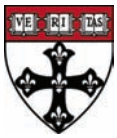
Designing Security

HPCR Policy Brief
Security Management Initiative



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Designing Security

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Table of contents

Executive Summary 3

Note on Methodology 4

Definition of Terms 4

Background 5

Obstacles to Security Management and Coordination 7
- Impediments to coordination 7
- Security management practices 9

Security Coordination Models 12

Improving Management and Coordination Practices 14
- Network of professionals 14
- Information sharing 15

Recommendations 18

Acronyms 22

Bibliography 23

Executive summary

Humanitarian organizations operate in increasingly hostile environments. Although authoritative statistics are scarce, anecdotal evidence suggests that aid workers face life-threatening risks that are exacerbated by the growing number of humanitarian organizations operating in the field with varying mandates, without common professional security standards and with limited success with inter-agency security coordination. The ability of humanitarian organizations to fulfill their mandates in the future will depend in part on their individual success in improving internal security management practices and in finding ways to coordinate their efforts on building common security standards and security coordination across agencies. To meet this challenge, humanitarian organizations must implement improved security management methods and find ways to coordinate their security operations and planning.

Despite broad acceptance of the need to develop better security management and coordination, many humanitarian organizations remain ambivalent about coordinating their security activities and few have instituted robust measures for improving their own security management practices. Further, efforts to improve security management practices are hampered by a critical lack of basic empirical knowledge about the field security environment. In discussions about humanitarian staff safety and security, the least common denominator continues to be cumulative anecdotal evidence provided by the many security personnel working for humanitarian organizations in the field.

This policy brief reviews the literature on humanitarian organization security management, highlighting common misconceptions about the field security environment, reviews the main structural and procedural issues impeding more effective security management, and illustrates why current initiatives to improve security management practices will remain only partial successes if they do not include a serious effort to replace anecdotal reporting on the field security environment with systematic collection and analysis of field security data. It argues that *staff security requires a common professional approach based on sound security expertise adapted to meet the operational needs of humanitarian organizations*. A model is developed for creating a network of security professionals responsible for guiding the design and implementation of common security standards and security information sharing protocol.

Note

This policy brief draws on the extant scholarly and policy literature on security management and coordination, the author's own experience with designing field security reporting systems for the United Nations and several NGOs, and on feedback from discussions with UN and NGO security managers attending a pilot training course designed by the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research (HPCR) at Harvard University, held at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) in Geneva, Switzerland from June 30 to July 3, 2006. An amended version of this brief will appear in the journal *Disasters* in 2007.

Definition of terms

Security Management: Those practices adopted by humanitarian organizations to ensure the security of their personnel, property, and programs, including, though not limited to, staff security training, risk assessment methods, incident reporting, improving security equipment, and crisis management procedures.

Security Coordination: Those policies, procedures, and practices designed to improve staff security through inter-agency collaboration, especially through developing common security standards, sharing security resources, and sharing security-related information.

Background: Are humanitarian aid workers at increased risk?

A recent report by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) notes that "since 1992, 229 United Nations civilian staff members have been killed as a result of malicious acts."[1] Further, during the period from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005, UNDSS "received information detailing the deaths of 65 international and national staff of international, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations as a result of malicious acts."[2] While there is no definitive study that offers an authoritative number of humanitarian aid worker deaths, there is general consensus that the absolute numbers of aid workers killed by violence is increasing.[3] This poses serious problems for both humanitarian aid organizations and their donors as the "high number of these types of security incidents undermines the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations, degrades the personal safety and well-being of staff and compromises the security of field installations."[4]

Academic and policy studies have highlighted the need for humanitarian organizations to develop improved security management practices to address staff security needs in an increasingly hostile operating environment.[5] These studies show that improved security for humanitarian aid workers requires both closer coordination at the field and policy levels between humanitarian aid organizations and the implementation of better security management practices within these organizations. There is some variance between academics and policy researchers, on the one hand, and security managers, on the other hand, regarding identification of the sources of risk to humanitarian aid workers. Notably, academics and policy researchers suggest that targeted violence poses the greatest danger to humanitarian aid workers, while humanitarian organization security managers point to criminal acts and traffic accidents as the greatest danger.[6] These divergent findings have serious policy consequences for humanitarian aid organizations and belie different methodological approaches to the development of strategies dealing with staff security.

Academic studies of humanitarian aid worker deaths rely typically on surveys of non-governmental organizations (NGOs),[7] information culled from the United Nations' ReliefWeb,[8] and events reported in the international news media to make descriptive

1. UN General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, *Safety and Security*, 2.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. See, e.g., King, *Paying the Ultimate Price*; Sheik et al., "Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers"; and Van Brabant, *Mainstreaming*.
4. UN General Assembly, A/60/223, *Safety and Security*, 3.
5. See, e.g., Bruderlein and Gassmann, "Managing Security Risks"; King, *Paying the Ultimate Price*; Sheik et al., "Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers"; Martin, "NGO Field Security"; and Van Brabant, *Mainstreaming Safety and Security*.
6. See, e.g., "Humans with weapons rather than motor vehicles pose the greatest threat." Sheik et al., "Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers," 168; "An analysis of the information collected in the chronology indicates that more civilian humanitarian aid workers were killed by acts of violence than died in vehicle and aircraft accidents." King, *Paying the Ultimate Price*, 15. In contrast to King and Sheik, see, e.g., "It is important not lose sight of the fact that the greatest risks to the well-being of NGO staff arise not from security threats, but from safety issues. Safety threats such as vehicle accidents, malaria, water-borne disease, HIV and other health threats continue to be by far the largest causes of causalities among relief workers." Martin, "NGO Field Security," 4 (author emphasis). Also see "Humanitarian and development personnel are increasingly facing intentional violence…Yet it is criminal violence committed with firearms - not attacks by armed combatants – that remains the most significant threat facing workers." Buchanan and Muggah, *No Relief*, 7; and "Although there is evidence of emerging threats related to terrorism, the experience of humanitarian agencies is that the predominant security risks faced by humanitarian workers continue to be criminal and accidental in nature, rather than relating to deliberate aggression." European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office, *Security of Humanitarian Personnel*, 1.
7. Sheik et al., "Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers."
8. King, *Paying the Ultimate Price*.

inferences about the threats facing humanitarian aid workers in the field, the sources of those threats and the impact on humanitarian aid workers. These studies suggest that humanitarian aid workers are increasingly the victims of targeted violence.[9] NGO security professionals argue, however, that such findings are flawed either because they rely on information from the media, which rarely includes fatalities due to accidents, crime, or illness, or because presenting mean numbers of deaths is misleading since the vast majority of attacks on aid workers take place in relatively few countries (Afghanistan, Angola, the Sudan), whereas inferences are typically made about the security of humanitarian aid workers generally.

Unfortunately, none of these studies makes a convincing empirical case that humanitarian aid workers are increasingly at risk. There are two reasons for this. First, accurate estimates for the number of humanitarian aid workers serving in the field are not available for the period that statistics are known for the number of humanitarian aid worker fatalities.[10] This means that little can be inferred about the rate at which humanitarian aid workers are dying, since the denominator, number of aid workers, is not available. Second, different academic studies rely on a diversity of methods, terms and protocols for identifying and recording security incidents, posing cross-study reliability concerns, while lack of consistency in the data collection methods employed by humanitarian aid organizations themselves make the validity of security incident data notoriously problematic.

While good empirical research on humanitarian aid worker deaths is improving slowly, anecdotal evidence is available showing that both safety (accidents, primarily) and security (targeted violence, mostly) remain serious concerns to international humanitarian aid agencies. The lack of solid empirical data on security incidents and the high operational and political costs of targeted killings of humanitarian aid workers offer a compelling incentive to improve security management practices and inter-agency security collaboration vis-à-vis the systematic collection, sharing and analysis of security information. In the past year, a handful of NGOs and the UN (UNDSS specifically) have adopted robust field security reporting methods for the collection of standardized security data.

The previous sections identified the dangers faced by humanitarian aid workers as well as the contributions and limits of current studies of humanitarian aid worker security. Both improved security management practices and better inter-agency security collaboration are needed to address the challenges of operating in the security environment depicted in the studies cited above. Though clearly complementary and mutually reinforcing, it is reasonable to treat both security management measures and security coordination separately, as each has its own sets of obstacles and constraints to consider.

Both academics and policy experts have identified some of the obstacles to effective security management within and security collaboration between humanitarian organizations. On the one hand, inadequate tools for conducting risk assessments, an inability to institutionalize staff expertise and a lack of strategic thinking have constrained effective security management. On the other hand, fear of a loss of autonomy among NGOs, and a desire to keep political processes and aid delivery separate are cited as serious impediments to security collaboration among humanitarian aid organizations.[11] A discussion of these points follows.

9. See, e.g., Abbott, "Dangerous Intervention."
10. An exception is the work by Marianne Abbott. Abbott takes the number of refugees and internally displaced persons as a proxy measure for the number of humanitarian aid workers operating in the field.
11. Stephenson Jr., "Humanitarian Relief Networks."

Obstacles to effective security management and security coordination

The literature on humanitarian aid organization security highlights a number of reasons why humanitarian aid organizations have not yet adopted adequately robust security management systems and why these organizations still fall short on security coordination.[12] The major obstacles to improved security management include an overly narrow focus on operational readiness for field operators but not strategic-level thinking about security and crisis management, high rates of staff turnover resulting in a disconnect between high levels of staff expertise and little or no institutional knowledge, and an inadequate attention paid to developing risk assessment and tools needed to understand and prepare for threats in the operating environment.[13]

Obstacles to effective security coordination between humanitarian organizations include significant differences in the capacities and mission of NGOs,[14] mistrust or misunderstanding between NGOs and the UN,[15] concern over humanitarian principles and mutual fears about agency autonomy,[16] competition over donor funds and a desire among aid organizations to be in the spotlight.[17] These issues are considered in turn.

Impediments to security coordination

Humanitarian principles and politics. Humanitarian aid organizations have traditionally delivered aid to beneficiaries according to the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence. In the post-Cold War world, these organizations have been tasked increasingly with participating in the post-conflict peacebuilding process, an inherently political process that some suggest negates claims to neutrality and independence.[18] Since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the idea of impartiality has also come under criticism as humanitarian aid organizations were seen to be delivering aid to people who had a hand in the genocide and were still preparing for or actively participating in violent conflict.

This tension between adhering to humanitarian principles, on the one hand, and participating in peacebuilding, on the other hand, has led to an identity crisis that is most evident currently in Iraq.[19] As NGO mandates have evolved from assistance and protection to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and good governance, humanitarian aid organizations are faced with a choice between acting as subsidiaries of the donor governments and playing a role of diminished importance on the international scene. In Iraq, aid organizations have had to choose either to work with the occupying power or risk not fulfilling their humanitarian mission. The 'War on Terror' further complicates the capacity of NGOs to maintain their independence and neutrality. Adherence to principles of neutrality and impartiality is easier when comfortably situated in the context of a balance of power (between the United States and the Soviet Union), where the dominant states in the international system managed political matters. In a globalized world charac-

12. See, e.g., Eide, *Report on Integrated Missions*; see also Kent, "United Nations' Humanitarian Pillar."
13. See Donini, Minear, and Walker, "Future of Humanitarian Action."
14. Stephenson Jr., "Humanitarian Relief Networks."
15. Ibid.
16. See Tong, "Questionable Accountability."
17. Stephenson Jr., "Humanitarian Relief Networks."
18. Donini, Minear, and Walker, "Future of Humanitarian Action."
19. See Donini, Minear, and Walker, "Between Cooptation and Irrelevance."

terized by asymmetries of power, it is more difficult for NGOs to substantiate claims of neutrality and impartiality.

Coordinating agencies. The humanitarian aid community utilizes umbrella organizations to coordinate the development of common standards and to provide a common forum for the discussion of issues that affect the aid community broadly. In the case of the UN, the main coordinating bodies are the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the "primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination relating to humanitarian assistance."[20] Its membership includes the heads of UN agencies, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and NGO coordinating bodies like InterAction and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). For NGOs in the U.S., this role is filled by InterAction. Humanitarian aid organizations may also work closely with one another through bilateral arrangements or with the United Nations, as often happens when NGOs act as implementing partners for the UN. These coordinating organizations can help clarify accepted practices for working with military forces and private security forces and may also identify minimum operating security standards.

Despite the attempt at institutionalization of coordination through these coordinating organizations, there is little evidence that such efforts result in greater security coordination at the field level. One problem is the issue of NGO representation at the UN. While NGOs are represented in IASC meetings by InterAction or ICVA, they cannot participate directly. Other impediments to coordination at the field level include the disparate missions of agencies, competition for donor funds, short-term objectives (humanitarian aid) versus long-term objectives (development programs) and different philosophies regarding working with military and private security forces.

These challenges to inter-agency security coordination are clearly visible in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, aid organizations face a choice between acting in concert with the UN or nurturing their own relationship with their beneficiary communities.[21] Interaction between the humanitarian community and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan creates the impression that the humanitarian community is participating in the political process, thus blurring the line between humanitarian and political action. The humanitarian community also faces competition from private contractors and the military for the delivery of aid, thus increasing pressure to continue operating in insecure environments.

NGOs are also sometimes reluctant to work with the UN, fearing that they will be constrained in their own freedom of movement. A good example of how NGOs will avoid being bound to standards that they have not designed themselves is evident in the creation of two separate sets of security standards. For example, rather than adopt the Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) developed by the UN, NGOs developed their own set of Minimum Operating Security Standards.[22]

Desire to maintain organizational autonomy. Many NGOs are fiercely independent organizations. This is particularly evident with respect to formal procedures introduced by the UN that are designed to incorporate NGOs into a coordinated security system. In 1996, for example, NGOs universally refused to sign on to the Memorandum of Understanding

20. See Martens, "NGOs in the UN System," 14.
21. Donini, Minear, and Walker, "Future of Humanitarian Action."
22. See, UN Security Coordinator, *Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS)*. "The purpose of MOSS is to establish standard field based criteria for minimum security arrangements to enhance staff security and reduce risk to enable UN field operations," on issues including, but not limited to, telecommunications, vehicles, training, equipment and security plans. See also, InterAction, "Suggested Guidance." The InterAction MOSS addresses organizational security policy and plans, security resources, human resource management, accountability, and sense of community.

(MOU) presented by the then Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD). Signatories to the MOU were asked to cede authority for security in the field to the UN, an idea with which no NGO was comfortable. Another illustration of a strong desire to maintain agency autonomy is clearly exhibited in the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) refusal to sign on to the Sphere project. The Sphere project is an inter-agency collaborative process that holds signatories accountable to a set of standards in areas that include food security, water sanitation, health services, and shelter. Its refusal to sign is understood to be an expression of MSF's unwillingness to reduce humanitarian aid to a set of technical standards, and a concern that Sphere would reduce the flexibility required by NGOs to respond to humanitarian disasters and focus, wrongly, on NGO accountability rather than the accountability of host governments.[23]

Competition over scarce resources. Competition over donor funds and a desire to be in the spotlight create an atmosphere that is not conducive to cooperation.[24] There is a strong incentive for organizations to be seen as taking the lead in delivering humanitarian aid to beneficiary communities. Organizations that are willing to deliver aid in risky environments can make a compelling claim to donors and can capture the media spotlight. This provides incentives to take risks that might otherwise not be taken. Being the only one of few organizations in an emergency operation can also make an agency the *de facto* spokesperson for the aid community in that particular emergency.

The competitive aid environment threatens humanitarian action by narrowing its logic to institutional imperative. This creates specific problems for the UN in "balancing its operational role – its programs and projects designed to provide and deliver humanitarian assistance – with its leadership and coordination roles."[25] Because collaboration is not cost-free, organizations are unlikely to want to bear the cost for collaborative initiatives and are likely to pass financial responsibility onto an agency that is willing to pay. This behavior, in turn, creates mistrust among NGOs, rendering collaboration less likely.[26] To overcome this problem, humanitarian aid organizations may need to re-imagine the task of coordination and focus on the development of organizational cultures that actively encourage improved inter-organizational trust.[27]

Security management practices

Focus on operational security at the expense of more holistic approaches. Humanitarian aid organizations typically use a combination of two approaches to address staff security needs. The first approach emphasizes standard-driven security management. The second approach employs a community-based approach relying chiefly on acceptance by the beneficiary community.[28] Mines awareness, radio training, hostage taking training and so forth all figure prominently in the first approach and are commonly included in NGO and UN staff training programs. A good example of the systems-based approach is the staff training programs offered by RedR, an organization dedicated to training humanitarian staff. While important for staff security, these training courses should also address more strategic issues, like duty of care to staff or accountability, that are more properly security management issues. Another limitation of NGO and UN security training is that international staff members are disproportionately the beneficiaries of these training courses even

23. Tong, "Questionable Accountability."
24. Stephenson Jr., "Humanitarian Relief Networks."
25. Kent, "United Nations' Humanitarian Pillar," 222.
26. Stephenson Jr., "Humanitarian Relief Networks."
27. Ibid.
28. These are sometimes referred to as the 'system-based security approach' and the 'community-based security approach.' See, e.g., Bruderlein and Gassmann, "Managing Security Risks."

though duty stations in some of the more insecure environments are often run by national staff.[29]

An 'acceptance' approach, on the other hand, assumes that NGOs can take effective steps that will lead to improved reception by the local community and that NGOs have the capacity to make sophisticated judgments about the types of threats they face. These assumptions are not supported by the literature, which suggests that NGOs lack the ability to understand contextualized information in the form of risk assessments.[30] The system-based and community-acceptance approaches are often presented as contradictory, representing different objectives and philosophies.[31] It is possible however that these approaches, when properly exercised, are mutually reinforcing. Proper analysis of the field security environment can provide a basis for making operational decisions that could arguably improve community-based approaches by alerting aid organizations to what they are doing wrong and which activities to curtail.

A strategic template to integrate lessons learned from risk assessments is needed to inform new polices and approaches that are necessary to finding the appropriate balance between system-based and community-based approaches to security training. A scientific approach is needed to supplement the *ad hoc*, 'gut instinct' interpretations currently utilized by security managers who "continue to under-value the importance of collecting and analyzing data on the distribution, types and impact of arms."[32] Such an approach would assist NGOs in "identifying what security threats are of the highest probability and greatest consequence to an NGO's operations and prioritizing resources to these threats accordingly."[33]

Limited data on field security and a shortage of scientifically trained security managers. The absence of scientifically trained security professionals is an impediment to improving NGO and UN security management.[34] An ECHO report on staff security cites staff competence as the most significant weakness in current security management. Most NGO and UN security professionals have military or police backgrounds and are not trained social scientists or policy experts. This explains, at least partially, the continued absence of robust systems to collect, analyze, and transform behavioral data about security into an improved understanding of the security risks faced by aid organizations in the field.

Until security reporting is inculcated into the standard operating procedures of aid organizations, interpreting developments in the field security environment will invariably remain a *post hoc* crisis response exercise rather than a forward looking crisis early warning approach. Aid organizations stand to benefit unequivocally from the incorporation of intelligently constructed reporting systems into their standard operational design. Moreover, if systems are designed such that they share common incident typologies and reporting protocols, then aggregate level data sharing among aid organizations promises to be a boon to their collective ability to develop a robust understanding of the changing dynamics of the field security environment.

Absence of a single security information database. The problems associated with a failure to collect standardized information and provide that information to both headquarters and field offices were made clear in the 2003 bombing of UN offices in Baghdad. The report of the Independent Panel on the Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel in Iraq

29. Ibid., 77.
30. See Gassmann, "Rethinking Humanitarian Security."
31. Bruderlein and Gassmann, "Managing Security Risks."
32. Buchanan and Muggah, *No Relief*, 11.
33. Martin, "NGO Field Security," 6.
34. European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office, *Security of Humanitarian Personnel*, 2.

found that the existing security management system is dysfunctional, in part because there is a "lack of proper threat assessments both at the strategic level at Headquarters and in the field."[35] Over-reliance on security plans, which are often treated as obsolete documents, and the inability of field security staff to identify impending threats point to a need for better security management and coordination.[36]

NGO security information and analysis is similarly inadequate. Despite being held up as the most effective NGO field security coordination mechanism, the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) too lacks a single database that includes security and situation report data. No serious steps have been taken to get beyond risk assessments based on "brainstorming the current and potential threats."[37] A systematic analysis of standardized baseline data is needed if aid organizations are ever to escape the cycle of *ad hoc* crisis management.

Another inherent limitation of current security management practice is an excessive reliance on static structural information found in the occasional field security assessments, and often outdated security plans and security guidelines. This impedes security managers by reducing their ability to assess dynamic changes that occur on a day-to-day basis both in relation to emerging threats in the field as well as measures being taken by field staff to mitigate their vulnerability.

35. See *Report of the Independent Panel on the Safety and Security of UN Personnel in Iraq*, 24.
36. Van Brabant, *Mainstreaming Safety and Security*.
37. European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office, *Security of Humanitarian Personnel*, 51.

Security coordination models

The United Nations manages staff security through its Department of Safety and Security. In the wake of the 2003 UN headquarters bombing in Baghdad, the UN General Assembly voted to appropriate fifty-four million dollars to bolster UN security and created the new Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), combining the previous United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) and other UN security mechanisms. This decision significantly increased the capacity of the United Nations to meet its security obligations and plans. UNDSS relies on a network of its own field security coordination officers, security officers, and security focal points from other UN agencies. This network provides the backbone of UN security and utilizes Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS), a global web-based Security Incident Reporting System (UNSIRS) that enables UNDSS to create security baselines from which to make predictive assessments of the field security environment, training programs (including interactive, computer-based, basic and advanced training courses completed by some sixty thousand staff members),[38] threat assessments, and country security plans to manage an estimated one hundred thousand United Nations staff and dependents globally.

Where the UN security management system is centralized and growing, NGO security management remains more fragmented. This is not surprising given the number of NGOs and the disparity in their respective resources, mandates and missions. While there is no NGO security management system, there is an effort to use shared security planning guidelines and to discuss coordination and security management issues through interactive forums like the InterAction Security Advisory Group (SAG). This group of security coordinators and security focal points from major U.S. NGOs meets in Washington, DC on a quarterly basis. The SAG gives participating NGOs a voice where they are able to articulate their concerns about security and provides a forum for discussing security coordination. The forum also provides NGO security coordinators with an opportunity to learn about UN coordination efforts, as InterAction's Director of Humanitarian Policy and Practice meets monthly with IASC/OCHA.

Coordinating organizations like InterAction and UNOCHA are useful in helping to articulate security standards and in providing fora for the discussion of security requirements. However, given the disparity in resources, philosophies, and missions among NGOs and UN agencies, more innovative approaches are required to meet the security management needs of humanitarian aid organizations. Novel approaches to some of the more intractable security management issues are most likely to come from field security operators working at the grassroots level. Informal networks of professionals that are sensitive to the needs of field security managers would be well positioned to develop the tools and methods needed to improve field security management. Among the tools and methods most relevant to improving field security management are field security reporting tools that clearly depict the level of operational risk faced by agencies, including the identification of the probability of an event happening, the magnitude of such an event and its likely implications for humanitarian aid organizations. Equally important, grassroots networks of security professionals could use such tools to coordinate their actions, improving preparation for and response to adverse events.

38. UN General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, *Safety and Security*, 5.

In the field, the record on both security management and security coordination during recent humanitarian emergencies in Afghanistan, Darfur, and Iraq suggests that there is considerable room for improvement in the way humanitarian aid organizations calculate risk and translate risk assessments into actionable preparation. In the case of the UN, for example, the Security in Iraq Accountability Panel identified serious problems in the execution of standard operating procedures in Baghdad.[39] NGO security coordination has encountered similar criticism. The NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI), for example, is said to have remained "unrepresentative of the broader NGO community and lacked the requisite skills to coordinate."[40] This type of criticism is not altogether new. In Sierra Leone (1997-1998), the UN and NGOs were criticized for creating "two parallel information management systems that often presented conflicting evaluations of safety and danger."[41]

39. See UN, *Report of the Security in Iraq Accountability Panel (SIAP*).
40. Puechguirbal, *Lesson Learning Review,* 8.
41. Sommers, "Dynamics of Coordination," 68.

Improving security management and security coordination practices

New strategic thinking is needed to overcome the obstacles to effective security management and security coordination discussed earlier. Formal institutional approaches to security management and coordination are necessary, but insufficient to meet the security needs of humanitarian aid organizations. Instead, grassroots models developed at the field level that are conceptually rich and methodologically rigorous are needed. Informal networks of professional staff should be utilized to provide concrete measures to guide the policy of coordinating organizations in a way that reflects the needs of the broader humanitarian community and in ways that promise to replace *ad hoc*, 'gut reaction' measures to security with informed security analysis. The international relations literature on epistemic communities offers interesting insights that are useful for articulating how a network of professionals provides a strategically useful method for improving both security management and inter-agency security coordination. An illustration of this conceptual argument is made through an analysis of security information sharing methods.

Network of professionals: Conceptual foundation

The literature on epistemic communities provides useful insights into the structural constraints states face in decisions to coordinate their activities around a given issue area and offers valuable insights on how highly focused and motivated groups of specialists help articulate preferences used by states in calculating their national interests under the structural constraints of an anarchic international system.[42] Some of the basic realist assumptions about states can also be usefully applied to an analysis of NGOs operating in the field. These assumptions include the idea that there is no single entity governing the behavior of NGOs in the field; NGOs operate in a self-help environment. Secondly, no single NGO can be certain about the intentions of other NGOs and UN actors. Thirdly, a basic motive driving NGOs is their own survival. Finally, NGOs think strategically about how to survive in the system. This means that NGOs will weigh the risks of operating in dangerous environments against their need to deliver aid and remain engaged with beneficiaries.[43]

While realists are pessimistic about the possibilities of mutual cooperation among states, liberal theorists point to the costs of not cooperating when mutual gains may be made. Some theorists posit that networks of knowledge-based experts (epistemic communities) offer a practical means of getting actors to cooperate in a self-help environment. An epistemic community is defined as a "network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area."[44] Epistemic communities share common normative beliefs and common perspectives on causal mechanisms and notions of validity and adopt common policy positions. These networks can facilitate cooperation among disparate actors facing uncertain outcomes by identifying the complex inter-linkages between issues and by formulating policy alternatives. In other words, *small, focused networks of professionals who share a common set of norms can work informally and extra-*

42. Haas, "Epistemic Communities."
43. See, for e.g., Mearsheimer, "False Promise of International Institutions," for a discussion of this logic as it pertains to the behavior of states operating in an anarchic international order.
44. Haas, "Epistemic Communities," 3.

institutionally to move organizations in the direction of coordination by alleviating mistrust between organizations and by articulating choices that lead to cooperation.

Security information sharing

While no single measure taken to improve security management practices and security collaboration is adequate to meet the security needs of humanitarian aid organizations, the standardized collection, analysis, and sharing of security information is a necessary condition for improving staff security. The collection of field security information is widely accepted by security professionals and donors as pivotal to producing the kind of information needed to inform better security management practices. Field data on security are also broadly useful to the entire humanitarian aid community and therefore also provide a good basis for the discussion of better security collaboration. Despite such support, methodologically-sound methods for collecting, analyzing, and sharing security data remain elusive. *The routine collection of standardized security information is essential for producing empirical data that is necessary for improving how aid organizations manage their own security and for how they coordinate with one another*. Security information reporting and sharing holds great promise for improving the security management practices of aid organizations and for paving the way towards closer collaboration, by making transparent and quantifiable the costs of working in isolation from one another.

One benefit to focusing on security information sharing is that it addresses a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for building the institutional trust required for overcoming some of the major obstacles to security coordination. Another benefit is that information sharing does not require that organizations partake of the same philosophy or the same operating principles to make information coordination work. Because they are singularly focused and strategically placed, networks of security professionals are capable of making transparent the benefits of collaboration and reducing the costs of collaboration by articulating coherent methods for information sharing and designing common or compatible platforms for security incident and situation reporting.

A network of professionals may also address legitimate concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and institutional independence by identifying the level of data aggregation required in order to balance the needs to protect the agency against the benefits to be acquired from sharing information. Furthermore, by designing common reporting platforms and identifying common report forms and reporting protocols, a network of security professionals may reduce the barriers to entry for smaller NGOs that would otherwise shy away from such initiatives because of prohibitive costs.

Few humanitarian aid organizations have incorporated routine security incident reporting and situation reporting into their standard operating procedures. The creation of Humanitarian Information Centers (HICs) by OCHA and the introduction of NGO coordinating organizations in Afghanistan (ANSO) and Iraq (NCCI) represent attempts to address this problem. These field reporting centers highlight the shortcomings of current approaches to security information collection, analysis and sharing.

Humanitarian Information Centers, a "common service of the UN system, managed by OCHA," are deployed at the onset of humanitarian emergencies.[45] HICs are designed to support the "coordination of humanitarian assistance through the provision of information products and services and the decision-making process at the headquarters and field level by contributing to the creation of a common framework for information management within the hu-

45. Sida and Szpak, *Evaluation of Humanitarian Information Centers,* 7.

manitarian community."[46] An HIC can play a useful role in providing basic demographic data including information products like meeting lists, contact lists, gazetteers, and maps. These are important things to have for managing day-to-day activities, but are entirely inadequate for producing baselines and assessments that are needed for making policy decisions.

The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) is an IRC-sponsored and ECHO-funded security coordination institution for NGOs operating in Afghanistan. Among other coordination functions, ANSO collects and disseminates information on the field security environment in the form of security incident and situation reports. As with its UN counterparts, ANSO collects unstructured situation and incident reports from around the country and provides maps and rudimentary analysis in return. A basic shortcoming of the ANSO model is its operational approach to security coordination. ANSO is staffed exclusively with members whose formal training is with the police or military. This explains in large part why ANSO took on an operational role in Afghanistan and focused on things like NGO-training through RedR training courses and staff evacuations and NGO-military relations. The task of information gathering and analysis, its primary function, has languished because there is no one with the relevant qualifications and practical experience to create robust field reporting systems that can provide contextual analysis. In fact, after limited use, ANSO abandoned its use of a security incident database.

As with security management generally, a system-based approach to information gathering and analysis has resulted in a narrowing of organization capacity to produce meaningful analysis of the operating environment. If institutions like ANSO and HICs are to succeed as effective coordinating bodies, then it is imperative that their capacities to provide contextualized analysis of the field security environment be built. This can be achieved by supplementing, if not replacing, their system-based approach to security with a more holistic approach that includes gathering standardized security incident and situation reports. The latter, in particular, will allow aid organizations to create baselines, enabling more objective assessments and projections about the direction and magnitude of emerging threats in the environment. The institutions must also create a common set of incident types and incident attributes that are simultaneously exhaustive and mutually exclusive (variables like information credibility, incident location, and so forth) that would allow these organizations to triangulate information sources and provide improved analysis.

Lack of consistency and conceptual rigor in the approach to collecting security data remains a major impediment to inter-agency security coordination in the field. The absence of a scientific approach to collecting and analyzing field security data is a gaping hole in humanitarian organization security collaboration. Until security incident and situation reporting are inculcated into the standard operating procedures of aid organizations, interpreting developments in the field security environment will invariably remain a *post hoc* crisis response exercise.

Despite the general absence of standardized field security reporting, there are notable examples that, if encouraged and nurtured by a network of security professionals, would likely result in a paradigm shift in the way security is currently managed among aid organizations. The two most important developments are the creation of a Security Incident Reporting System by UNDSS and the development of similar field reporting tools by World Vision International and Save the Children. The UNDSS field reporting system provides users with a standardized web-based form that collects incident data across twenty-four variables. This system is currently used by United Nations staff and Field Security Country Officers predominantly, but has been designed to

46. Ibid., 7.

include non-governmental organizations too. One limit of the system is that, at the moment, UNDSS collects security incident information and not situation report data. This difference is important because security incident data only give the organization insight into what has already gone wrong and not what measures are being taken to reduce vulnerability or to identify emerging threats that have not yet met the threshold of an action taken against the UN. Current UNDSS efforts to inculcate security incident reporting in the field are likely to succeed where a previous similar effort (Humanitarian and Protection Safety Network (HSPN)) failed.[47] This is because the UNDSS effort was led by a network of professionals representing UN staff from both headquarters and the field, UN information technology staff, academics and private industry over a period of eight years. The dedication of this group created strong incentives for UNDSS to adopt the system and lowered the costs of undertaking the project by keeping its development at a grassroots level.

For the NGOs too, there is good reason to be optimistic about the prospects for adopting robust field security reporting methods. A number of NGOs participating in InterAction's Security Advisory Group have either already adopted, or are in the process of adopting, their own field security reporting systems. Given their mutual interests and the widely held belief that what one agency does in the field affects all other agencies, there is every reason for UN and NGO humanitarian aid organizations to collaborate to share field data. A network of professionals that guides the development of a portal enabling these agencies to share mutually agreed upon aggregate level data is needed. If combined with a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) component, this would be a powerful tool in the hands of these organizations and would provide the means not only for managing incidents, but for finally building a capacity to interpret broader trends in the field security environment. This latter point would represent a major change in how these organizations understand and deal with field security.

47. A report by ECHO asserts that HSPN failed because of high turnover rates of personnel in participating organizations, liability and privacy issues, reluctance to provide information that might implicate the participating organization's own staff, one-way flow of information from the field to headquarters, absence of field-based trials and technical flaws in the software. See European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office, *Security of Humanitarian Personnel*, 55.

Recommendations for improving security practices

Encourage the growth of a network of security professionals

A network of security professionals can provide an alternative, grassroots approach to developing and implementing improved field security practices and procedures for coordinating the activities of humanitarian aid organizations outside the constraints of the bureaucratic/political structures of these organizations. This would foster coordination among humanitarian organizations by incrementally building trust across agency lines. A network of security professionals would also improve the probability that security technologies would be adopted and used by field staff through developing personal and institutional incentives for coordination, and by developing and maintaining common reporting protocols and basic indicators, common situation report queries, and a core set of incident types that are identical for all UN and NGO participants. They would also make recommendations on future developments and needed changes to current standard operating procedures.

Hire security planners and managers with policy experience

The hiring of trained security researchers to help with the analysis of data and with developing early warning models can represent a significant asset in coordination. Aid organizations are too narrowly focused on hiring professionals with police and military backgrounds who favor 'system-based' strategies to address the security needs of their personnel. A more developed and mature understanding of the field security operating environment would enhance aid organizations' strategic security plans by providing a richer understanding of the field security environment. Routine and systematic collection of security incident and situation report data are required for this type of analysis, and aid organizations would do well to hire professionals with a strong social science background to supplement the system-based approach with a broader analytic expertise.

Implement better reporting and information sharing practices, in cooperation with donors and insurance agencies

Donors have a major role to play in supporting the collective improvement of humanitarian organizations' security management practices and in encouraging greater security coordination among aid organizations. One way they may do this is to encourage the hiring of security professionals with expertise in risk assessment and security and crisis management. Another step that can be taken is to require professional communities and humanitarian organizations to include in grant proposals measures that demonstrate an emphasis on the provision of security management tools, as well as measures to ensure coordination among aid agencies. Insurance companies can also play a role by reducing the cost of premiums for organizations that collect and analyze standardized field data and conduct risk assessments. They should further reduce rates where mechanisms have been developed for sharing this information across the aid community.

Expand security training programs

Humanitarian organizations should develop training courses that address the relationships between humanitarian organizations on the one hand and other security operators, including military forces

and private security companies, on the other hand. Staff training courses should also address issues of agency duty of care to staff, accountability, and crisis management. Finally, training should provide practical tools and methods for improving security management, especially with respect to conducting risk assessments.

Figure 1 depicts two realms that provide humanitarian aid organizations with different approaches to field security coordination. A network of professionals is needed to guide security collaboration drawing on best practices from both realms.

Fig. 1 Differing Realms of Security Coordination

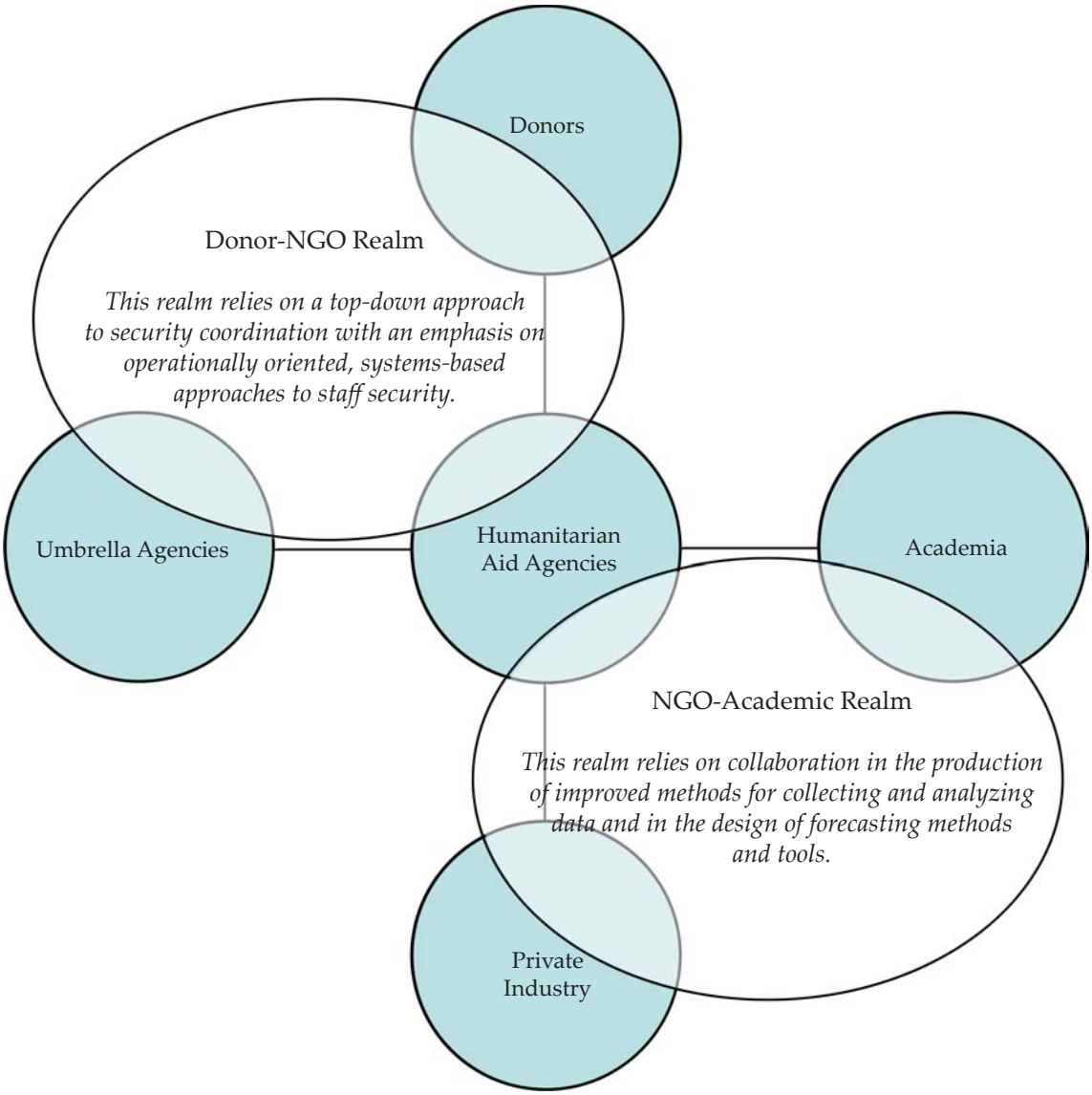
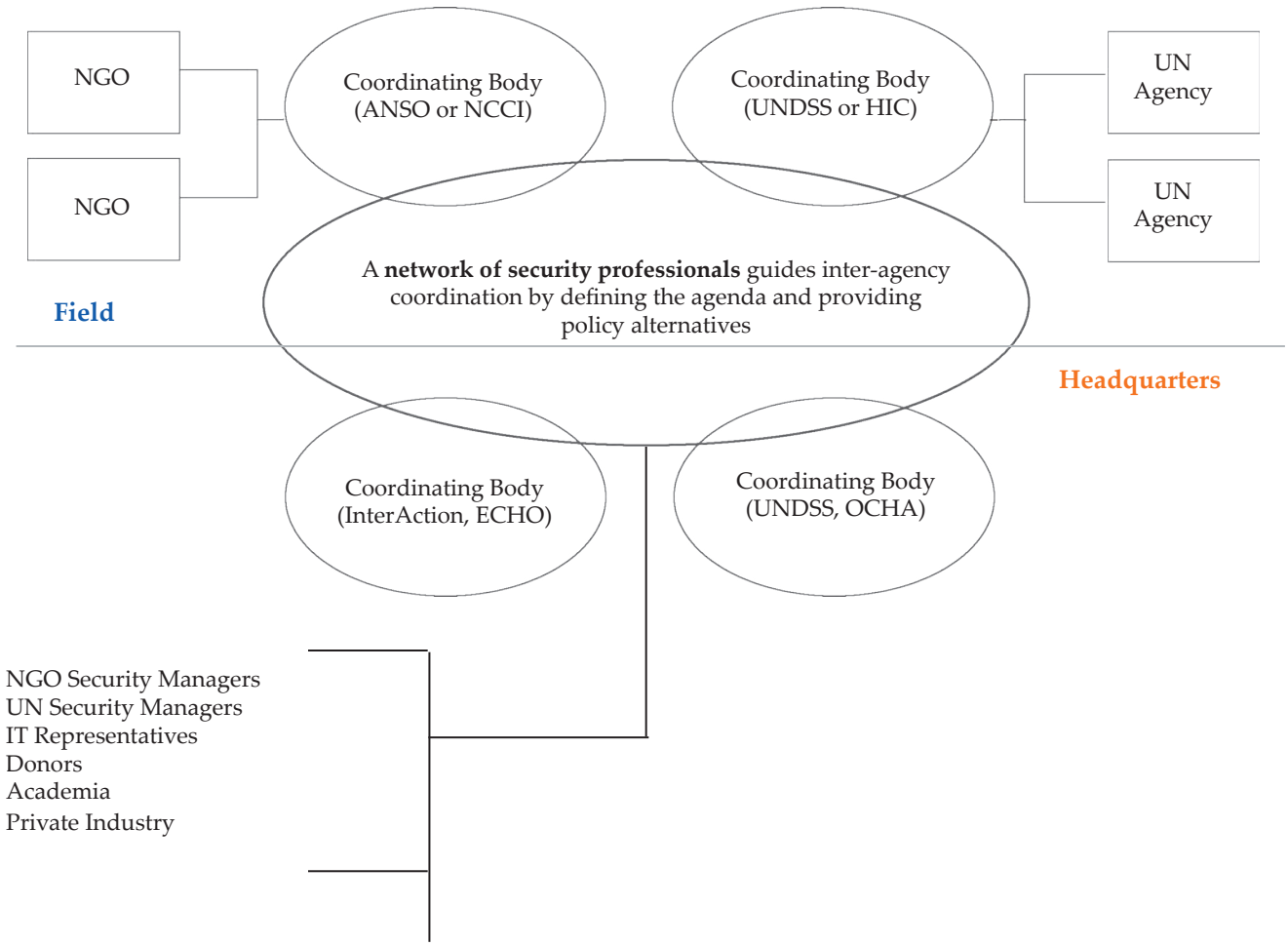


Figure 2 depicts the coordinating role a network of security professionals would play among humanitarian aid organizations. The network is comprised of security professionals spanning the humanitarian, academic, policy, inter-governmental and donor communities.

Fig. 2 Coordination by Security Professionals



Acronyms

ANSO	Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
FSCO	Field Security Coordination Officer
GIS	Geographic Information System
HIC	UNOCHA Humanitarian Information Center
IASC	United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCCI	NGO Coordinating Committee for Iraq
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SAG	InterAction Security Advisory Group
SFP	Security Focal Point
SMT	United Nations Security Management Team
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNMOSS	United Nations Minimum Operating Security Standards
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSECOORD	Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator
UNSIRS	United Nations Security Incident Reporting System

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About HPCR

The Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University (HPCR) was set up in 2000 with a view to serve international organizations with research and policy input on humanitarian law, human security, conflict management, and conflict prevention.

The Program is engaged in research and advisory services on conflict prevention strategies, the management of humanitarian crises and the protection of civilians in conflict areas. It advises international organizations, governments and non-governmental actors, and focuses on the protection of vulnerable groups, conflict prevention strategies, and the role of information technology.

HPCR has developed several regional and thematic website portals whose primary objective is to enhance the capacity of organizations and governments to develop preventive strategies in addressing conflict situations. These websites provide an interactive virtual platform for policy and decision-makers to gain access to information and academic resources, integrated linking systems, and online discussion fora related to international humanitarian law and to human security in their respective regions.

The Program rests on the joint efforts of the Harvard School of Public Health, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, and the Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, and it seeks to cooperate closely with operational and academic institutions around the world.

About SMI

The Security Management Initiative (SMI) was launched in 2005 by the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University (HPCR) with a view to assist international organizations working in hazardous environments, namely in conflict areas, to improve the management of the security of their staff and assets. The Initiative was launched as a follow-up to the results of recent inquiries on the security system of the United Nations which highlighted serious deficiencies in the management of the security of UN personnel in conflict areas.

The primary goal of this project will be the development and updating of security management tools, training, and policy resources for international agencies engaged in conflict and other hazardous areas. Through these activities, SMI aims to set the grounds of a center of excellence in security management in partnership with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, governments and policy centers focusing on the management of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding operations. In this context, SMI plans to elaborate the first comprehensive curriculum for the advanced training in security management of international agencies' senior security personnel, senior operational managers, and members of their governance structure, with a view to improve the security of staff engaged in conflict areas, and strengthen the capacity of agencies to discharge their mandates in high-risk environments.

SMI works in partnership with all interested stakeholders, including the United Nations Department for Security and Safety (UNDSS) and other UN partners, Inter-Governmental Organizations at the regional level, NGOs and NGO consortia, in particular the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the military, private security companies, donor governments and in particular their development agencies, as well as concerned private sector companies such as the extraction industry or insurance and re-insurance companies.

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