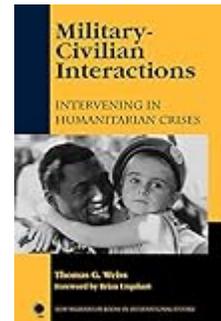


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Thomas G. Weiss.** *Military-Civilian Interactions: Intervening in Humanitarian Crisis.* Lanham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. xix + 281 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8746-6.



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“The opinions or assertions herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Department of the Army, Navy, or Air Force or of the Department of Defense”

My oldest brother, who represents the pacifist wing of my family, once told me that the Clinton Administration’s humanitarian deployment of the armed forces has put the pacifist community in the odd position of supporting military spending. As the author of *Military Civilian Interactions* writes in the preface, “Somewhat paradoxically then, this former conscientious objector was less keen about a ‘peace dividend’ than many observers; rather, I was intrigued about the possible uses of outside military forces to foster international peace and security. For me the most likely and desirable peace dividend would be the application of military might and expertise to dampen violence and help victims under the auspices of a strengthened United Nations.”

Weiss’s book is more a political science treatise than military history. The author studies the effectiveness of using military forces to intervene in political and humanitarian crises through five case studies; Northern Iraq (1991-1996), Somalia (1992-1995), Bosnia (1992-1995), Rwanda (1994-1995), and Haiti (1991-1996). Each chapter briefly describes the background to the conflict, military and civilian responses, and the costs and bene-

fits of the intervention. Each case is neatly summed up with a one-page table.

The intervention in Northern Iraq, just after the Persian Gulf War, occurred almost accidentally. When the Iraqi Republican Guard attacked the Kurds, the U.S. military already had a stockpile of supplies in the vicinity of the crisis, and it seemed cheaper to drop them to the Kurds than to ship them back to the United States. The mission’s success in stabilizing the situation showed the potential of the military in humanitarian missions and encouraged other interventions. International leaders lurched from crisis to crisis, applying lessons learned from previous missions and discovering that the new situation was totally different than the previous crisis. Generals are not the only ones who fight the last war.

Humanitarian missions are not just military ventures. One this book’s strengths is its discussion of the interaction of the players in each crisis, ranging from military forces, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the International Red Cross as well as their respective roles in each crisis.

Perhaps this book was written too soon. For example, the author judges the Haitian intervention as a qualified success and a significant prerequisite to the democratic transition from Prime Minister Jean Bertrand Aris-

tide to Rene Praval in 1997. Unfortunately, the chapter was written before Praval was unable to form a coalition, leaving Haiti without a government two years later and leading to the recent annulment of those elections. In fact, thus far none of the five interventions discussed have apparently resolved or will resolve the underlying problems that created the crisis in the first place.

However, Weiss is aware of this problem, noting the situations are too different, the timeframe too short and the information available too inconsistent to draw meaningful conclusions. While the author regrets that he is unable to offer more definitive conclusions, I believe he shows considerable wisdom in refusing to do so.

Another concern is the unstated implication that these interventions are a completely new phenomenon. The western world has intervened in the third world for reasons political, economic and humanitarian for over a century. One of the reasons Europe intervened in Africa in the late nineteenth century was to stop the slave trade and the belief that Africans would benefit from western values and technology. American intervention in Central America resulted in better sanitation and reduced

incidence of mosquito-borne diseases. Even the much-despised Vietnam War included a significant dose of humanitarian and economic development. Is the occupation of Haiti in 1994 really that much different than the one in 1915?

However, it is unfair to judge a book on anything other than what the author tried to accomplish and Weiss's intention was to begin a discussion. Although he supports increased use of the military in humanitarian missions, he recognizes that the benefits may be only short term. His efforts in laying out issues and raising questions for evaluating the success of these missions or determining whether the military is really the best means to achieve the desired ends are thought provoking. It is a discussion I hope that military historians will join as we study the history of the military at the end of the twentieth century.

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