but these are nonetheless 'humanitarian' traditions. There are also often concerns that these donors conflate their humanitarian and development aid. The King Salman Center of Saudi Arabia, for example, sees humanitarian and development assistance as inseparable from one another, and funds both development projects as well as responding to immediate needs on the ground.[3] China takes a similar view, and favours bilateral, government-to-government responses. That said, DAC donor states too are charged with expanding previously

agreed definitions of 'aid', including for example the domestic costs of hosting refugees and seeking to include some military expenditure.

Second, all available evidence indicates that there is in fact huge diversity in approach, priorities and motivations across *all* donors, Western and non-Western, with both 'good' and 'bad' practices across the board. Looking at the larger picture, there is one principal commonality among all third-party humanitarian actors, namely that their humanitarian aid strategies are intrinsically tied to their foreign policy goals.

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3   HPG interview, Riyadh, 14 February 2016.

3 Policy drivers

3.1 National interest

There is a clear link between a state's foreign policy interests and its engagement in international humanitarian action. Whilst this relationship has a long history, foreign policy has increasingly dominated humanitarian aid decisions in the post-9/11 period in particular (Macrae et al., 2002: 63). In reference to the US, for example, 'the line separating the [US government's] humanitarian stake from our other key foreign policy goals has been erased: these issues have become deeply embedded in one another' (Halperin and Michel, 2000: 8; see also Rowlands, 2008; DI, 2014).

Within the broad concept of 'foreign policy' there are a number of specific factors influencing states' humanitarian action, including national security, economic or commercial interests and the attainment of international and regional power or influence. The primacy of these factors in aid decision-making evolves over time, from crisis to crisis, and in relation to both the external environment and internal domestic factors.

3.1.1 Humanitarian action and national security

The use of humanitarian and development aid as a tool in national security strategies is by no means a new phenomenon. Aid was a key component of security strategies on both sides during the Cold War (Boschini and Olofsgard, 2007; Meernik et al., 1998). The US targeted aid to countries aligned with the Soviet Union in an attempt to encourage them to switch allegiance, and the Soviet Union provided vast volumes of aid to its allies – $26 billion in 1986 alone (Drury et al., 2005; Brezhneva and Ukhova, 2013; Binder et al., 2010).

Since the events of 9/11, however, there has been a marked upward shift in this regard, with humanitarian action explicitly integrated in unilateral and multilateral efforts to 'stabilise' countries or areas deemed to pose an international security threat, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia (Collinson, Elhawary and Muggah, 2010; Fishtein, 2010; Bradbury and Kleinman, 2010; Gompelman, 2011; Gordon, 2011). The US military in particular has provided vast amounts of assistance in such contexts in order to obtain intelligence for military operations, to engender local support for its presence and to extend the authority of US-backed local and national authorities – for example, in 2013 it reported expenditure of $140 million in Afghanistan, mainly on infrastructure and water supply projects (Huber, 2015). In disaster response, the deployment of US military assets is permitted only when it also serves US national security interests (Oxfam, 2012; Margesson, 2013).

The UK has also used humanitarian aid both to support military and security operations and in relation to political and security objectives. For example, despite its military drawdown from the region, the UK government has continued to use 'humanitarian aid to achieve British security goals' in the Middle East (Bryce, 2014). The UK has spent £1.2 billion on humanitarian financing for Syria and the region in an effort to discourage refugees from attempting to reach the UK (Stone, 2016). The government has also repeatedly justified its relatively high humanitarian aid spending, particularly during the current period of austerity, to the British public by explicitly linking its aid efforts to national security (Slack, 2016; PMO, 2014; Holmes, 2012; HM Treasury, 2015).

The GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have also sought to use humanitarian aid to further their national security and strategic interests. Their more assertive aid and political engagement in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon in recent years is seen as an effort to address regional security threats, including sectarian tensions. The same is true for Turkey, whose humanitarian action in the Middle East had surged in an effort to support regional stability, even before the Syria conflict began (ICG, 2010). South Korea has focused the bulk of its aid on security interests – namely its relations with North Korea (Yoo, 2009; Binder et al., 2010).

Humanitarian organisations have been highly critical of such approaches, arguing that the use of humanitarian aid to achieve military or security

objectives has placed beneficiaries, aid workers and even the entire humanitarian enterprise at significant risk (Oxfam, 2012; DARA, 2010; Jackson and Haysom, 2013; Svoboda, 2014; Moseley, 2009; Macdonald and Valenza, 2012). There is however limited concrete data to support these concerns beyond anecdotal accounts.

Since the events of 9/11, a number of states, including the US, the UK, Australia and Canada, as well as the EU, have adopted legal and policy measures aimed at curbing international terrorism. In practice, such measures – particularly those of the US – are adversely affecting the manner in which international humanitarian aid is provided, including the choice of recipient countries or organisations and even which populations can receive the aid some donors fund (Belaon, 2014; Metcalfe-Hough, Keatinge and Pantuliano, 2015; Mackintosh and Duplat, 2013; Oxfam, 2012). For example, banking restrictions on money transfers aimed at disrupting terrorist finances have also constrained aid organisations from operating in contexts including Somalia and Syria.

3.1.2 Economic and commercial interests
From a very practical perspective, a state's economic status and economic objectives have a significant bearing on their engagement in international humanitarian action. Economic and trade interests influence a state's decisions regarding what crises they allocate aid to and how much they give (though the evidence is less clear on humanitarian as opposed to development aid). Some research indicates that access to oil in recipient states is often key in the aid decision-making process (Fink and Radaelli, 2009: 3). Domestic business leaders and federations have also been influential in aid decisions, in some cases lobbying for increased aid to facilitate access to markets in recipient countries, as was reportedly the case with Turkey's engagement in Somalia (Binder and Erten, 2013). In the post-EU referendum period, the UK government has signalled that it is refocusing its aid budget on supporting British trade opportunities with developing states, though it is unclear whether this will include humanitarian as well as development assistance (see for example Slack, 2016; Swinford and Riley-Smith, 2016).

The much-propagated assumption that donor states use aid purely to further overseas commercial interests is not entirely borne out by the available evidence. Rather, economic interests are one of

multiple factors that influence aid decisions (Dreher et al., 2011). As regards China, for example, there is a widely held perception that its development and humanitarian aid is being used primarily in support of its business interests, for example in Myanmar and in a number of African countries. While this is an element of Chinese strategy, China too has multiple, competing interests in its international relations that go beyond simply economic, including diplomatic, reputational and security priorities (Hirono, forthcoming).

3.1.3 Gaining political power and influence
The use of humanitarian aid to gain regional or international power and influence is also a common thread in states' behaviour. As Scholvin (2010) and Rowlands (2008) discuss in relation to many so-called 'new' donors, aid is often prioritised for neighbouring countries in an effort to attain or demonstrate regional leadership and influence. For example, Brazil took a leading role in the 2010 Haitian earthquake response, including co-chairing the donor conference, increasing its troop contribution to the UN mission MINUSTAH and making a significant contribution to the humanitarian appeal, all in an effort to demonstrate its regional leadership and to counter US military and political dominance (Binder et al., 2010). Turkey's growing role as a humanitarian actor in the Middle East – both as a humanitarian donor and via its engagement in humanitarian diplomacy – is in part attributed to efforts to augment its standing in the region and repair long-standing divisions between Ankara and the wider Muslim world stemming from its alignment with the US during the Cold War (ICG, 2010; Saferworld and IPC, 2015). In the post-conflict response in Lebanon in 2006, Iran and the Sunni Gulf donor states entered into an extraordinary competition with each other to provide assistance to specific communities in an effort to entrench their respective political and religious affiliations in the country and assert their regional dominance (Barakat and Zyck, 2008; Barakat and Zyck, 2010; Harmer and Martin, 2012). Similarly, Qatar has in recent years taken a key role in conflict mediation efforts in Yemen and Lebanon and between the Sudanese government and Darfuri rebels in an attempt 'to burnish its diplomatic credentials and carve out an image as an important regional player' (Barakat, 2014: 1).

Many so-called 'new' donor states are also often charged with using aid (development and humanitarian) to demonstrate that they are responsible members of the wider international community (Hirono and Neill,

2012: 14; Krebs, 2014a). Brazil, India and South Africa have reportedly used their role as international aid actors to further their claim to a seat on an expanded UN Security Council, which in turn is part of their on-going effort to reform global governance structures (Kragelund, 2010; De la Fontaine, 2007). Using aid to gain favour or compliance in an effort to attain or retain global authority is also prevalent among more established donors: Oxfam (2012) asserts that the five major Western humanitarian donors give aid to countries whose UN voting patterns are not aligned with Western states' interests, as a means of encouraging their future political support.

Humanitarian aid can also be used to improve or repair a donor state's image overseas. The US Congress has called for more visible labelling of the relief supplies the US provides to conflict-affected people in Syria to demonstrate US 'solidarity' (Margesson, 2013). The US has also been accused of using large volumes of aid provided to Indonesia in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and to the 2005 Pakistan earthquake response to repair its reputation among Muslims following its military operations in the Middle East (Jia, 2015). These efforts have not, however, been particularly effective, and the impact on popular opinion has been minimal (Wike, 2012). Other donor states have used similar tactics: earlier this year, Saudi Arabia established a $540 million relief effort – 'Operation Restoring Hope' – in Yemen and pledged to fund the entire UN emergency appeal for conflict-affected people in the country, reportedly in response to negative reactions at home and abroad to the impact of its bombing campaign on Yemeni civilians (Ghattas, 2015; BBC News, 2015; Al Arabiya, 2015; Arab News, 2015).

It would be wrong to assume that only these core foreign policy objectives influence a state's decision whether, how and when to engage in overseas humanitarian crises. Certainly, cultural, religious and historical ties can also play a part. For example, in the Ebola response in West Africa, the US, France and the UK all took substantial roles in affected countries with which they had long-term connections – Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone respectively (PAC, 2015). As Fink and Radaelli (2009: 12) conclude, 'former colonies are 25–30 percentage points more likely to receive aid after natural disasters' from Western donors. Gulf states have regularly given large tranches of financial and in-kind support and engaged diplomatically in crises in their region, including Lebanon, Palestine and more recently Yemen.

3.2 The humanitarian imperative

While foreign policy influence on a state's engagement in humanitarian action is largely inevitable, it does not automatically rule out 'humanitarian' or moral considerations, particularly where this is framed as embodying values such as humanity and contributing to supra-national aims such as human rights and international peace and stability. Even in the US, which receives regular criticism for failing to uphold humanitarian principles, the influence of foreign policy varies: 'how [humanitarian aid] is used and whether it becomes more of a strategic policy tool depends on the situation, what other governments are doing and the degree to which the US has further interest in the region' (Margesson, 2013: 14). Commentators have also asserted that, although in the past China was unable to 'cede a leading position to humanitarian principles [in its aid practice] due to the international political environment and China's own limited economic capacity at the time', its current humanitarian aid strategy 'amply embodies the humanitarian character' (Li, 2012: 50).

States often engage in humanitarian action – whether through the provision of financial or in-kind aid or diplomatic intervention – on the basis of a moral or religious obligation, or out of a sense of solidarity. Although this is not always described in terms of humanitarian principles or international legal obligations, these concepts can be viewed as in alignment with the core principle of humanity. For example, religious obligations or practices such as *zakat* are a key driver of aid provision by Turkey and the GCC countries to other Muslim populations in need (Binder and Erten, 2013). Engagement in humanitarian diplomacy is seen by some governments as a moral obligation (Barakat, 2014), and investment by disaster-prone states in disaster relief operations overseas is motivated, at least in part, by a feeling of empathy with other populations going through similar trauma (Binder and Conrad, 2009; Binder et al., 2010; White, 2011; Drury et al., 2005). For many states in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), what they regard as their long-held socialist, liberal ethos motivates their behaviour as humanitarian actors (De la Fontaine, 2007; Kragelund, 2010; Harmer and Cotterell, 2005; Binder et al., 2010). Governments also often respond to the moral considerations and values of their own citizens: the UK regularly matches public donations to high-profile crises and funds from some GCC countries and Turkey are regularly combined with public

donations as part of the state's contribution to crises in Somalia, Pakistan and the Middle East (Young, 2015; Binder and Erten, 2013).

Humanitarian organisations often argue that foreign policy considerations skew donor aid allocations in a manner that has frequently resulted in people most in need of assistance being passed over in favour of crises of greater strategic interest to the donor community – evidenced, it is often said, by the consistent variation in funding levels for different crises (Harmer and Cotterell, 2005; Harmer and Martin, 2012; Fink and Radaelli, 2009; Oxfam, 2012; DARA, 2010; DARA, 2011). However, it is also the case that states have expended the largest sums of aid money (billions of dollars) and, arguably, diplomatic effort, in the world's largest, most acute and most complex humanitarian crises – such as Darfur in 2004–2005, the Gaza Strip in 2010 and Syria and neighbouring refugee-hosting states since 2011, though admittedly with limited success in terms of securing an end to human suffering in these conflicts. Humanitarian financing provided by states has increased year on year, with $18.7 billion provided in 2014, up by 24% compared with 2013 (GHA, 2015). Admittedly, these increases have not kept pace with increasing humanitarian demand, from protracted crises in particular: 96.6 million people in 40-plus countries needed life-saving assistance in 2016, but only 46% of the costs had been met by October 2016, according to OCHA (OCHA, 2016).

3.3 Geopolitical alliances, tensions and mistrust

Foreign policy is primarily concerned with how states engage with each other – how they position themselves vis-à-vis each other – and the nature of this relationship, the alliances and tensions between states, has a direct bearing on if and how they engage in new and on-going humanitarian crises.

Formal alliances on humanitarian action among Western states include global mechanisms such as the DAC, the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative and donor support groups to individual UN agencies (Rowlands, 2008). These mechanisms are characterised by formalised common policies and benchmarks for good practice, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of collective aid responses. Non-Western states have tended to form looser bilateral or multilateral coalitions focused around shared values such as those of the NAM and the principles of South–South Cooperation. More recently, though, formal mechanisms for cooperation at regional or global level have developed, such as ASEAN's Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance in disaster management (AHA Centre, established in 2011) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)'s Humanitarian Affairs Department (ICHAD, established in 2008) (Fan and Krebs, 2014; Svoboda et al., 2015). These regional mechanisms are increasingly important in providing operational frameworks for neighbours or groupings of states to collaborate in preparing for and responding to crises. Such collaborations tangibly demonstrate solidarity and provide opportunities for dialogue on issues that may be less contentious at a regional level.

Historically, there has been a distinct lack of effective cooperation on international humanitarian action between Western and non-Western states. Few non-Western states participate in global humanitarian donor mechanisms: for example, until recently South Korea was the only non-DAC member of the GHD group (Binder et al., 2010). This lack of cooperation is linked to the lack of trust many Western states have in 'new' donors, believing that they will undermine 'good' practices by providing support to 'bad' regimes and providing aid on the basis of strategic interests rather than needs (Binder and Meier, 2011; Binder et al., 2010; Kragelund, 2010; Rowlands, 2008; Naim, 2007; Dreher et al., 2011; Fuchs and Klann, 2012). For non-Western states, engagement in these fora is not particularly attractive because they appear overly bureaucratic and are very Western-dominated (Rowlands, 2008; Binder and Meier, 2011). However, the GHD group now has a wider membership, including 13 non-DAC members.

Although these distinct blocs have tended to work separately, more recently there has been a discernible push or interest in working more collaboratively on humanitarian action – as evidenced in the (somewhat 'dynamic') relationship between Russia and the West on the Syria conflict, as well as EU engagement with the BRICS, increasing engagement from GCC countries in DAC fora and the collective commitments made by 180 states at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. There have also been some surprising

ad hoc bilateral alliances aimed at enhancing aid responses, such as the collaboration between Cuba and the UK in the recent international response to the West African Ebola epidemic, where Cuban doctors worked in UK-established and -run treatment centres.

Tensions between the DAC states and China, Russia and other non-DAC governments often relate to a fundamental difference of view regarding the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference. These principles are a core element of the NAM and South–South Cooperation and shape the engagement of many of these states in humanitarian action: for example, most NAM countries appear to prefer to provide aid in natural disasters, where it is more likely to be coordinated through the national government, rather than imposed by the international community (White, 2011). Divergent views on these principles are particularly evident in relation to Western-led 'humanitarian intervention' in conflict- or crisis-affected states – a concept that the NAM states have specifically rejected (NAM, 2003).

China's strong views in this regard have caused particular tensions because of the country's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Reflecting the position of the Chinese state, Chinese scholars have long rejected 'humanitarian intervention' as an instrument of power politics used by Western countries to achieve strategic interests such as regime change (Fu, 1998; Yang, 2000; Zhang and Pan, 2000; Wang, 2002; Chi, 2006; He, 2006; Chen, 2012; Huang, 2012). China's repeated veto of UN Security Council action in the Syria conflict on this basis has drawn vociferous criticism from Western states and consolidated negative perceptions of China's 'humanitarian' agenda.

Western states' views of non-Western states in relation to their aid practices are, however, contradictory and not entirely accurate. First, there is evidence to attest to the failure of OECD-DAC donor states to comply with the aid norms and standards they have committed themselves to over the years: DARA's Humanitarian Response Index, for example, reveals that humanitarian aid decisions taken by DAC donors in respect of ten of the 14 most prominent humanitarian crises in 2010 were influenced by non-humanitarian interests (DARA, 2010). There is also a wealth of literature on the use of humanitarian aid by Western states for military and security purposes. Second, non-Western donors may be outperforming their Western counterparts in some respects: the latter tend to provide far more support for national leadership and national capacities than OECD-DAC donors do despite their commitments in that regard (Harmer and Martin, 2012).[4]

3.4 Aid decision-making processes and foreign policy influence

Some commentators have suggested that the influence of foreign policy on a state's humanitarian action is in part related to the nature of that state's political system and how this relates to the bureaucracy charged with managing humanitarian action. The proximity of the officials responsible for aid decisions to the executive or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is key (Arel-Bundock et al., 2015): the closer the relationship between aid decision-makers and the political and foreign policy hierarchy, the more likely it is that a state's aid decisions will be influenced by foreign policy interests. In Canada, a distinct humanitarian team in the 'integrated' ministry Global Affairs Canada manages humanitarian spending, and the UK government established a separate cabinet-level ministry for aid, separate to the Foreign Office, in 1997. However, even where states have sought to structurally separate aid budgets and related bureaucracy, this has not necessarily insulated aid decisions from political or foreign policy influence, or meant that aid policies are more needs-based or principled (Rowlands, 2008). For example, the assertion by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) that UK humanitarian aid 'will be based on need and need alone' contrasts starkly with the stated intention of former Prime Minister David Cameron to use aid as a tool in counter-terrorism strategies (UK government, 2011: 5), and more recently with new aid minister Priti Patel's announcements regarding aid for trade. Legislative arrangements can limit the degree to which aid decisions are insulated from political decisions. For example, the US Congress has allowed a degree of flexibility in the prioritisation of humanitarian aid, but has also continued to demand that it generate adequate political benefits for the US through the visibility and branding of its aid (Margesson, 2013: 13).

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4   Donor commitments on aid effectiveness are outlined in the Paris Declaration (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership Agreement for Effective Development Cooperation (2011).

4 Foreign policy and humanitarian action: a research agenda

4.1 Key themes in current knowledge

Preliminary analysis of major states' engagement in humanitarian action overseas indicates that a state's policy or decision-making in this area is invariably subject to foreign policy influence: indeed, it is often seen as a tool of or integral to foreign policy. The degree or nature of that influence appears to be affected by a number of discernable variables or factors, including:

- the political nature of the government and domestic political priorities and discourse;
- economic status and interests;
- the degree to which the crisis country is of strategic interest, and the nature of that strategic interest, including security, economic interests or cultural, religious or historical ties; and
- the wider international or regional geopolitical environment.

At the same time, there is evidence that 'humanitarian' or moral concepts and values – if not formal humanitarian principles and legal obligations – play an important role in decision-making, driven more by considerations of international values and the benefits of cooperation. The humanitarian imperative and foreign policy objectives or interests are not always mutually exclusive, and the balance between them is highly dynamic, changing from crisis to crisis and even through the lifecycle of a crisis, making it difficult to predict accurately how a specific state will respond to overseas humanitarian crises in future. Whilst there may be more evidence of patterns of behaviour among the DAC states – largely because there is more historical analysis of these countries – a high degree of change is still evident in individual patterns of behaviour over time.

Another emerging theme is the serious concern with which the humanitarian community at large views the link between a state's foreign policy and its engagement in humanitarian action. This concern relates to what are perceived as *inherent* tensions between foreign policy objectives and humanitarian principles. Humanitarian organisations argue that the clear influence of foreign policy on a state's engagement in humanitarian action undermines their ability to be perceived as independent, neutral and impartial, thereby compromising their safety and that of the people they are seeking to assist. These arguments are not always supported with concrete evidence of direct impact and there is limited analysis of how the behaviour of humanitarian organisations themselves – such as their funding policies or donor engagement – affects their ability to operate.

Concerns about the behaviour of states are even so legitimate. For instance, the GHD initiative can be seen as an attempt by a group of Western donors to acknowledge and manage the tensions between their political and humanitarian roles. But more than ten years since its establishment, GHD has had no major impact. There is little to suggest that their members' behaviour has worsened over this time but it certainly has not improved, as evidenced for example in Collinson et al. (2009)'s analysis of donor responses to the crises in Sri Lanka and Sudan or in the broader discussion of the international response to the crisis in Syria. Looking at the current engagement of some GCC states in the conflict in Yemen, their roles also raise serious concerns regarding stated commitments to both the normative framework of humanitarian action and their own traditional values and concepts of humanity.

4.2 Key knowledge gaps

There is no shortage of literature that discusses the role and behaviour of states in relation to

humanitarian, and development, interventions or action, including how this relates to foreign policy. However, there are a number of important gaps in current knowledge and analysis. First, much existing literature provides general comments across geographically or politically aligned groups of states, thus ignoring the diversity and changing behaviour of individual states in relation to humanitarian action and how and why this is linked to or influenced by foreign policy. Second, much of the literature is focused on states' roles as donors and relies on reported financial contributions to humanitarian responses to determine patterns of behaviour. Not only is such analysis often based on partial or inaccurate data sets due to the paucity of public reporting on aid disbursements, it also misses other significant areas of state action, including humanitarian diplomacy. Finally, and perhaps most starkly, the available analysis lacks in-depth discussion of where, how and to what extent foreign policy has been influenced by humanitarian considerations.

4.3 Focus areas for future research

The role of third-party states in humanitarian crises can be critical to their resolution – to achieving the political agreements which end conflicts and other emergencies, to ensuring access to life-saving assistance and services and building resilience against future crises, as well as ensuring better protection of affected populations and greater access for humanitarian organisations in the interim. This role is multi-faceted, involving in-kind, financial and political investments. How great that investment is – and how effective it can be – invariably relates to states' foreign policy agendas, driven, as we have seen, by a combination of interests and values. Understanding this is key to leveraging these investments to the benefit of those caught up in humanitarian crises around the world.

Most of the humanitarian literature on this topic automatically assumes that any links between a state's foreign policy objectives and humanitarian action are negative, but this ignores both the historical reality and the potential that these links may offer in terms of resolving humanitarian crises. There is some interesting historical analysis in the foreign policy literature regarding how foreign policy agendas and the wider geopolitical context affect a state's engagement in humanitarian action, such as pertaining to the Cold War and its immediate aftermath. However, there is little in-depth examination of how contemporary international relations are affecting cooperation between states engaging in crises or the humanitarian system at large, or what humanitarian diplomacy strategies are being or could be pursued. Such analysis may prove highly informative in terms of humanitarian organisations' engagement with states, particularly in relation to some of the most complex, protracted international crises.

Reframing consideration of non-DAC states in this regard would be particularly important. To date, discussion of their roles, motivations and potential has been limited because these questions have been analysed from a predominantly Western perspective, with limited engagement with representatives or other relevant actors in those states. Engaging directly with these actors, from an objective perspective, could provide a more in-depth understanding of the current and potential links and areas of collaboration between states and with other humanitarian actors.

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