THE 'HUMANITARIAN FRONTLINE', DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF, AND RELIGION
WHAT CONTEXT, WHICH THREATS AND WHICH OPPORTUNITIES?

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence of a humanitarian frontline in several operational contexts. Over the last fifteen years and since 2001 in particular, the international aid sector has been confronted with a climate of polarization. With the traditional aid and donor landscape dominated by Western or Western-aligned parties who are sometimes involved in armed conflict too, aid organizations face the impact of the supposed or real instrumentalization of development and relief in a wider security and geopolitical control agenda. At the same time, Western or Western-associated secular development models that are often promoted by traditional aid have either encountered their limits or failure in several parts of the global periphery. The expanded space for religion due to globalization and the social changes that it causes have also expanded the space for faith-based development and relief actors, especially in operational situations that have a large cultural and ideological dimension. This paper focuses on the Islamic world and Islamic faith-based aid, but several factors and trends discussed in it bear relevance for Christian faith-based aid in majority Christian parts of the global periphery too.

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Muslim victims, Western benefactors? Pakistani earthquake victims in a tent of the Islamic aid organisation Al-Mustafa Welfare Society (Vince Gainey, 2006)

Over the last decade and since 2001 and 2003 in particular, the development and relief sector has been confronted with a global climate of polarization between what is seen as 'the West' on one hand and 'the Islamic world' on the other. What is seen as a civilizational and cultural conflict sometimes stands for a deeper confrontation, that between the haves, have-nots and the socially mobile of globalization. In the development and relief sector, there has been greater attention and focus on the Islamic world since, with attempts at certain levels and in certain operational and academic circles to understand the complexities better. Religion and religious actors are most often part of those complexities. If we connect this to humanitarian issues, the question arises as to what the role and importance of religion and faith-based actors in development and relief are. More importantly, in what global and sub-regional operational context do they operate?

The issue of faith-based development and relief is by no means unique to what is known or seen as the Islamic world. It is also very important in Christian parts of Africa to name but one example. It is also relevant for other religions even though Islam and Christianity are presently the largest and most dynamic religions and also those with the oldest and largest involvement in the aid sector. Nonetheless, as Benthall says, "few would argue that Christian NGOs such as CAFOD and Christian Aid are often able to make advantageous use of their confessional networks in majority Christian areas. Islamic charities in general have experienced considerable difficulties since late 2001 owing to suspicions on the part of some Western governments that they have been used as fronts for terrorist activities."[1] It is in the Islamic world that the association of religion and development and relief is controversial since it is situated against the background of a civilizational faultline and conflict. Has the humanitarian space become affected by the latter, and if so, how?

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1   Jonathan Benthall, "Have Islamic aid agencies a privileged relation-
     ship in majority Muslim areas? The case of post-tsunami reconstruc-
     tion in Aceh", The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, June 2008,
     e-journal on www.jha.ac

1. What is the humanitarian frontline?

> Look, like it or not, a lot of the international organizations have been tainted by the post-2001 events. People see these war images on CNN and Al Jazeera. At the grassroots level, many have difficulties to make a distinction between the Western military, the humanitarian NGOs, the UN Security Council and the US – for them they're all birds of a feather. And that has a fundamental impact on the way you are perceived and, thus, your security.
>
> HQ staff of Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2006

1.1. The 'clash of perceptions'

Even if the question gained prominence before 2001 in the wake of micro-regional and interconfessional conflicts as in Sudan and Bosnia for example, Iraq and Afghanistan are often put forward as the contexts where at least parts of the humanitarian space have clearly become a 'humanitarian frontline'. Donini and Minear, for instance, find that Iraq and Afghanistan have brought home the reality that humanitarian action is 'of the West' and is largely perceived as such in the global periphery.[2]

The web of linkages between Western politics, economics, values and behaviour, on the one side, and the posture and processes of humanitarian action on the other, are not altogether new, but the polarization resulting from Iraq and Afghanistan has brought these linkages into much starker view. The fact that traditional humanitarian action is largely funded by a small club of Western donors is also problematic in terms of universality. Equally problematic is the slighting of contributions from non-traditional sources falling outside standard Official Development Assistance definitions: contributions made by families, communities, and organizations in affected countries; diaspora remittances; and contributions from governments and other donors in the Islamic world. The contributions from this parallel universe, while substantial, remain unrecognized and largely unrecorded.[3]

Several elements pop up in Donini and Minear's analysis: the domination of aid by 'the West' or actors, development concepts and ideologies associated with it; the politicization of aid; and Iraq and Afghanistan as key cases in a new post-Cold War conflict and security paradigm characterized by asymmetrical warfare and supposed civilizational faultlines. New operational challenges arise at times when aid fits into a wider security and geopolitical control strategy. Duffield contextualizes this as follows:

With the ending of the Cold War, strategic alliances between metropolitan and Third World states, an important aspect of the former balance of power, lost their geopolitical rationale. Rather than enfeeblement and paralysis, however, out of the crisis of state-based security a new framework has taken shape. This security paradigm is not based upon the accumulation of arms and external political alliances between states but on changing the conduct of populations inside them. Within this new public-private security framework, stability is achieved by activities designed to reduce poverty, satisfy basic needs, strengthen economic sustainability, create representative civil institutions, protect the vulnerable and promote human rights: the name if this largely privatized form of security is 'development'.[4]

Duffield's analysis of aid is set in the emergence of a larger security agenda which is conceptualized by Fowler. In the space of some two decades, Fowler says, NGOs and other aid bodies have established a distinct, influential position within the international arena. Post-Cold War realities, characterized by a supposedly reluctant but necessary US hegemony, have invited increasingly violent reactions and the emergence of international insecurity with a new, complex configuration.
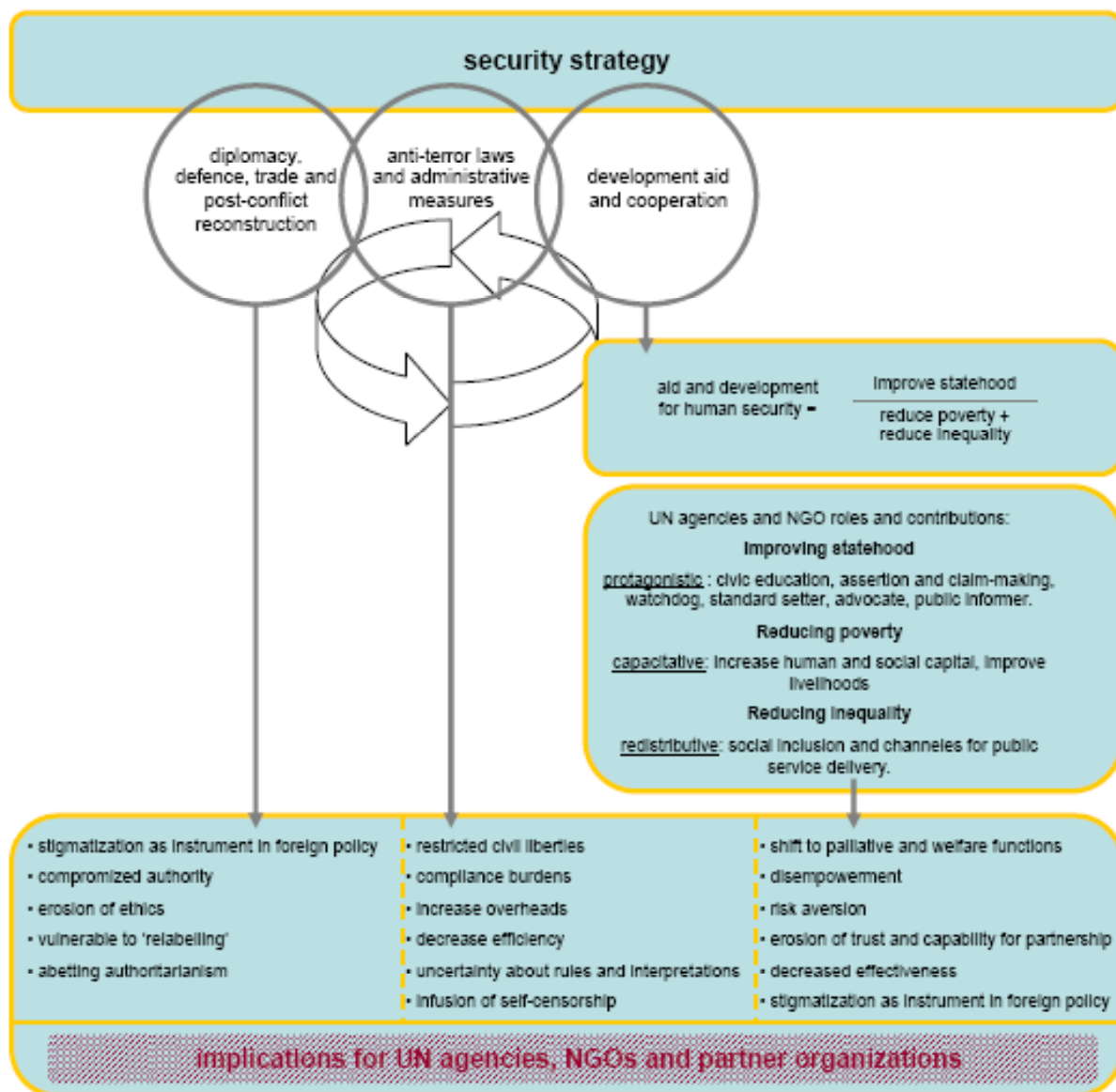
While perhaps elevated to global consciousness by the terror of Al-Qaeda, contemporary insecurity is not simply arising from a supposed clash of cultures, beliefs or civilizations. Insecurity also stems from deeper and wider responses against the disfunctions – in change-driven anxiety, in environmental unsustainibility, in inequality, in injustice – of an enforced globalization of free-market capitalism to which there is, apparently, no alternative possible or to be tolerated. At a world level at least, the relationship between growth and national and human security appears not virtuous but inherently destablizing.[5]

In the light of the ever-deepening reliance of non-governmental development organizations on official forms of aid, serious questions arise from the growing integration of overseas development assistance into a comprehensive security strategy for the West. Such a strategy is not uniformly employed by each donor country within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Nevertheless, the contours of an emerging development-for-security agenda

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2   Although the terms 'Third World' and 'the South' are still popular in common parlance and among authors, we feel that 'global periphery' is more adequate since it reflects the nature of global power balances better. 'The Third World' is basically a term related to the world order as it existed during the Cold War, whereas global peripheral areas are no longer necessarily situated 'South' of the US, the EU and Japan but also exist in the former Soviet Union, ex-Yugoslavia and even in enclaves in the West. Likewise, certain enclaves in 'the Third World' are now global economic centres.

3   Antonio Donini and Larry Minear (eds.), *Agenda humanitaire à l'horizon 2015. Principes, pouvoir et perceptions*, Les rapports du GRIP, 2007/1, Groupe de recherche et d'informations sur la paix et la sécurité and Feinstein International Centre, p. 17.

4   Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid", Disasters, 2001, 25(4), p. 310.

5   Alan Fowler, "Development and the New Security Agenda: W(h)ither(ing) NGO Alternatives?", in: Anthony J. Bebbington, Samuel Hickey and Diana C. Mitlin, *Can NGOs Make a Difference. The Challenge of Development Alternatives*, 2008, p. 113.

security strategy

diagrams:
- diplomacy, defence, trade and post-conflict reconstruction
- anti-terror laws and administrative measures
- development aid and cooperation

aid and development for human security = Improve statehood / reduce poverty + reduce inequality

UN agencies and NGO roles and contributions:

Improving statehood

protagonistic : civic education, assertion and claim-making, watchdog, standard setter, advocate, public informer.

Reducing poverty

capacitative: Increase human and social capital, improve livelihoods

Reducing inequality

redistributive: social inclusion and channels for public service delivery.

- stigmatization as instrument in foreign policy
- compromized authority
- erosion of ethics
- vulnerable to 'relabelling'
- abetting authoritarianism

- restricted civil liberties
- compliance burdens
- increase overheads
- decrease efficiency
- uncertainty about rules and interpretations
- infusion of self-censorship

- shift to palliative and welfare functions
- disempowerment
- risk aversion
- erosion of trust and capability for partnership
- decreased effectiveness
- stigmatization as instrument in foreign policy

implications for UN agencies, NGOs and partner organizations

seems likely to shape the possibility for NGOs either offering or becoming alternatives.[6]

The graphic above visualizes this paradigm as well as the various factors and levels that interact and contribute to the situation and the consequences for NGOs and UN agencies. We adapted Fowler's graphic by adding UN agencies besides NGOs as well as the partner organizations of each since they operate in the same context and face the same implications. We also visualized the interaction that takes place between the different pillars of security strategies of states and great powers.[7]

James stresses that independence of action and identity is a critical principle for humanitarians to maintain, yet in the circumstances examined above…
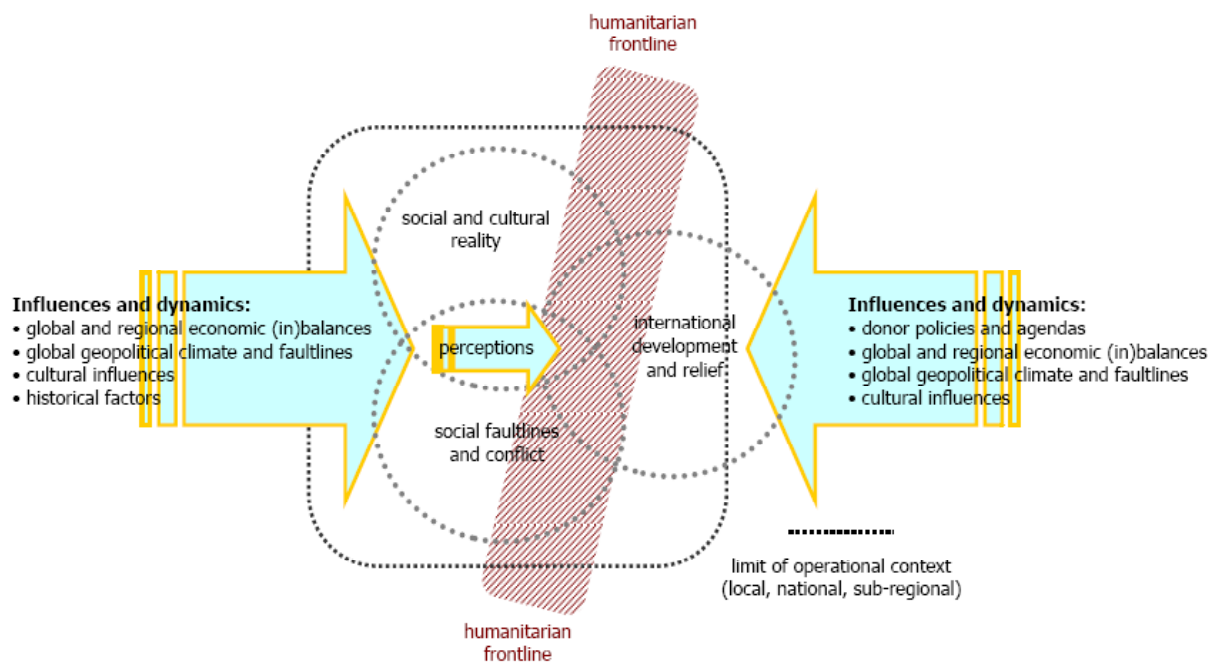
… this has (become) a contentious issue. One reason is that the aid industry relies on the donor market place for its existence and many humanitarian agencies rely heavily, sometimes exclusively, on donor governments that may be party to the conflict. A 'new aid paradigm' (…) came about in permanent emergencies where aid is often used by donor countries in lieu of political action and NGOs are simply contractors for government interests. A further manifestation of this issue is the blurring of the lines of distinction between humanitarians and the military in the field.[8]

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6   Ibidem.
7   Graphic created and adapted from the original by the author on the basis of that in Alan Fowler, *op. cit.* (see note 5), p. 112.

8   Eric James, "Two Steps Back: Relearning the Humanitarian-Military 'Lessons Learned' in Iraq and Afghanistan", The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, October 2003, e-journal on www.jha.ac . See also Mark Duffield, op. cit. (see note 4), pp. 310 and 312.

humanitarian
frontline

social and cultural
reality

Influences and dynamics:
• global and regional economic (in)balances
• global geopolitical climate and faultlines
• cultural influences
• historical factors

perceptions

international
development
and relief

social faultlines
and conflict

Influences and dynamics:
• donor policies and agendas
• global and regional economic (in)balances
• global geopolitical climate and faultlines
• cultural influences

limit of operational context
(local, national, sub-regional)

humanitarian
frontline

How do we situate the idea and concept of the humanitarian frontline therein? The term itself is sometimes used in NGO publications and fundraising materials for the place where the action is – where aid is being delivered. In this research, however, we approach it as something rather different. It is an operational context where various development and relief actors are perceived by populations and authorities as being instrumental in a political agenda of both governmental and non-governmental interest groups. These actors serve as vectors for spreading and promoting values, norms and forms of social organization that are often perceived as alien by local beneficiaries and both formal and informal leaders. Often, these agendas collide with the prevailing social dynamics in a given context, sometimes creating or enhancing social disparities between the agencies' international and national staff and local counterparts on one side, and local communities on the other.

The presence and activities of development and relief actors that are working under the influence of extraneous agendas fuel negative perceptions and misperceptions of other actors among the population and leadership structures. The operating space thereby becomes tainted for development and relief actors who seek to embody and promote values, norms and forms of social organization that are more compatible or less inconsistent with those of the beneficiaries base, and that engage with local counterparts who are either left out or are in competition with those of the extraneous development and relief actors. The outcome is competition or at least an occupation of competing humanitarian spaces between different categories of development and relief actors, some of whom are driven primarily by humanitarian ideals, and others that have consciously or de facto aligned or affiliated themselves with parties to regional or global conflict.[9]

The above graphic visualizes the humanitarian frontline as well as the factors that determine or facilate its formation. The 'frontline' is put in the same context and colour as the implications bar at the bottom of the graphic of Fowler's model since they overlap.
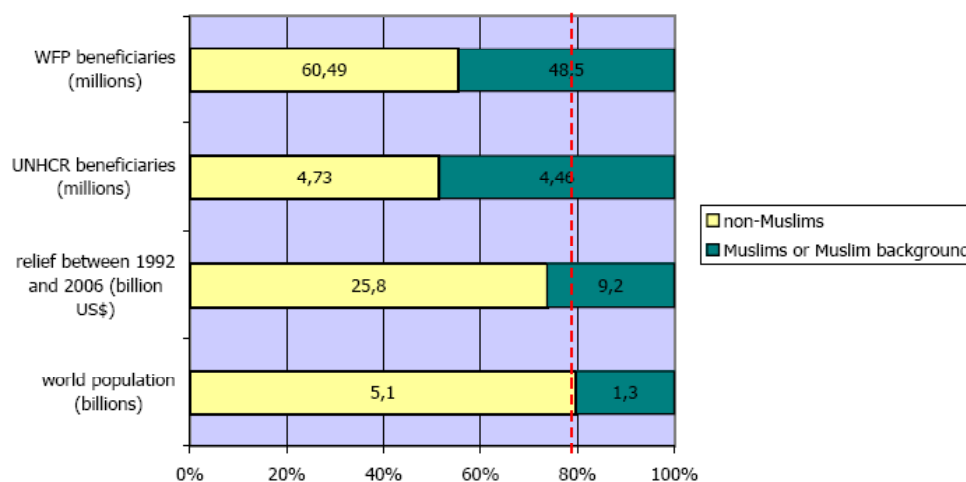
The concept of the humanitarian frontline or at least notions thereof had already appeared in the late 1980s and in the 1990s, more specifically in contexts like Sudan where Christian aid organizations were accused of being conduits for financial and technical support for Christian rebels in the south of the country, and Bosnia where certain Gulf-based Islamic charities were said to do the same among Bosnian Muslims. With growing impressions and imagery of a global civilizational conflict pitching 'the West' against 'the Islamic world', development and relief actors increasingly find themslevs in a situation where they are perceived to be instrumental in hidden 'neocolonial', 'Christian' or 'Islamist' agendas.

These perceptions do not appear out of the blue though. In a number contexts, there are definitely documented cases of aid organizations, often operating on the fringe of the development and relief sector but some large players too, who combine aid with religious proselitizing or use humanitarian aid as a front for such activities.[10] The proportions and impact

9   This definition has been compiled by the author with inputs from

Jonathan Benthall, Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University College of London and Greg Hansen, aid worker, researcher and author of the Iraq Country Study for Humanitarian Agenda 2015, Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University (e-mail exchanges of 20 May and 8 June 2007).

10   For a number of examples, see the chapter "De l'autre côté du miroir: les ONG chrétiennes", in Abdel Rahman Ghandour, Le Jihad humanitaire.Enquête sur les ONG islamiques, 2002, and especially pp. 292-308. By the same author, "Humanitarianism, Islam and the West: contest or cooperation?", Humanitarian Exchange, № 25, 2003, pp. 14-15. Other examples, in North Iraq this time, include IRIN

	non-Muslims	Muslims or Muslim background
WFP beneficiaries (millions)	60,49	48,5
UNHCR beneficiaries (millions)	4,73	4,46
relief between 1992 and 2006 (billion US$)	25,8	9,2
world population (billions)	5,1	1,3

of this phenomenon vary from context to context yet combined with other factors, its presence definitely stains the hallmark of neutrality of Western and international aid workers. This is especially the case when it happens in a polarized global climate. A field manager of a large non-confessional Western NGO in Tajikistan told, for example:

> There are Christian missionaries in the country who run humanitarian programmes and English and computer courses as a cover for proselityzing. That's basically what they do. Even if it is not a massive phenomenon, it's there and it stains bona fide organizations even where you have 'Islam light' as compared to Afghanistan or Arab countries. For example, I'm a US citizen and I work for an organization that focuses on education and orphanages. The problem is, so do many of these Christian missionaries. So we definitely feel increasing suspicion from communities as well as local authorities where we work.[11]

An emergency manager of a large Islamic NGO who worked in Lebanon and North Kenya shared a similar experience:

> I had it often when I introduced myself to communities and authorities in the field, that they asked me: 'which Islamic Relief do you represent: that from Saudi Arabia or that from the UK'?[12]

Humanitarian News & Analysis, "IRAQ: Sunni extremists threaten to kill Christian converts in North" and "IRAQ: Aid organizations reaffirm secular, humanitarian principles", IRIN portal, www.irinnews.org, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 21 and 23 May 2007.

11 Interview with Tom McCormack, Country Programme Director, Save the Children Tajikistan, 23 October 2006. For more on this issue, see Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Humanitarian engagement with armed groups. The Central Asian Islamic opposition movements, 2003 and especially pp. 35-37.

12 Marc-André Lagrange, Researcher and former Emergency Manager for Islamic Relief, at the conference *Diversité culturelle et confes-*

1.2. Have-nots, benefactors and conventional truths

Which factors and trends have contributed to the emergence of a humanitarian frontline and in what fields and at what levels does the existence of such a frontline show itself the most? In our opinion, four factors and trends are important therein:

- the disproportional representation of Muslims or populations of Islamic background among the aid beneficiaries in the world;
- the dominance of the global development and relief sector by Western or Western-associated institutions, donors and non-governmental organizations;
- the stagnation or failure of Western or Western-associated secular development models and the come-back of religion in the global periphery;
- the erosion of the image of neutrality of the western-international development and relief sector.

We discuss them more in detail now.

1.2.1. The disproportional representation of Muslims or populations of Islamic background among the aid beneficiaries

It is often thought that Muslims form a disproportional share of the needy and aid beneficiaries as compared to their overall proportion in the world's population. At first

sionelle, une chance pour l'humanitaire de demain?, Secours islamiques, Altermondes and Coordination Sud, Paris, 24 May 2008. The 'Saudi Islamic Relief' of which the respondent speaks is the quasi-namesake International Islamic Relief Foundation or IRRO which is, although not a state institution, closely connected to the official religious establishment of Saudi Arabia.

glance, the figures confirm this. According to the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), for example, of an estimated 1.3 billion Muslims (20.4% of the world's population), some 522 million or nearly half are believed to live in absolute poverty. Of the IBD's 55 members, 27 or half belong to the low income category.[13] According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, of a total of US$35 billion raised in humanitarian appeals since 1992, more than US$9 billion, or 27%, was spent in majority Muslim contexts.[14] Likewise, of the world's 9.2 million refugees registered by the UN High Commissioner on Refugees in 2004, some 48.5% were of Muslim background, just like 43.2% of the 23.7 million Internally Displaced Persons due to armed conflict in 2005. Of the World Food Programme's 109 million beneficiaries in 2005, 44.5% were of Muslim background.[15] Several of these figures are schematized in the graphic on page 6. It shows the share of beneficiaries of Islamic background as compared to the overall share of Muslims in the world's population in 2004, except where indicated otherwise.[16]

In these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that Muslims are traditionally perceived as the receiving end rather than initiators and benefactors of development and relief activities. It would be commonplace to say that the reality is more complex, hence we bring in a couple of nuances. First, Islamic charity, development and relief do exist and in ways which challenge the stereotypes associated with it over the last half decade. Much of Islamic charity is informal or not recorded as accurately as that of the 'classical' donors though. Secondly, chronic instability and structural poverty are also widespread in non-Islamic regions, like the Great Lakes region in Africa for example. Third, majority Muslim countries like Turkey, the Gulf states and Iran, to name a few, cannot be called particularly or extremely poor. Some are donors of humanitarian aid. And fourth, in the cases of countries with large Muslim

populations (182.2 million in Indonesia, 136.9 million in Pakistan and about 115 million in Bangladesh) or large Muslim minorities (108.6 million in India), substantial poverty rates – something that is not limited to the Islamic world – logically translate into high absolute numbers of poor and potential beneficiaries.

On the other hand, as the set of maps on page 8 show, several conflict zones, poverty areas and risk zones for natural disasters are indeed situated in what is known as the Islamic world.[17] One of the causes lies in patterns of colonialism and neo-colonialism combined with local social hierarchies that consolidate and perpetuate structural poverty. More importantly, the area of the Islamic cultural sphere largely overlaps one the physical geography of which is characterized by an abundance of strategic raw materials, oil and natural gas in the first place. This causes geopolitical competition and resource wars for the control of these resources. It has also a physical geography that is more vulnerable to natural disasters, earthquakes, regular droughts and deltaic floods in particular. Also, throughout its modern history – the imperial-colonial era, the Cold War and the present competition between powers for assets that increase their chances of survival in the global economy – this region has always found itself locked between spheres of influence of competing global and regional powers.

1.2.2. The dominance of the global development and relief sector by western or western-associated institutions, donors and non-governmental organizations

Chronic conflict and the problematic humanitarian situation in what is or what becomes a global frontline area has led to a large humanitarian presence in several majority Muslim contexts. In general, the humanitarian landscape is dominated by Western and international development and relief organizations and institutional donors. In 2004, for example, 36% of reported global relief and development assistance came from the US, 42% from the EU (ECHO as well as individual members that is) and 12% from Japan. This includes Official Development Assistance (ODA) as well as donations by both the government and the public to NGOs, IFRC-affiliated structures and UN agencies.[18]

13 Islamic Development Bank, *Annual Report № 29 1424h. (2003-2004)*, p. 43.

14 IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, *'A Clash of Ignorances' – Relief aid and the Arab and Islamic world*, IRIN Portal, www.irin-news.org , UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 19 March 2007.
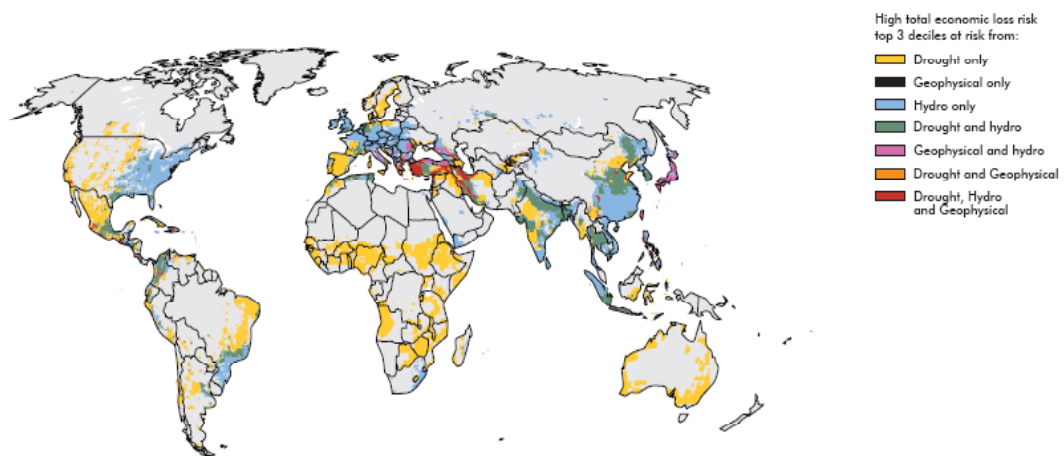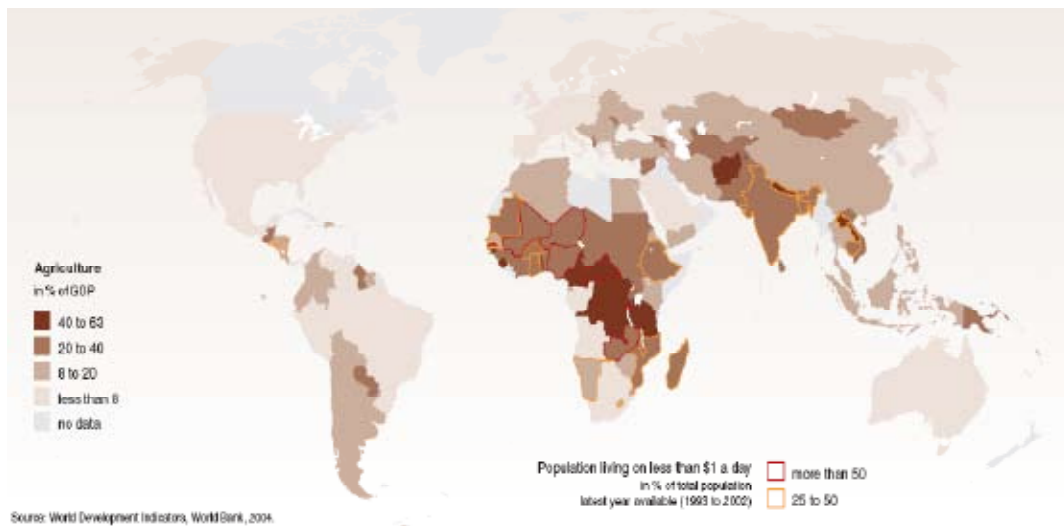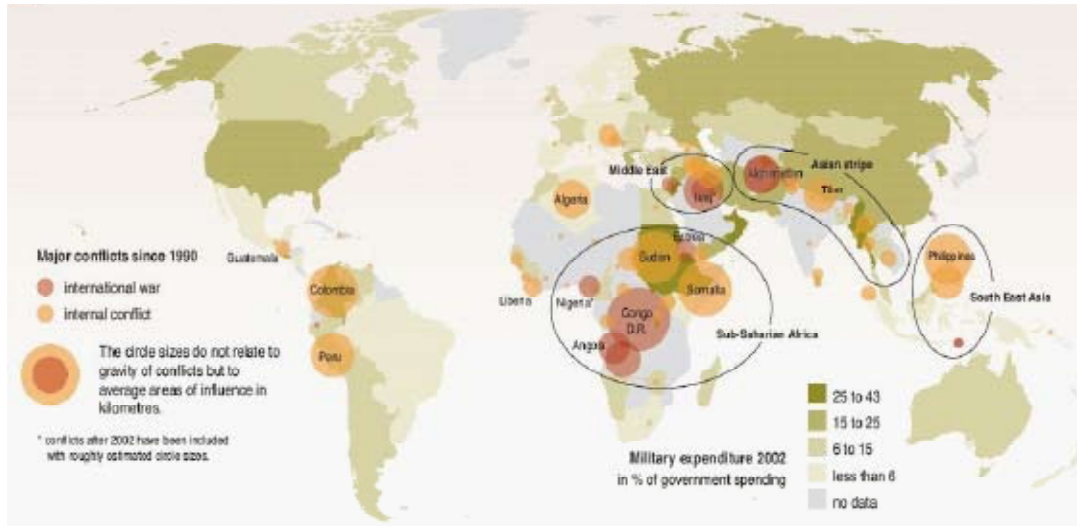
15 Almost no organizations have, or at least publish, breakdowns of their beneficiaries by religious background. The quoted figures are calculations and extrapolations of the percentage of Muslims in the country of origin or in the operational context on statistics in: Annex 5–Refugees by origin of UN High Commissioner on Refugees', *The State of the World's Refugees. Human Displacement in the New Millenium.*, 2006, pp. 217-220; *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2005*, Norwegian Refugee Council and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, pp. 78-79; World Food Programme, *2005 Beneficiary Statistics* (spreadsheet from WFP Intranet).

16 Graphic compiled by the author on the basis of the sources in note 15. The figure of 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide can be discussed but is one used in several surveys, for example Dalia Mogaded, *Ordinary Muslims*, The Gallup Centre for Muslim Studies, 2006. It is based on extrapolations of religious statistics in Encyclopedia Britannica from 1998, where the number of Muslims is put at 1.1 billion at an average annual growth rate of 2.2%.
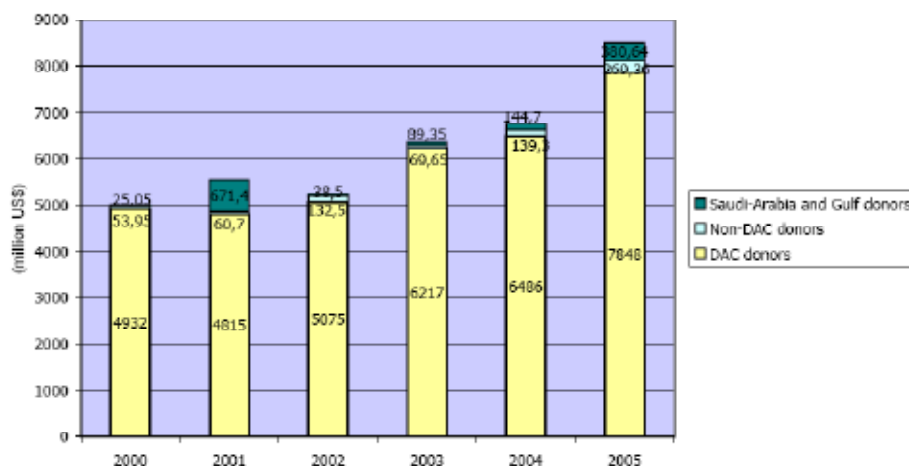
17 The maps are designed by Emanuelle Bournay (major conflict areas since 1990 and poverty and the primary sector) and Hugo Ahlenius (vulnerability for natural disasters) and taken from the United Nations Environment Programme-GRID Maps and Graphics Database (maps.grida.no, used with permission on 23 June 2008).

18 Development Initiatives and the Global Humanitarian Assistance project, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006*, Figure 2.14, p. 19.

Major conflicts since 1990
- international war
- internal conflict

The circle sizes do not relate to gravity of conflicts but to average areas of influence in kilometres.

* conflicts after 2002 have been included with roughly estimated circle sizes.

Military expenditure 2002
in % of government spending
- 25 to 43
- 15 to 25
- 6 to 15
- less than 6
- no data

Sources: PRIO/Uppsala Armed Conflict Dataset 2004, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 200

Agriculture
in % of GDP
- 40 to 63
- 20 to 40
- 8 to 20
- less than 8
- no data

Population living on less than $1 a day
in % of total population
latest year available (1993 to 2002)
- more than 50
- 25 to 50

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2004.

High total economic loss risk
top 3 deciles at risk from:
- Drought only
- Geophysical only
- Hydro only
- Drought and hydro
- Geophysical and hydro
- Drought and Geophysical
- Drought, Hydro and Geophysical

The above graphic gives an overview of the evolution in reported relief and development aid from Development Assistance Committee members (DAC) compared to non-DAC and major Islamic donors between 2000 and 2005.[19]

This graphic shows the dominance of DAC donors – Western or Western-aligned OECD countries that is – in the global development and relief landscape. Yet it is only part of the story. To start with, even if the amounts committed and spent by non-DAC donors (including Islamic ones) are small compared to the total reported assistance, at the recipient country level, the involvement of non-DAC donors is highly significant, especially in highly symbolic Islamic contexts like Iraq, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories and Pakistan.[20] Furthermore, the graphic and source statistics only show reported aid and say little about informal, non-reported aid from non-governmental charities and civil society in Muslim contexts in general. This is no unimportant nuance, since much aid coming from non-Western sources, and Islamic ones in particular, can be categorized as such. Besides, much of the charities and non-donor initiated civil society organizations in Islamic contexts are faith-based to some extent.

If the amount of aid from classical donors is rather well-documented and followed-up due to monitoring and accounting procedures, the overall picture of non-DAC and non-governmental aid including that from Islamic actors is less clear, in part because much happens through informal networks. "No reliable figures exist for the magnitude of philantropic giving in Muslim communities", a 2005 study by USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination says. "But it is estimated to total between US$250 billion and 1 trillion annually. This estimate takes into account approximations of per capita donations in some countries, per capita incomes in Muslim-majority countries and religious obligations to donate at least 10% of one's income to charity."[21] The often-quoted figure of U$ 1 trillion, which is equal to three times the GDP of Iran or twenty-five times that of Oman, is considered by ourselves as well as other researchers to be unreal though.[22] It has likely been calculated on the basis of a theoretical average annual donation multiplied by the number of Muslims in the world.

Nonetheless, there indeed exists a large current of Islamic non-governmental charity, development and relief initiatives that plays an important role in several contexts. Because of the extensive use of informal networks for funding and implementation, its exact global proportions in terms of amounts of money involved are not known. Donini says in this regard:

> Like our own, the non-Western approaches to humanitarianism come in different shapes and sizes. Some are politicized, but some are on level. In Somalia, for example, there are dozens of NGOs that receive money from benefactors in the Gulf and from the Somali

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19 Graphic created by the author on the basis of statistics from Development Initiatives and the Global Humanitarian Assistance project, *op. cit.* (see note 18), figure 5.2., p. 69, HPG Background Paper, *Diversity in Donorship: the Changing Landscape of Official Humanitarian Aid. Aid Donorship in the Gulf States*, ODI-HPG, September 2005 and OCHA Financial Tracking Service database, ocha.unog.ch/fts.

20 Development Initiatives and the Global Humanitarian Assistance project, *op. cit.* (see note 18), pp. 70-71.

21 USAID Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, *The Idea and Practice of Philanthropy in the Muslim World*, PPC Issue Paper № 5, PN-ADD-44, August 2005, p. 1.

22 E-mail exchange with Jonathan Benthall, University College of London, of 12 October 2007. Masood Hyder, "Humanitarianism and the Muslim World", Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, August 2007, e-journal on www.jha.ac. The quoted GDP comparisons are for 2007, according to the GDP ranking of the International Monetary Fund.

diaspora. They provide essential education and health services. Some have become self-sufficient and work on a cost-recovery basis. Their standards of accountability may be different from ours but they also happen to be much cheaper, effective and rooted in local society than we are accustomed to.[23]

Some authors like Hyder point out that besides Islamic sources of charity, labour remittances play a very significant role in development and relief as well.[24] Both funding channels often cross or complement each other in the field in the sense that some remittances are used for charity and development purposes as well. The figures for remittances are much clearer and reliable than those of charity. According to the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects 2006, the total amount of officially recorded remittances for 2005 was US$232 billion. Of this, so-called developing countries received US$167 billion, which is about twenty times the Official Development Assistance from DAC sources for that year. Officially recorded remittances, a large portion of which come from migrants in the West and the Gulf, are the second most important source of external financing after direct foreign investment and well before ODA. Among the top twenty recipients are several large Muslim countries or countries with large Muslim populations like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Likewise, 20.4% of the GDP of Jordan and 12.1% of that of Tajikistan are believed to come from remittances.[25]

1.2.3. The stagnation or failure of Western or Western-associated secular development models and the come-back of religion in the global periphery

The trends outlined above occur at times when in many Islamic as well as non-Islamic contexts, Western and during the Cold War also Soviet, ideologies and approaches to social development failed to take root or satisfy the needs of a socially mobile population. Wigger discusses this process in the framework of a wider historical process thereby quoting Shephard, Ahmed and Tibi:

> For Shephard, the dominant factor affecting life and development in the global periphery inlcuding the Islamic world was western imperialism in various forms: military-political, economic and cultural. Hence the bulk of political ideologies developed or adapated in the Muslim world were a response to Western initiatives, primarily from Europe and the US. One 'modern' response was secularism. As in the West, which served as an example, this involves almost all aspects of public life in accordance with human reason and initiative, religion being restricted to the private sphere and that of the ritual. The hope was that this model of society would bring the benefits of progress already being enjoyed by the West.[26]

Naturally, that process was reflected in the development priorities of the secular elites in the global periphery and in the policies of international development actors. Yet since the 1970s, there has been a response to this line in the form of religious awakening, whose propagandists and carriers have pointed to the failure of secular government to achieve greater social justice. The following elements that characterize the religious awakening are highlighted in the discussion. First, according to Ahmed, comes the changing nature of Western imperialism from a physical colonial presence to cultural domination. Second, there is, according to Tibi, rather a selective consumption of Western goods and technologies combined with a rejection of what is culturally 'Western', 'modern' or propagated as such.[27] An additional factor according to ter Haar is, that "in many post-colonial societies, religious revival based on existing traditions or cultures constitutes a delayed process of decolonization. It is the third phase of the cultural history of the underdog in world society after the revival of the original culture and the westernization of the elite."[28]

At the same time, populations in both Islamic and non-Islamic societies in the global periphery are confronted with often dramatic social changes: urbanization, modernization, conflict, the spread and impact of communications technology, the erosion of traditional or ideologically imposed identities and eventually, at least among parts of society, a re-identification process along religious lines and Islamic and evangelical Christian ones in particular. This rather strong and renewed importance attached to religion is also suggested by empirical data, like that of the 2002 research on religion by the Pew Global Attitudes Survey project.[29]

According to these research results, 65% of the respondents in Turkey, for example, considered religion to be very important individually and socially (a further 23% somewhat important) and in Uzbekistan 35% (with another 46% somewhat important). In Pakistan and Indonesia, those who considered religion to be very important amounted to 91 and 95% respectively just like an average of 87.4% in the ten African countries surveyed. Even if many of the researched countries where those interviewed attach great importance to religion are categorized as low income countries and even if the result, sharply contrast with those in Western countries except the US, it is too easy to link the degree of social relevance accorded of religion to poverty. Countries like Turkey and Indonesia are not particularly or extremely poor and are not marginal. The most important common denominator is,

23 Antonio Donini, "Western Agencies don't have a Humanitarian Monopoly", Humanitarian Affairs Review, Autumn 2004, p. 15.
24 Masood Hyder, *op. cit.* (see note 22).
25 The World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects 2006*, pp. 85-86, Table 4.1. on p. 88 and Figure 4.1. on p. 90.
26 Andréas Wigger, "Encountering perceptions in parts of the Muslim world and their impact on the ICRC's ability to be effective", Interna-

tional Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 87 №858, 2005, pp. 346-347.
27 Akbar Ahmed and Hassan Tibi are quoted in Andréas Wigger, op. cit. (see note 26), p. 346-347.
28 Gerrie ter Haar is quoted in Andréas Wigger, op. cit. (see note 26), p. 347.
29 The Pew Global Attitudes Project, Among Wealthy Nations, the US Stands Alone in its Embrace of Religion., The Pew Research Centre, December 2002, online briefing paper at people-press.org

that all are countries that experience a high degree of social mobility and social changes due to globalization.

Another Pew study from 2003 details that even if majorities and substantial minorities in both the Islamic and non-Islamic global periphery believe that religion lies in the private sphere, faith and religion are considered to be a source and even a condition for social morality. For example, 73% of respondents in Turkey, 55 in Uzbekistan, 33 in Pakistan, 24 in Jordan and an average of 61.2% in the ten African countries surveyed completely agreed with the statement that religion is a private matter and should be kept separate from government. At the same time, 84% of respondents in Turkey, 74 in Uzbekistan, 89 in Pakistan and an average of 81.1% in the ten African countries surveyed completely agreed with the statement that faith is necessary to be moral.[30]

1.2.4. The erosion of the image of neutrality of the Western and international development and relief sector

> "It's not because you say you are neutral that you are seen as such."
>
> Aid worker of Médecins Sans Frontières, 2007

1.2.4.1. Caught in the line of geopolitics?

Perceptions and neutrality are often mentioned in specialized literature as well as by respondents as elementary in the existence of a humanitarian frontline.[31] The situation in that field has changed dramatically over the last one and a half decades and especially after 2001. Hyder summarizes the situation as follows:

Until recently, there was no compelling reason to reach out to Muslims over and above the current levels of assistance and concern being extended to them by the humanitarian community. The Muslim world seemed too disunited, weak or poor to actively participate in the international humanitarian enterprise, either as donors or as partners. But the perception of that relationship has changed dramatically in the light of recent events. The change became apparent with the bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad in 2003. That tragedy demonstrated that the assistance community is in danger of being perceived as too closely associated with the West, compromised in terms of its humanitarian credentials, and therefore in danger of offering a target to militant groups.[32]

Is it seen as such by people who work or recently worked for international NGOs and donor organizations in the field? A former worker of Médecins Sans Frontières said:

As far as I'm concerned, if respecting the cultural codes in society, humanitarian assistance brought out by Western aid organizations should not be more difficult in Islamic countries than in other places. But yes, in insecure places such as Iraq and Somalia organizations are facing great difficulties. So, in my opinion, it is really nothing about religion or cultural insensitivity that is the problem for Western NGOs. Rather it is the contemporary geopolitics that reflect the reality aid workers have to deal with in the field. Furthermore, there is a tendency to identify any problems such as insecurity for aid workers in Muslim contexts as 'a conflict between Westerners and Muslims'. It's too simple to assume that it's because of a clash of civilisations. But yes, it is also true, and you feel it over there, that there currently is a polarized climate and that aid workers do increasingly come across problems in the Islamic world.[33]

An ECHO representative in the Middle East who has worked for Médecins Sans Frontières in the Balkans before added:

Often the issue is the timing of aid. Look, in several high-profile contexts like Iraq, Afghanistan and the Serbian-populated parts of Kosovo for example, literally hunderds of aid organizations arrived right after military operations or outright invasion by Western powers. That has strengthened the perception that there is a common interest and a structural link between both, especially in areas where there exist opinion currents that 'the West' is plotting against 'the Muslims' or 'the Serbs' for that matter. There are also cases of private companies that call themselves aid organizations for tax reasons or distribute products as humanitarian aid to create a local demand and get into the market.[34]

An NGO coordinator for Iraq confirmed that "in the case of Iraq, you had Saddam saying for fifteen years that the UN and NGOs were spies and saboteurs. Such things linger in the minds of part of the people, especially since the UN sanctions and inspections were felt to be utterly humiliating, even by

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30 The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Views of a Changing World. How Global Publics View the War in Iraq, Democracy, Islam and Governance, and Globalization,* and *Project №44 Final Topline Results*, The Pew Research Centre, June 2003, pp. 39 and 115.

31 See, amongst others, Antonio Donini and Larry Minear, op. cit. (see note 3) and Andréas Wigger, op. cit. (see note 26), pp. 343-365.

32 Masood Hyder, *op. cit.* (see note 22). See also Antonio Donini, "Western Agencies don't have a Humanitarian Monopoly", Humanitarian Affairs Review, Autumn 2004, pp. 12-15.

33 E-mail exchange with a Western aid worker of Médecins Sans Frontières, 27 June 2006.

34 Interview with Philippe Royan, Head, ECHO Regional Support Office, Amman, 5 April 2007. A similar view was expressed by Cédric Turlan of the NGO Coordination Committe in Iraq in IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, "IRAQ: Aid Organizations Reaffirm Secular, Humanitarian Principles", IRIN portal, www.irinnews.org , UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 23 May 2007. Criticism of this kind is not only aimed at Western donors. One informal reaction which the author collected after the Russian government donated US$6 million – to be used to purchase 13,350 metric tons of fortified wheat flour from Russian companies – to the World Food Programme in Tajikistan in early 2006 was: "Well, first (the Russian military and their stooges) helped to engineer a civil war that destroyed and impoverished my country. And now (the Russians) are playing the generous benefactors. Probably, as usual, they have an agenda. Grab something in return, or else add it to the debt to Russia." E-mail exchange with a Tajik graduate student, 15 March 2007, and WFP Press Release, *WFP Welcomes Arrival of First Russian Donation to Tajikistan*, 29 March 2006, posted on Reliefweb, reliefweb.int

people who hated Saddam.[35] The key elements that come to the forefront and affect the perception and especially that of neutrality of development and relief actors is the global geopolitical context, the opinion climate and the presence of intensively covered and symbolic armed conflicts especially when armed forces belonging to major donor countries are involved in one way or another in them.

1.2.4.2. The impact on humanitarian security

The literature and many respondents interviewed for this research agree that the image of neutrality and, in turn, the immunity of Western and international humanitarian actors have considerably eroded over the last decade. Of course, what there is of negative perceptions and feelings can take different forms and different degrees of intensity and durability and do not necessarily have to result in violence against aid workers. As one employee of a Western NGO explained "it ranges from indifference, over temporary and emotional anger linked to certain specific incidents to cynicism and outright violence."[36] Nonetheless, the increasing amount of violence consciously targeting aid workers – generally considered 'not done' fifteen years ago – is one of the most tangible and quantifyable indicators of a changing climate.

A study by the Centre on International Cooperation and the Humanitarian Policy Group on security challenges for aid workers indentified several security trends during the period between 1997 and 2005.[37] Some of these are visualized in the graphics below. First, the study identifies a marked increase in absolute numbers of both violent incidents and aid worker victims, even if this has to be seen against a global increase of aid workers by 77% from 136,000 in 1997 to 242,000 in 2005. Second, as is clear from the graphic below to the right, violence especially seems to be directed against NGOs and the UN, especially since 2000.

Third, with 78% of the victims and a sharp increase since 2004, it is especially national staff who are being targeted. This is the result of several trends: the growing tendency to delegate programme management to local staff without proper protection and security management, the presence of both government-affiliated and non-state armed actors who consider national staff of 'Western' and international organizations to be 'traitors', and social gaps (different social-geographic origins and levels of education, stark differences in income, etc.) and tensions between NGO and

UN staff on one hand, and formal and informal leaders and the grassroots level on the other.

Fourth, there is the increasing number of politically motivated incidents as compared to financially motivated or incidental ones. Although this varies by the year, where perpetrators and intentionality can reasonably be identified – on average 59% of all cases – political incidents clearly outnumber other kinds every single year of the said period. In 1997, for example, there were 11 political, 6 financially motivated and 3 non-specifically targeted incidents. In 2003, a peak year, there were 22 political, 11 financial and 9 non-specifically targeted incidents. Last but not least, of the top-ten contexts identified in the paper, the first five – Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Iraq and the North Caucasus – are Muslim-majority contexts and conflict areas with international military and peacekeeping operations and/or armed conflict between Islamic and non-Islamic parties.

The graphic on page 13 shows the trend in violent incidents against aid workers, the number of victims and the targeted organizations and their share of victims between 1997 and 2005.[38]

While staff of UN agencies, international NGOs and their local partner NGOs have increasingly become targets for political, Islamic organizations, from their side they have found themselves at the sharp end of increasingly negative perceptions, relentless scrutiny and bad media publicity, with several having among them their assets frozen and activities suspended by Western or Western-aligned Muslim governments.[39] Although investigations on terrorism support charges were often directed against individual employees and sub-offices rather than against the organization as a whole, and were sometimes founded, the freezing of accounts, activity suspension and, in some cases, outright closure of a number of charities, badly affected beneficiaries of the organizations' social and infrastructure projects.[40] They have also stained the image of bona fide Islamic organizations in general.

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35 Interview with Kasra Mofarah, Executive Coordinator, NGO Coordi-nation Committe in Iraq, Amman, 4 April 2007.

36 Interview with an Iraqi employee from Falludjah and of Muslim background of a Western NGO, Amman, 3 April 2007.

37 Abby Stoddard, Adèle Hammer and Katherine Haver, *Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations*, Briefing Paper, Centre on International Cooperation and Humanitarian Policy Group, December 2006, p. 2-5 and the namesake Humanitarian Policy Group Report №23, September 2006. See also Jane Darby, "Field under fire. Humanitarian workers become soft targets.", Global Health Link, № 124 (December 2003), Global Health Council, p. 4.

38 Graphic compiled by author on the basis of Table 1, Abby Stoddard, Adèle Hammer and Katherine Haver, *op. cit*. (see note 37), p. 2 and Table 2 in the namesake Humanitarian Policy Group Report №23, September 2006, p. 11.

39 Abby Stoddard, "Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends", Humanitarian Policy Group Briefing, № 11 (July 2003), Overseas Development Institute, p. 34.

40 Benthall speaks of a real over-reaction (see Jonathan Benthall, "The over-reaction against Islamic charities", ISIM Review, №20, Autumn 2007, pp. 6-7). A controversial example is that of the UK-based Palestinian Relief and Development Fund or Interpal. Interpal is repeatedly being accused of ties with the Palestinian Hamas – which is listed as a terrorist organization in Israël, the US and the EU – ever since a negative article in *The Sunday Telegraph* in 1996. This case resulted in a libel suit and apologies, as did later, similar allegations by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and by *The Jerusalem Post*. In 2003, Interpal was put on a US Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entities' list of five charities suspected of aiding Hamas. Although investigations by the UK Charity Commission found the accusations groundless, Interpal continues to be subject to regular UK bank accounts freezing under US and Israëli diplomatic pressure
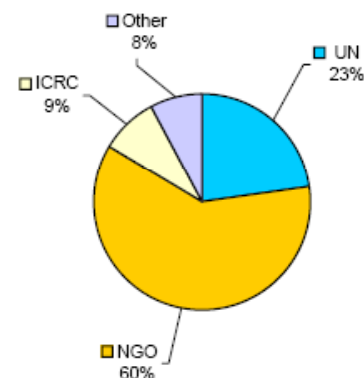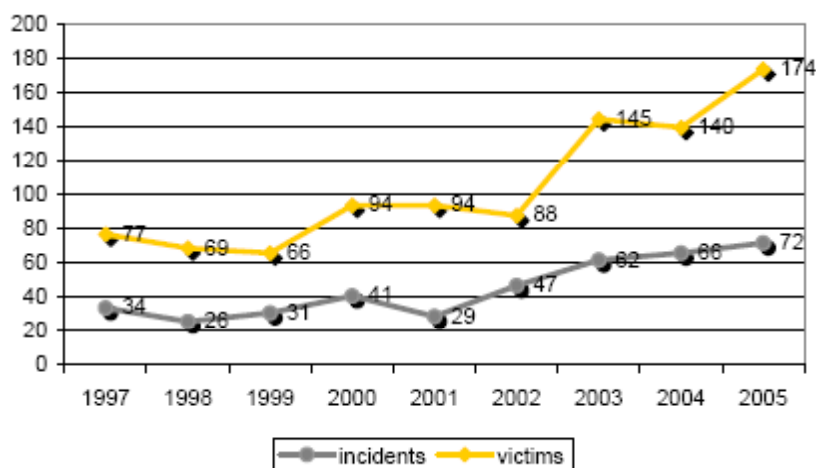
2. And religion and faith-based aid in all that?

In these circumstances, how far does faith-based development and relief have an added operational value and comparative advantage? Although for now, the debate and research about the religious factor in development and humanitarianism is still rather situated in the margin of development studies, it is increasingly being recognized that the religious factor has been underestimated. Ever since the advent of post-colonial development strategies, the dominating assumption has been that development means that societies in the global periphery should become 'like the West' (or in certain parts of the world during the Cold War, like the Soviet Union) through industrialization, economic growth, the wholesale borrowing of Western (or Soviet) political-administrative institutions and social-cultural westernization (or sovietization) including secularization where religion would eventually disappear from the public sphere.

The end of the Cold War, the limits, flaws or outright failure of Western and Soviet development models in the global periphery and globalization have drastically overhauled this process and paradoxically expanded the space for religion and religious renewal. Beyer says:

> The globalization of society, while structurally favoring privatization in religion, also provides fertile ground for the renewed public influence of religion in the sense that religion can become the source of collective obligation. What is private is a matter primarily

for individual disposition, and what is public concerns society as a whole or at least a larger segment of society. Yet, career choices, economic choices and political preferences are also matter of individual choices. The private sphere, from this vantage point, is evidently aso a vital part of the public sphere. Moreover, in what is specific about the public sphere is functional rationality, then modern religion is also not without public treats.[41]

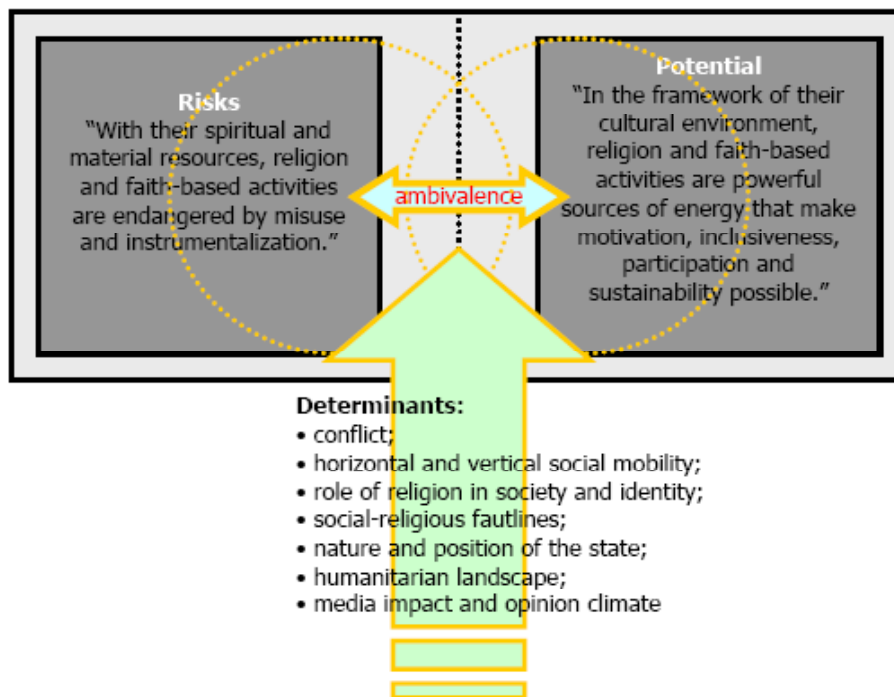But what is meant by religion in this regard? According to Haynes, there are two ways to define it:

> First, in a spiritual sense, where one is concerned with transcendence, sacredness and ultimacy. Second, in a social-material sense, where religion defines and unifies social, political and community-based groups or movements. In the Third World, religion has by and large retained a much higher level of social importance, even in many swiftly modernising societies. Secularisation occurs except when religion finds or retains work to do other things than relating people to the supernatural. Only when religion does something other than mediate between man and God does it retain a high place in people's attentions and politics.[42]

In that respect, Haynes continues, religion remains socially significant in two ways. First, as a component of cultural defence, when culture, identity and a sense of worth are challenged by a source promoting either an alien religion or rampant secularism and that source is negatively valued and second, in the context of cultural transition, where identity is threatened in the course of major cultural transitions like rural-urban or international migration and the erosion of traditional identities and sources of authority. In both cases, religion may furnish the resources either for dealing with

(see Linda Lönnqvist e.a., "UK-based NGOs: stigma and labelling at Interpal", ONTRAC Bulletin №35, January 2007, International NGO Training and Research Centre, pp. 3-4). The accusations revolve around the ideological and personal affiliations of Interpal's partner organizations in the Palestinian Territories and the personal ties between senior Interpal cadres and Hamas members. An example of an accusation file against Interpal and several other charities operating in the Palestinian Territories is the *Special Information Bulletin on Interpal* by the Israëli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre and its Centre for Special Studies, December 2004, ITIC Portal at www.terrorism-info.org.il.

41 Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, 1994, pp.71-73.
42 Jeff Haynes, "Religion, secularisation and politics: a post-modern conspectus", Third World Quarterly, 18(4), p 713.

Risks
"With their spiritual and material resources, religion and faith-based activities are endangered by misuse and instrumentalization."

Potential
"In the framework of their cultural environment, religion and faith-based activities are powerful sources of energy that make motivation, inclusiveness, participation and sustainability possible."

ambivalence

Determinants:
• conflict;
• horizontal and vertical social mobility;
• role of religion in society and identity;
• social-religious fautlines;
• nature and position of the state;
• humanitarian landscape;
• media impact and opinion climate

such transitions or for asserting a group's claim to a sense of worth.[43]

Change and transition are important elements in the whole process in the sense that they give both ground and challenges for faith-based development and relief actors. According to Nanji, Islamic, Christian and other faith-based development and relief organizations can tap into the potential of being faith-based if they focus on assisting their target groups and coreligionists in particular to handle and adapt to social change.[44] Roy adds that they can achieve that by linking religious norms to universal values like social-economic rights, poverty eradication and access to education and health care. Faith-based aid organizations can thereby instrumentalize religious institutions for social purposes. Roy also thinks that it is important to reach out beyond one's coreligionists, institutionally as well as in terms of beneficiaries.[45] Does that work in operational practice? This differs from context to context and especially depends on, first, the actual position, role and practice of religion and religious actors in the given beneficiary community and second, the religious-cultural nature (or absense thereof) of the operational challenges.

An important dimension is added by Holenstein who says that in serving the functions as outlined by Haynes and Nanji, the

religious factor in development and relief has an ambivalence with both risks and a potential which is shown in the graphic above.[46]

In our opinion, ambivalence especially occurs on the intersection of the risk and potential of faith-based action and is highest if religion – or, as often, countering religion – is instrumentalized in the framework of a wider security-cum-development strategy as it was defined by Duffield and Fowler earlier in this paper. To what extent being faith-based brings added value or not for an aid organization depends on the extent that it maximizes the potential of religion at the detriment of the risks. There are also a number of factors that determine the space, intensity and evolution of the faith factor and its ambivalence:

• the presence and nature of conflict and especially the role of religion and religious identities and actors therein;[47]
• horizontal as well as vertical social mobility, for example rural-urban and international migration;
• the actual role of religion and religious actors in society and in local identity, with ambivalence being more likely in

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43 Ibidem, pp. 713-714. For a discussion of this process in the Islamic world and Muslim immigrant communities, see Olivier Roy, *L'Islam mondialisé*, 2002, pp. 68-71.

44 Interview with Azim Nanji, Director, Institute for Ismaili Studies, London, 14 March 2006.

45 Interview with Olivier Roy at the Egmont Institute, Brussels, 13 February 2006.

46 Figure adapted by the author from the original in Anne-Marie Holenstein, "Les organismes donateurs gouvernementaux et les organisations confessionnelles", Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge, volume 87, № 858, 2005, p. 371.

47 Discussion with Aurore Arnould, Desk Officer for the Balkans and the EU, Caritas-Secours catholiques France at the conference *Diversité culturelle et confessionelle, une chance pour l'humanitaire de demain?*, Secours islamique, Altermondes and Coordination Sud, Paris, 24 May 2008.

areas where religious identity is unclear or diluted like the Balkans or parts of Africa; [48]

- social fautlines that converge with religious ones, for example: differences in wealth and power between Muslims and Christians or vice versa, and between established secular elites and more religious segments of society;
- the nature and position of the state and civil society;[49]
- the different actors in the humanitarian landscape in the given context: the presence of competing actors and real or perceived hidden agendas behind development and relief activities;
- the opinion climate and the way it is shaped by both global and local media, for instance the way coverage of incidents like Abu Ghraib, the Danish cartoons or the situation in Gaza are covered by the media and contribute to a manipulable emotional climate.

The expanded space for religion due to globalization and the social changes that it causes have expanded the space for faith-based development and relief actors, especially in operational situations that have a large cultural and ideological dimension like gender, livelihoods and education for example. The above analysis has focused on the Islamic world and Muslim beneficiaries but several elements and situations are relevant and applicable for Christian faith-based aid actors in majority Christian parts of the global periphery too. The fact that they operate in a global climate of faultlines, polarization and societies in a state of flux certainly influences these actors' position in the sense that faith-based aid embodies, as well as faces, challenges, risks but also opportunities.

Ghandour feels that the importance attached to religion in many Islamic and other non-Western contexts implies that many "neither understand nor accept that the humanitarian gesture, whatever its origin, can be situated outside the sphere of religious values, and cannot envisage associating with secular managers representing organizations that adopt an international approach devoid of any religious inspiration."[50] Even if their values and operational standards are not those of the classical DAC and OECD donors and of the secular elites in the global periphery, in many contexts, faith-based aid organizations and charities have become part of a social safety net and providers of social services that are normally provided by the state but where the latter does not or no longer, do that due to lack of financial means, technical capacity, political willingness or mere presence. This and the religious renewal in the global periphery are part of a reality the recognition of which will implicitly confirm the limits if not failure of development strategies that were dominant since the beginning of the post-colonial era.

48 Interview with Jonathan Benthall, Pembury-Tunbridge Wells, 17 January 2006.
49 Discussion with Philippe Droz-Vincent, Lecturer at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, at the conference, *Quelle politique humanitaire au Moyen-Orient?*, Médecins du Monde, Paris, 16 May 2008.

50 Abdel Rahman Ghandour, "The Modern Missionaries of Islam", in: Fabrice Weissman and the Médecins Sans Frontières Foundation (eds.), *In the Shadow of 'Just Wars'. Violence, Politics and Humanitarian Action.,* MSF Foundation, Bordeaux, 2004, p. 334.

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