## Chapter Two

# *Humanitarian Interventions*

'HE IS just repeating the same kind of stuff,' our translator told us, 'but keep nodding while you are listening so that he thinks I am translating what he said. Then let's get out of here before we get killed. Those missiles are coming closer.'

It was May 1994 and I was in northern Iraq, crouched on the bare ridge of a mountainside taking incoming Turkish shellfire. We bumped into a group of guerrillas from the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) who offered us their customary sweet tea and responded to our questions about current political events with interminable speeches about socialism and revolutionary warfare. The thuds of Turkish artillery were indeed getting louder, and while it did not seem to bother the PKK guerrillas it was making the rest of us very nervous.

I went to the Kurdish region of south-east Turkey to write an article about the conflict between the Turkish security forces and the PKK. The war was at its most intense and around 3,000 Kurdish villages had been burned over the previous decade as part of a 'scorched earth' policy by the security forces. The conflict had caused an estimated 30,000 deaths and displaced hundreds of thousands. It was difficult to get people to talk to us in Turkey because of the ubiquitous presence of plain-clothes security forces, who even followed us into our hotel rooms. Eventually we decided to cross into northern Iraq, where many refugees had fled, to ask what had driven them out of their homes.

The first Gulf war had ended three years earlier and a safe haven created to protect the Kurds, after their abortive rising against Saddam Hussein collapsed when the western backing they expected failed to materialize. Fearing another chemical weapons attack, like the one at Halabja in 1988, two million people fled towards the Turkish border, but found it sealed off by the Turkish government. A journalist I was travelling with had been in the region at the time and recalled seeing bodies hanging from every lamp post in the towns that Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard had retaken. Soon, up to a thousand people a day were dying from hunger and cold up in the Kurdish mountains. The world had just witnessed US air power annihilate the Iraqi armed forces, and western public opinion refused to accept that nothing could be done to save the Kurds from another act of genocide. When the UN passed Security Council Resolution 688 on 5 April 1991 calling for action, Britain, France and the United States deployed ground troops to turn back the Iraqi army and persuade the refugees that it was safe to come down from the mountains.[1]

Western troops were withdrawn after a few months and replaced by a handful of lightly armed UN guards. Western coalition forces enforced a no-fly zone in the region using planes operating out of Turkish airbases to discourage the Iraqi army from venturing too far north. Turkey's support was vital for the no-fly zone policy, but this meant that the coalition had to ignore Turkish cross-border raids against Kurdish rebels based inside Iraq. In response to one Turkish ground and air attack, in which napalm bombs were reportedly dropped on a village in October 1991, a US military spokesman said that the allies were there to protect the Kurds from Iraq, but not from Turkey.

For most of the 1990s northern Iraq was a hellhole. In the first refugee camp we visited five people died from disease the previous week, and one man told me that his brother was killed by a landmine the day before. Another refugee said it was like living in the world's biggest concentration camp. The Turkish government pressurized the largest Iraqi Kurdish faction, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), to take action against the PKK, and both Turkey and Iraq helped manipulate the factional struggles between other rival Kurdish groups. When I was there the region was engulfed in constant clashes and skirmishes between the KDP and its main rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), while the battle we witnessed on the mountainside was the result of a series of cross-border incursions by the Turkish army designed to crush the PKK. Given that people considered themselves safer here than in south-east Turkey, we could only guess what they must have fled from.

Back in south-east Turkey we finally found a taxi driver in Diyarbakir, the regional capital, willing to take me and a photographer into the countryside where the fighting was taking place. We slipped out past a US Air Force base onto an unapproved road. Our driver grew increasingly nervous the further we travelled into no-man's land. He had been tortured by the Turkish security forces and the experience had left him with a facial twitch that became more pronounced the deeper into the countryside we went. In the first village, we were met by worried-looking people who thought we were plain-clothes security men. They had been told to leave their village the previous week and they tried to assure us that they were about to go. Their fear spoke volumes.

The only people who had stayed in this area had agreed to become 'village guards' and collaborate with the authorities. They operated a shoot-to-kill policy against suspected guerrillas; the Turkish air force also patrolled the skies on the lookout for PKK columns. The PKK regarded village guards as legitimate targets and sometimes mined roads in these areas. Our car slowed to a crawl as we scanned the dirt in front of us for metallic objects. Finally we reached Sihocoban, a village where 800 people had been driven out a few weeks before. The village had been stripped, looted and burned. We took a few photographs and got back into the taxi to return to Diyarbakir, feeling wretched for what we had put our driver through.

Back in Britain, I had a story that no one was interested in. The Kurds were old news by then and, besides, I had the plot wrong. The west had saved the Kurds from Saddam Hussein, so how could it be colluding in their repression by Turkey? Messy, confusing conflicts in far-off places do not make compelling news stories. One of the lessons the political humanitarians have learned is that you need to keep it simple to grab the public's attention.

Of course, real life is not usually like that, but the mid-1990s at least provided plausible examples with which to make the case. While I was on a mountain in northern Iraq, the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina was heading towards its brutal climax. Meanwhile, another genocide was underway in Rwanda and a peacekeeping mission in Somalia ending in ignominy. The combined effects of these three conflicts had a profound effect on the way the UN responded to subsequent humanitarian crises. It also did enormous damage to its reputation for dealing with future crises.

The establishment of the Kurdish safe haven is often portrayed as the prototype for other humanitarian interventions in the 1990s. In his final report to the UN General Assembly, its former secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar cited it as an example of 'the collective obligation of States to bring relief and redress in human rights emergencies'.[2] The term 'humanitarian intervention' covers a variety of acts – ranging from the provision of assistance to the use of force – by which a state, a group of states or some other organization interferes in another state's internal affairs in order to aid people who have been identified as being either in acute distress or facing imminent danger. Some scholars restrict the use of the term humanitarian intervention to political and military operations that infringe on the territory or sovereignty of another state.[3] Conversely, many humanitarian workers dislike the use of the term to cover anything other than the impartial distribution of relief assistance.[4] These are, obviously, different phenomena, though operational issues in the field can sometimes blur the distinctions.

Attempts to replace the use of force with a system of collective security can be traced back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, by which states agreed to end the European 'wars of religion' and respect the principle of non-intervention in one another's internal affairs. The principle also underpins the system of international relations envisaged by the UN Charter, Article 1 of which states the UN's primary purpose is to be the maintenance of international peace and security. Article 2 of the Charter was clearly intended to make the prohibition on the use of force by individual states comprehensive and watertight:[5]

> All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.
>
> Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State or shall require the members to submit such matters to settlement.[6]

The non-interference rule cannot, however, be absolute. By virtue of their membership of the UN, states must accept certain restrictions on their actions. Membership is open to all 'peace-loving nations' irrespective of the nature of their government, providing that they accept the obligations of the Charter. The promotion of respect for human rights is listed in Article 1, though the wording indicates that it is a more aspirational goal. Articles 55 and 56 also state that the UN shall promote 'universal respect for, and observance of, human rights' – which are deemed to contribute to conditions of peace and stability – and that all members of the UN 'pledge themselves to take joint and separate action' to achieve these purposes.

These rights have been spelled out in more detail in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), the conventions against genocide and torture, and a number of other human rights treaties. These recognize some rights as being non-derogable, that is, they cannot be set aside in any circumstances, even in an emergency threatening the life of the nation. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ruled that the prohibition of genocide and assaults on the 'basic rights of the human person' are part of customary international law, which means they are binding on all states, even if they have not signed treaties to this effect.[7] When the totality of the UN Charter is read together with these instruments, it can therefore be argued that states are restricted from inflicting harm on people within their own territorial borders by virtue of the UN Charter.[8]

Some proponents of humanitarian intervention also argue that the wording of Article 2 may not preclude the use of force so long as it is not directed 'against the territorial integrity or political independence' of a state. Powerful states that believe a weak state is violating international law may be tempted to rely on this formulation if they decide to take matters into their own hands. This point was made in 1949 by the United Kingdom in the 'Corfu Channel' case, in which the British Navy sent minesweepers into Albanian territorial waters following damage to its ships. The ICJ criticized Albania for neglecting to warn shipping that its waters were mined. However, it also stated that:

> The Court can only regard the alleged right of intervention as a policy of force . . . and as such cannot, whatever be the present defects in international organisation, find a place in international law. Intervention is perhaps less admissible in the particular form it would take here, for, from the nature of things, it would be reserved to the most powerful states.[9]

In the 1986 case of 'Nicaragua v the United States', the ICJ referred to its decision in the 'Corfu Channel' case, and held that the principle of non-intervention between independent states has customary international law character.[10] 'Nicaragua v the United States' concerned a complaint by Nicaragua, which accused the US of laying mines in its ports and giving assistance to right-wing contra guerrillas seeking to overthrow its left-wing government. The ICJ rejected the US justification of collective self-defence on the grounds that Nicaragua had allegedly helped rebels in neighbouring El Salvador. It also rejected the US argument that its intervention was justified by the human rights situation in Nicaragua:

> A strictly humanitarian objective cannot be compatible with the mining of ports, the destruction of oil installations, or again with the training, arming and equipping of the *contras* . . . the argument derived from the preservation of human rights in Nicaragua cannot afford a legal justification for the conduct of the United States.[11]

The only explicit exception to the prohibition of the threat or use of force by states is the 'inherent right of self-defence' recognized by Article 51.[12] States have the right to defend themselves if they come under attack and may also come to the aid of their allies. States may also have the right to take 'anticipatory measures' to defend themselves if they are threatened with attack, although the scope of this remains controversial.[13] In addition to this, the UN Security Council may authorize the use of force under Chapter VII of the Charter in discharging its responsibility for upholding international peace and security.[14] However, force should only be used if the pacific methods envisaged in Chapter VI of the Charter are deemed insufficient. There is no reference to human rights in Article 2 of the UN Charter and so, according to the Charter at least, the principle of non-intervention cannot be set aside solely on this basis. However, since the ICJ cannot actually review the legality of the UN Security Council's actions,[15] there is nothing to prevent the Council referring to human rights when it invokes its

Chapter VII powers. As one commenter put it, 'A threat to peace . . . seems to be whatever the Security Council says is a threat to peace.'[16] This argument is discussed further in chapter six.

The biggest obstacle to a Chapter VII-authorized humanitarian intervention is that its five permanent members all have the individual power to veto such actions. As former UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali commented in 1992, 'Since the creation of the United Nations in 1945, over 100 major conflicts around the world have left some 20 million dead. The United Nations was rendered powerless to deal with many of these crises because of the vetoes – 279 of them – cast in the Security Council, which were a vivid expression of the divisions of that period.'[17] Between 1946 and 1986 the Security Council recognized the existence of a threat to international peace and security seven times,[18] resorted to military force on three occasions[19] and twice imposed binding non-military sanctions.[20]

This changed with the end of the cold war as the Security Council began to take a more expansive view of what constituted a threat to international peace and security.[21] Between 1988 and 1994 it mounted almost twice as many peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations as it had done over the previous forty years.[22]

As described above, the end of the first gulf war led to the establishment of the Kurdish safe haven. Operation Provide Comfort was principally undertaken by troops from the United States, Britain and France in April 1991. Up to 7,000 ground troops were deployed and a no-fly zone declared over northern Iraq. Apart from the military forces, thirty other countries contributed relief supplies and some fifty international NGOs either offered assistance or participated in this operation.[23] NGO staff attended regular briefings held by military commanders and also had access to military telecommunications and transportation. In *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention*, Thomas Weiss and Cindy Collins observe, 'The NGOs perceived the military as an ally in their efforts to assist a persecuted minority group.'[24]

This involved a considerable mind-shift by soldiers and aid workers who had previously had little contact with each other, but such co-operation was to become increasingly frequent in future interventions.

UN Security Council Resolution 688 was not in fact adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter, nor did it explicitly authorize military intervention. However, it used similar language, describing the refugee crisis that was threatening to overwhelm neighbouring states as constituting a 'threat to international peace and security in the region'. It also demanded 'humanitarian access' to the affected Kurdish population, while reaffirming support for Iraq's territorial integrity. It was adopted by ten votes to three, with Cuba, Yemen and Zimbabwe voting against and India and China abstaining. The Iraqi government vigorously protested that the resolution constituted interference in the country's internal affairs, but subsequently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN which 'welcomed humanitarian measures to avert new flows of refugees and displaced persons from Iraq'.[25]

The apparent success of this initiative coincided with the wave of optimism that swept the world at the end of the cold war. In December 1991, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution aimed at strengthening the co-ordination of UN humanitarian assistance during emergencies, which also stressed the obligation of governments to permit the distribution of relief to people in need.[26] Although some concern was expressed during this debate about respect for state sovereignty, most speakers stressed that the issue of international human rights was a legitimate concern for the whole international community under the UN Charter. British Prime Minister John Major commented during discussions at the UN that 'the opening line of our Charter . . . doesn't talk about states or governments, it talks about people.'[27]

In January 1992, a Heads of State summit discussed the institutionalization of a new conflict-management role for the UN. In his *Agenda for Peace* report, Boutros Boutros-Ghali urged the re-establishment of its Military Staff Committee, the creation of 'peace enforcement' units and an increased role for the ICJ.[28] These proposals were not accepted, but the following month the Security Council decided to establish a mission to help oversee elections in Cambodia, which was to be the UN's biggest single field operation to date.[29] Then, in December 1992, the Security Council explicitly sanctioned a military humanitarian intervention in Somalia, invoking its Chapter VII powers for the first time ever with respect to a purely internal conflict.[30]

Operation Restore Hope was authorized in December 1992 by Resolution 794, which was supported by all the permanent members of the Security Council. It described the situation in Somalia as 'unique' and stated that 'the magnitude of the human tragedy . . . constituted a threat to international peace and security.'[31] Member states were permitted to 'use all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations'. It also stated that 'impediments to humanitarian relief violated international humanitarian law', and that anyone interfering with distribution of relief assistance 'will be held individually responsible in respect of such acts'.[32] Subsequent resolutions expanded the mandate to include disarming the main militias and pledging to bring to justice the perpetrators of acts of violence that were hampering the relief effort.[33]

Somalia has been the subject of numerous memoirs written by those involved, most of which focus on the period after the UN's military intervention. The crisis which prompted it began in early 1991 with the toppling of the country's dictator Mohammed Siad Barre and the fracturing of the country into civil war and lawlessness. During the 1980s, when Somalia was backed by the west as a counterweight to Soviet support for Ethiopia, it is estimated to have received more aid per person than any other country in Africa.[34] This aid was mainly used to sustain Siad Barre's regime and reward his supporters, and was seen by Somalis as a source of political patronage. A major cause of the civil war following his downfall was the attempts by the militias that ousted him to gain control over its distribution.

Many aid organizations periodically scaled their operations in Somalia up and down and Mohamed Sahnoun, the UN's special representative to Somalia, noted that this led to considerable mistrust and cynicism towards the international relief effort on the part of ordinary Somalis.[35] The UN itself had withdrawn all its staff in 1990 and then made sporadic attempts to return during the course of 1991. The only organization to maintain a consistent presence in the country was the Somali Red Cross (SRC), which became the main focus of the relief effort during most of 1991 and 1992. Somalia became the Red Cross movement's largest ever operation, surpassing the previous record set in Biafra in 1967. It has been widely praised and Alex de Waal argues that it was the only kind of operation that could have been mounted in such circumstances. The ICRC supported it strongly and flexibly, empowering its Somali delegation to make all major decisions. It used considerable ingenuity to deliver food supplies and its 24,000 staff took significant risks in doing so. Thirteen staff members of the SRC were killed during the operation, including two internationals. However, as in Biafra, it contrasted greatly with the political humanitarian approach that ultimately ensured its demise.

In Somalia the ICRC broke with a major tradition in hiring armed guards, and Oxfam's Tony Vaux remembers his surprise at seeing Red Cross vehicles mounted with heavy machine guns.[36] It also tolerated the large-scale diversion of its supplies. According to the ICRC around 15–20 per cent of its deliveries did not reach their intended beneficiaries, though others put the estimate much higher. One of the main arguments from those who supported the UN's military intervention in 1992 was that the aid effort was sustaining a war economy. Weiss and Collins claim that up to 80 per cent of the food being sent to Somalia was looted and that the militias used the proceeds of 'humanitarian taxes' to try and ship weapons in from Serbia.[37] Others believe that this figure is grossly exaggerated, but the impression that the aid community was effectively subsidizing the militias was certainly widespread. The open-backed land cruisers mounted with heavy weapons that the militias relied on were commonly known as 'technicals', in reference to the budget line 'technical assistance' by which the aid agencies accounted for some of their extraordinary items of expenditure.

The ICRC maintained a relatively low profile for its Somalia operation, partly because this was its normal practice and partly because drawing attention to its delivery of aid increased the prospects of that aid being looted. It helped shame the UN into a proper deployment of its agencies in January 1992 but, as other humanitarians began to mount their own operations, they also started to shape the political agenda towards the crisis. One of the first NGOs to arrive was CARE, which had a warehouse full of food looted in January 1992. In November of that year CARE tried, unsuccessfully, to deliver a large convoy of aid without paying off the various militias along the way. Five people were killed in the resulting shoot-out, which became the subject of sensationalist media reports. CARE, which was criticized for failing to listen to its local staff regarding strategy, began to lobby hard for military intervention by the UN. Its president, Philip Johnstone, was seconded into a senior position with the UN's emergency programme at around the same time. His widely quoted comment that, in order to deliver aid, 'we have to fight the Somalis themselves', was subsequently to earn the mission its soubriquet of 'Operation Shoot-to-Feed'.

A number of US-based NGOs, including the International Rescue Committee and Oxfam America, also publicly called for military intervention. Save the Children UK opposed the move, while others remained silent. The UN's representative, Mohamed Sahnoun, also opposed it, preferring to negotiate with militia leaders and any representatives of Somali civil society he could find. Most informed commentators agree that this policy of trying to re-empower traditional community leaders through dialogue offered by far the most realistic chance of building a peace process in Somalia from the 'bottom up'.[38] However, Sahnoun was increasingly marginalized within the UN, and was forced out of office in October 1992. He subsequently argued that 'integrating security with assistance and rehabilitation programmes is intensely challenging in the best situations, but I believe that specific decisions were taken that were wrong in this case and that, from a moral perspective, were likely to undermine the UN and its partners'.[39]

The UN scaled up its operation from fifty observers in April 1992 to 500 peacekeeping soldiers in September. Finally, in December, it authorized the deployment of 35,000 soldiers in a phenomenally expensive US-led mission. Marines swarmed onto the beaches at Mogadishu harbour to be greeted by the world's news corps. The famine was already abating by the time the soldiers arrived, but troops were initially deployed to guard deliveries. The militias kept a low profile at first but gradually began to reassert themselves, leading to clashes with the US troops in February 1993. That May, the UN assumed control of the operation from the US, but there was no marked change of tactics and the UN appointed a senior US official, a former aide to President Bush, as its special envoy to ensure continuity.

The basic strategy remained to try and uphold basic law and order while persuading Somalia's feuding warlords to participate in some form of national reconciliation. While this made sense, the UN occupation was soon beginning to experience the same kind of organizational problems that have characterized all other interventions since. Sahnoun's 'bottom up' strategy was abandoned by his successors in the search for quick-fix deals with the warlords in an attempt to cobble together a coalition government. A succession of international administrators soon alienated most of Somali civil society through their arrogance and ignorance of the country's political culture. The key turning point came in June 1993 when a group of eighty Pakistani soldiers in the UN mission were killed or injured in a clash with a militia group led by the prominent warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid. Some troops were literally ripped limb from limb while escorting a food convoy. The UN pledged to bring the perpetrators to justice and the operation moved into a more aggressive phase.

Over the next few months several thousand people were killed or injured as the UN forces tried to hunt down Aidid. In one incident, in July 1993, US helicopters attacked a house in which a group of Somali elders had gathered, killing seventy-three people. In September, a US helicopter fired on a crowd and killed sixty. MSF published a detailed communiqué on violations of humanitarian law by UN troops that summer.[40] Photographs also began to emerge of US, Canadian, Belgian, Pakistani, Tunisian and Italian UN soldiers torturing people. One series showed two soldiers dangling a child over an open fire, urinating on a dead body, forcing a child to drink vomit and kicking and stabbing a person on the ground. Another showed soldiers posing beside the battered and bloody corpse of a boy with his hands tied behind his back. Human rights groups documented accounts of children placed in metal containers and left in the boiling sun for days without food or water. Others said they were forced to dig their own graves. Women were reportedly subject to sexual violence and tortured with electric shocks.[41]

In October 1993, two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down by Aidid's militia and eighteen American soldiers killed, an incident later portrayed in the film *Black Hawk Down*. Over a thousand Somalis are thought to have died during the battle to rescue the surviving US troops. This was effectively the end of the mission, though the formal withdrawal did not take place until the following March.

A few days after the Black Hawk incident another UN force, consisting of US and Canadian soldiers, was prevented from landing in Haiti by a mob of supporters of the military dictatorship chanting Aidid's name. The force was sent to help restore the country's democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, but events in Somalia caused the US government to lose its nerve.

The incident came at almost exactly the same time as the Security Council was discussing the size of the UN force to despatch to Rwanda. In October 1993, the UN agreed to establish a mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) using its Chapter VI powers, which permit international intervention but not the use of force. Its commanding officer, Roméo Dallaire, had asked for 4,500 troops but this number was scaled back following US objections resulting from its experiences in Somalia. By the end of that year Dallaire had only managed to assemble 1,300 soldiers. Further troops were approved in January 1994, bringing the force up to a strength of 2,500, but the UN's cumbersome budgetary procedures meant that the money to pay for the mission did not arrive for several more months. Dallaire's requests for sufficient supplies to make this force operational were also subject to repeated obstacles and delays, and he never received vital equipment such as functioning armoured personnel carriers to transport his own troops. He has written that 70 per cent of his time was devoted to administrative battles with the UN.[42]

UNAMIR was originally deployed to monitor a ceasefire agreed between Rwanda's army and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-based force headed by Paul Kagame, which had invaded from neighbouring Uganda. The RPF was mainly composed of Tutsi exiles who had fled Rwanda to escape a previous genocide thirty years earlier. By 1990, almost a million Tutsis were living in neighbouring countries, making them one of the largest refugee communities in Africa. Many had spent their whole lives in refugee camps, while others settled into a sometimes uneasy existence with their host communities in Uganda, Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania.

Tutsis in Uganda faced persecution from President Milton Obote's government, which was mainly backed by groups from the north of the country. Many joined Yoweri Museveni's southern-based National Resistance Army in a rebellion which eventually brought him to power in 1986. Tutsis comprised around a quarter of Museveni's armed forces, which then became the Ugandan army, and he relied heavily on them to help him suppress a rebellion in the north. These forces formed the RPF in 1987 and three years later, 4,000 of its members deserted from the Ugandan army overnight to invade Rwanda, taking their weapons, uniforms and equipment with them.

The 1990 invasion prompted France to intervene militarily in support of the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana. Rwanda's armed forces rapidly expanded and its government unleashed a wave of repression against its internal opponents. The RPF was initially beaten back, but under Kagame's leadership transformed itself into an effective guerrilla force using hit-and-run tactics. Although its base of support was small it benefited from growing discontent with President Habyarimana's rule and opened talks with the government's opponents. Reports of human rights violations by international monitors led to growing pressure for reform from western governments and donors. In 1991, Habyarimana agreed to a constitutional amendment to end his one-party dominance and a new coalition government signed a ceasefire with the RPF in July 1992, which led to an agreement signed in Arusha in August the following year.

UNAMIR was deployed to monitor this ceasefire. It was mandated to use force only in self-defence, and was prohibited from acting in 'deterrence or retaliation'. Western diplomats, wary of getting sucked into another African civil war, preferred to ignore the increasingly ominous warnings they were receiving about the Hutu political extremists. The CIA conducted a desk study of potential scenarios based on its own intelligence reports, which included a worst-case scenario of 500,000 killed in a genocide, but it failed to share this with the UN mission.[43]

The killings began on 6 April 1994, after a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down over Kigali airport. Responsibility for the attack is disputed, but it served to destroy the nascent Rwandan peace process. Hutu extremists used it as a signal to launch a ferocious campaign of murder against ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutu sympathizers. The Rwandan genocide claimed up to 800,000 lives, and UN peacekeeping soldiers were accused of remaining passive instead of intervening to save lives. According to one of the earliest reports by the *Guardian*, on 12 April 1994:

> A few yards from the French troops, a Rwandan woman was being hauled along the road by a young man with a machete. He pulled at her clothes as she looked at the foreign soldiers in the desperate, terrified hope that they could save her from her death. But none of the troops moved. 'It's not our mandate,' said one, leaning against his jeep as he watched the condemned woman, the driving rain splashing at his blue United Nations badge. The 3,000 foreign troops now in Rwanda are no more than spectators to the savagery which aid workers say has seen the massacre of 15,000 people.[44]

In fact the UN mission was among the first victims of the attack when ten Belgian paratroopers were tortured to death by the *genocidaires*. One Rwandan official explained that the mutilation of the corpses, whose genitalia were hacked off and stuffed in their mouths, was inspired by the effect on western resolve following the Black Hawk incident. 'We watch CNN too you know,' he commented.[45] Dallaire lacked sufficient troops to mount a rescue operation and the Belgians subsequently withdrew their 400 soldiers, who were the key component of the UNAMIR force. UNAMIR was reduced to a rump force of about 270 ill-equipped Canadian, Ghanaian, Tunisian and Bangladeshi soldiers, who are nevertheless credited with saving up to 30,000 lives.[46] France and Belgium evacuated their nationals from the country and left the Rwandans to their fate. Dallaire has subsequently estimated that a total of 4,000 well-equipped troops would have given him enough leverage to stop the slaughter. He believes that a number of different players share responsibility for what happened:

> The Rwandan genocide was the ultimate responsibility of those Rwandans who planned, ordered, supervised and eventually conducted it. Their extremism was the seemingly indestructible and ugly harvest of years of power struggles and insecurity that had been deftly played on by their former colonial rulers. But the deaths of Rwandans can also be laid at the door of the military genius Paul Kagame, who did not speed up his campaign when the scale of the genocide became clear and even talked candidly with me at several points about the price his fellow Tutsis might have to pay for the cause. Next in line when it comes to responsibility are France, which moved in too late and ended up protecting the genocidaires and permanently destabilizing the region, and the US government, which actively worked against an effective UNAMIR and only got involved to aid the same Hutu refugee population and the genocidaires, leaving the genocide survivors to flounder and suffer. The failings of the UN and Belgium were not in the same league.[47]

Once the genocide was underway the US government lobbied hard to prevent it being described as such by the UN Security Council, lest this require it to support a more forceful intervention. Belgium tried to persuade other troop-contributing countries to withdraw their contingents to minimize its embarrassment at pulling out.[48] It then stated that it was ready to redeploy its forces in a strengthened UN mission, but France vetoed the plan. Most humanitarian agencies also withdrew from the country, with the exception of the ICRC. In a reversal of roles from Biafra, a group of MSF doctors put themselves at the ICRC's disposal when their own organization pulled out.

MSF, Oxfam and a number of other agencies campaigned vigorously for international military intervention. MSF ran a series of adverts proclaiming that 'one cannot stop a genocide with medicines.'[49] What finally brought the slaughter to an end, however, was the military victory of Kagame's RPF forces, who controlled more than half the country by the end of May 1994. The UN finally agreed to deploy a second mission in early June, but this initiative foundered when the French government unilaterally announced that it was sending its own forces on a 'humanitarian mission' called Operation Turquoise. The French government offered to place them at the UN's disposal, a move the Security Council endorsed later that month. The French 'humanitarian intervention', however, was a partisan attempt to shore up an ally, and permitted many of those directly involved in the genocide to flee to neighbouring Zaire.[50] The majority settled in camps in eastern Zaire, which were increasingly used as bases for continuing attacks on Rwanda.[51] While the beleaguered UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali publicly welcomed the initiative, Dallaire privately threatened to shoot down the French force's planes.

UNHCR and the other humanitarian agencies were soon criticized for 'feeding killers' in the camps in Zaire while ignoring the survivors of genocide inside Rwanda.[52] Some international NGOs, such as MSF, IRC and CARE, withdrew from the camps in September 1994, citing their concerns over the misuse of relief. Within one year of the refugees arriving in the Zaire city of Goma, bordering Rwanda, the number of relief agencies had dropped from 150 to five.[53] The continued existence of these camps, both inside and outside Rwanda, became an acute source of embarrassment to the international community. UNHCR supported publicity campaigns in the camps encouraging the inhabitants to return home voluntarily – despite credible evidence of revenge killings inside Rwanda.[54] One aid worker has claimed that the camp authorities reduced food rations and refused to treat any new cases of TB or AIDS in order to pressurize people to return.[55] Ultimately many of the camps were forcibly closed by the Rwandan army; in one such operation, around 2,000 internally displaced civilians were massacred.[56] Thousands more were arbitrarily arrested or 'disappeared', and many are believed to have been killed.[57] UNHCR's director of planning, policy and operations, Sergio Vieira de Mello, failed to condemn the operation, though, as Ian Martin (a former secretary-general of Amnesty International now serving with OHCHR) stated, the principles of *non-refoulement* and refugee law were 'abused and brushed aside to a degree never seen before'.[58]

The Rwandan government held one of the non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council in 1994, and so participated in all the debates before, during and after the genocide. The RPF's seizure of power during the course of this year obviously brought a dramatic change in the perspective it was to adopt at the Security Council, though, ironically, the new government remained opposed to external intervention; it also voted against the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to try those accused of carrying out the genocide. RPF troops were soon facing accusations that they had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, within the country itself and in neighbouring Zaire (soon to become the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The horrors of Rwanda and the conflict in the Balkans (discussed in the next chapter) had a huge impact on the humanitarian interventions debate during the 1990s, with many observers blaming the UN for its failure to act firmly enough. However, that failure needs to be set in the context of what had happened in Somalia, and, in some ways, the failure of this intervention was more significant. The Somali mission had been authorized by the UN, was properly funded and had a sufficiently robust mandate, yet it ended in ignominy and its failure directly contributed to the disasters that followed elsewhere.

Some of the participants in the UN mission in Somalia believe it should have been more forceful, while others think it strayed too far from its humanitarian mandate.[59] A US military spokesman summed up what many in the international community thought had gone wrong: 'We fed them, they got strong, they killed us.'[60] A review ordered by the incoming US president, Bill Clinton, concluded that the 'Somalia syndrome' meant western public opinion would not tolerate the deaths of any of their soldiers engaged in humanitarian work. Many US critics blamed 'UN incompetence' for its failure and this became a standard excuse for the US government's lacklustre support for future missions. The US ambassador to Sierra Leone, John Hirsch, says that the US effectively withdrew from UN peacekeeping operations in Africa as a result.[61] Spyros Economides and Paul Taylor have noted, in *United Nations Interventionism*, that it also led to a wild oscillation in Clinton's foreign policy during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The US often seemed prepared to 'fight to the last Fijian' UN peacekeeper to oppose any settlement that legitimated ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, but it refused to countenance deploying its own ground troops in the region to stop it.[62] For the rest of the 1990s the US government refused to provide adequate support for UN missions to prove effective, and then used their resulting failures as retrospective endorsement of this policy.

Most observers agree that the key turning point in Somalia was not the shift from US to UN command of the mission in May 1993, but the response to Aidid's attack on the Pakistani soldiers the following month. The subsequent decision to take a harder line against Aidid was unanimously backed by all members of the UN Security Council, including the US government, and most of the leading personnel responsible for implementing this policy were closely linked to the US administration. Clearly the human rights violations committed by UN soldiers were a major factor in alienating ordinary Somalis, and Human Rights Watch published a report urging that future UN missions should have an explicit human rights component. This was generally accepted and one of the first acts of the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was to despatch OHCHR observers to Rwanda in May 1994. The Human Rights Watch report also warned against future attempts to tackle humanitarian problems through military means, but failed to spell out what this might mean in practice.[63]

The decision to intervene in Somalia was the direct result of a campaign by a number of humanitarian organizations and, despite its debacle, they continued to argue in favour of similar interventions elsewhere. Some, such as Weiss and Collins, argue that the main failure was that the intervention came too late – as if the same strategy would have been more successful had it been implemented twelve months earlier. Others continue to use Somalia as an example of how the indiscriminate delivery of aid can increase human suffering by 'feeding the war economy'.

An alternative view would be to say that giving out food in a famine is a sensible course of action. Famines usually occur because an excess of demand over supply causes prices to rise, while incomes often simultaneously fall. Most people die not because of a lack of food but because they cannot afford to buy what little is available.[64] Of course, in an ideal world food should be delivered where it is most needed, but Somalia was not ideal in any sense. The ICRC approach of flooding in as much as possible, even if it meant paying off the various militias, was probably the most suitable for the conditions since it was better to distribute food indiscriminately than not at all. Another alternative, proposed by Andrew Natsios, a senior USAID official, was to sell the food at cut-prices to local merchants and allow market mechanisms to help with the distributions. This would also have increased supply, and so lowered prices, and he felt that the merchants would be more effective in delivering food to places the humanitarian agencies could not reach. However, when he presented this to a meeting of donors and UN officials he was met with disbelief:

> The notion that humanitarian organisations would sell food in a famine mystified some and appalled others . . . The UN field

> staff of the World Food Programme and the UN Development Programme initially resisted the concept: they opposed the scheme because they thought it was abusive to sell food to starving people (which, of course, was not what the plan proposed to do) and they were uncomfortable with the practical mechanisms for carrying it out. Because of these misgivings they slowed the implementation in its formative months.[65]

Such schemes would also have been difficult to justify to a sceptical western public that has become increasingly used to hearing media reports of the waste and inefficiency of humanitarian relief. It also cuts against a number of prejudices about humanitarianism, such as the idea that food should only be given to the 'deserving' and that benevolent centralized agencies are better at allocating scarce resources than leaving the task to market mechanisms. Instead, the World Food Programme left its supply in Mogadishu's warehouses for months because it could not figure out how to distribute it, while UNDP failed to spend any of the $68 million it budgeted for Somalia because it could not get a signature from the appropriate minister in the country's non-existent government.[66] Of the $1.6 billion spent on Operation Restore Hope in 1993, it is estimated that only 4 per cent reached the people of Somalia and this mostly fell into the hands of the warlords, whose operations the UN ended up subsidizing to a far greater degree than the ICRC had ever done.[67]

Perhaps the main lesson of Somalia is that humanitarians should have argued more forcibly against the militarization of the mission. Mohamed Sahnoun was forced out of office largely because he took this position, but he received little support from the other main humanitarian organizations. He has stated that while some military force might have been justified, it should have been much more limited and 'capable of being absorbed by the local environment'. The huge US-led force deployed in

Somalia was intended to overawe the militias, but it ended up taking over the logic of the whole mission. In calling for the military intervention, and then relying on it for their security, the humanitarian agencies lost any possibility of maintaining their neutrality or building links with Somali civil society.

Sahnoun also urged humanitarian organizations to 'achieve enough solidarity amongst themselves so that they are able to resist the imposition – for instance, by the deployment of security assets – of political-military priorities in the deployment of humanitarian goods and services'.[68] This sound advice was basically ignored by humanitarian agencies as they increasingly allied themselves to the cause of western intervention, both through their advocacy and operational activities over the next decade.