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Humanitarian Soldier

Humanitarianly legitimized military interventions in global crisis zones, zones breeding instability—large-scale violence, sickness, military treats, and displacement—have become normalized in the post-Cold War era. Particularly after 9/11, humanitarianism has become multifariously entangled with the outright political and strategic international objectives of state actors. Many researchers have argued that during this time the so-called liberal Western states began to use humanitarian rationale, rhetoric, and practices as tools to advance their strategic objectives in global politics (Barnett 2011; Chandler 2002; Douzinas 2007). This trajectory fortified the collaboration and cooption between military and humanitarian actors, resulting in a blurring of the line between military, state, and humanitarian action and actors.

As a result of the politicization and militarization of humanitarianism, the operational environment in conflict areas has changed. The blurring of the boundaries between humanitarian non-governmental organizations and other actors—state, military, and counter insurgency—and their agendas in conflict zones has resulted in the shrinking of “humanitarian space.” Thus, the credibility of the neutrality of humanitarian actors and respect for humanitarian law has also decreased, ensuring an increased level of violence targeting

humanitarian workers and a decline in the access of vulnerable populations to aid (Acuto 2014). Moreover, the public imaginary and people's conceptions of and expectations regarding foreign conflict, crisis zones, and humanitarian/military presence in areas of action have also witnessed changes. The cooption and closer collaboration of humanitarianism and militarism have given birth to a figure that appropriately encapsulates and embodies the global politics of the politicized humanitarian system and the logics of the new wars: the humanitarian soldier.

The figure of the humanitarian soldier is apparent in the legitimizing speeches and the official and public relations contexts of post-9/11 military operations, and such a figure often becomes most apparent in visual form. The figure of the contemporary soldier employed in global crisis areas incorporates the physical and visual features of a humanitarian worker and a strong militarized soldier rolled into one, and therefore they corporally embody the merging of humanitarian and military action. For example, material released by the multinational NATO-led International Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan characterizes the key features of the new humane soldiers in global crisis zones. The ISAF soldiers are pictured as armed with state-of-the-art military equipment and presented as strong and determined in their fight against the Taliban. Yet, in addition to this, the soldiers are habitually shown distributing humanitarian aid, providing health care, tutoring local populations, helping to reconstruct the war-ravaged country, and humanely communicating and interacting with the locals (Kotilainen 2016).

Humanitarian soldiers embody the military-humanitarian ethos of post-9/11 global politics, and they represent the strong, care-giving, moral, yet militarized power of the "international community" and the "West" and of the "humanitarian international order" (Barnett 2010) at work on the ground in global crisis zones (De Lauri 2019; Kotilainen 2016). This figure, in public relations use, aspires to make Western warfare seem humane and conducted in accordance with the moral legitimization for such interventions. The humanitarian soldier is therefore well suited to winning over the hearts and minds of the domestic populations of the warring states. Furthermore, in addition to these deliberate objectives, the strong, militarized, yet compassionate soldiers create a symbolic contrast with the local, less-developed objects in need of help and tutelage, an image that embodies strong colonial undertones and poignantly echoes contemporary global hierarchies (Kotilainen 2016).

The humanitarian soldier is also deployed in non-military operations, for example in the massive intervention by the United States in Haiti after the 2010

earthquake, or in the intervention to help fight the West African Ebola epidemic of 2014–2015.

Noora Kotilainen

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Humanitarian War

In the post- World War II period, the newly created (1945) United Nations (UN) was hesitant to approve the idea of military intervention by a member state in the sovereign land of another member state, even in the case of alarming humanitarian situations. During the Cold War, geopolitics played an important role in rendering the UN Security Council ineffective as member states turned a blind eye to human rights violations of their political allies around the world (Roberts 1993).

The principle of non-intervention was the dominant norm within the UN system until the late 1980s, and member states would be expected to justify their interventionist actions based on the UN Charter's chapter concerning "threat to the international peace and security" so as not to receive condemnation and pushback from the UN (Vincent 2015). Yet, between World War II and the end of the Cold War, the world witnessed interstate wars (e.g. the Korean and Vietnam wars), political interventions through coup d'états (e.g. Nicaragua,