



INTERNATIONAL LAW  
JOURNAL

---

**WHITE BLACK  
LEGAL LAW  
JOURNAL  
ISSN: 2581-  
8503**

*Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal*

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

[WWW.WHITEBLACKLEGAL.CO.IN](http://WWW.WHITEBLACKLEGAL.CO.IN)

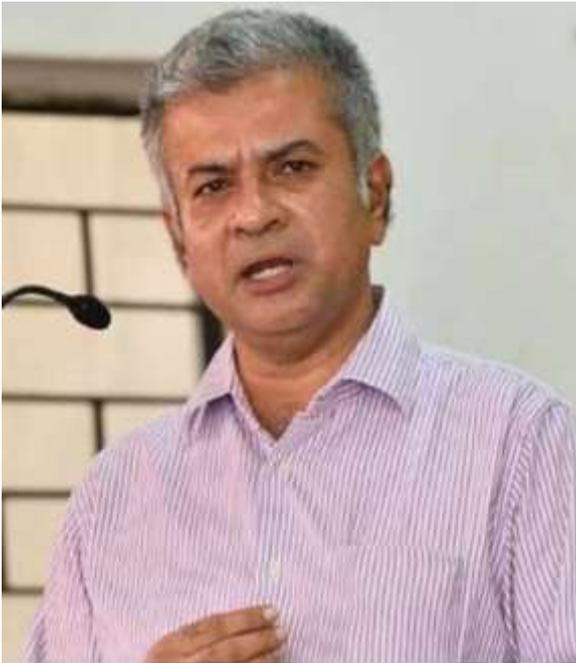
### **DISCLAIMER**

No part of this publication may be reproduced or copied in any form by any means without prior written permission of Editor-in-chief of White Black Legal – The Law Journal. The Editorial Team of White Black Legal holds the copyright to all articles contributed to this publication. The views expressed in this publication are purely personal opinions of the authors and do not reflect the views of the Editorial Team of White Black Legal. Though all efforts are made to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the information published, White Black Legal shall not be responsible for any errors caused due to oversight or otherwise.

WHITE BLACK  
LEGAL

## **EDITORIAL** **TEAM**

### **Raju Narayana Swamy (IAS ) Indian Administrative Service** **officer**



a professional  
Procurement from the World Bank.

Dr. Raju Narayana Swamy popularly known as Kerala's Anti-Corruption Crusader is the All India Topper of the 1991 batch of the IAS and is currently posted as Principal Secretary to the Government of Kerala. He has earned many accolades as he hit against the political-bureaucrat corruption nexus in India. Dr Swamy holds a B.Tech in Computer Science and Engineering from the IIT Madras and a Ph. D. in Cyber Law from Gujarat National Law University. He also has an LLM (Pro) (with specialization in IPR) as well as three PG Diplomas from the National Law University, Delhi- one in Urban Environmental Management and Law, another in Environmental Law and Policy and a third one in Tourism and Environmental Law. He also holds a post-graduate diploma in IPR from the National Law School, Bengaluru and diploma in Public

### **Dr. R. K. Upadhyay**

Dr. R. K. Upadhyay is Registrar, University of Kota (Raj.), Dr Upadhyay obtained LLB , LLM degrees from Banaras Hindu University & Phd from university of Kota.He has succesfully completed UGC sponsored M.R.P for the work in the ares of the various prisoners reforms in the state of the Rajasthan.



## **Senior Editor**

### **Dr. Neha Mishra**



Dr. Neha Mishra is Associate Professor & Associate Dean (Scholarships) in Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal Global University. She was awarded both her PhD degree and Associate Professor & Associate Dean M.A.; LL.B. (University of Delhi); LL.M.; Ph.D. (NLSIU, Bangalore) LLM from National Law School of India University, Bengaluru; she did her LL.B. from Faculty of Law, Delhi University as well as M.A. and B.A. from Hindu College and DCAC from DU respectively. Neha has been a Visiting Fellow, School of Social Work, Michigan State University, 2016 and invited speaker Panelist at Global Conference, Whitney R. Harris World Law Institute, Washington University in St.Louis, 2015.

### **Ms. Sumiti Ahuja**

Ms. Sumiti Ahuja, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi,

Ms. Sumiti Ahuja completed her LL.M. from the Indian Law Institute with specialization in Criminal Law and Corporate Law, and has over nine years of teaching experience. She has done her LL.B. from the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. She is currently pursuing Ph.D. in the area of Forensics and Law. Prior to joining the teaching profession, she has worked as Research Assistant for projects funded by different agencies of Govt. of India. She has developed various audio-video teaching modules under UGC e-PG Pathshala programme in the area of Criminology, under the aegis of an MHRD Project. Her areas of interest are Criminal Law, Law of Evidence, Interpretation of Statutes, and Clinical Legal Education.



### **Dr. Navtika Singh Nautiyal**

Dr. Navtika Singh Nautiyal presently working as an Assistant Professor in School of law, Forensic Justice and Policy studies at National Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. She has 9 years of Teaching and Research Experience. She has completed her Philosophy of Doctorate in 'Intercountry adoption laws from Uttranchal University, Dehradun' and LLM from Indian Law Institute, New Delhi.



### **Dr. Rinu Saraswat**

Associate Professor at School of Law, Apex University, Jaipur, M.A, LL.M, Ph.D,

Dr. Rinu have 5 yrs of teaching experience in renowned institutions like Jagannath University and Apex University. Participated in more than 20 national and international seminars and conferences and 5 workshops and training programmes.

### **Dr. Nitesh Saraswat**

E.MBA, LL.M, Ph.D, PGDSAPM

Currently working as Assistant Professor at Law Centre II, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Dr. Nitesh have 14 years of Teaching, Administrative and research experience in Renowned Institutions like Amity University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur, Jagannath University and Nirma University.

More than 25 Publications in renowned National and International Journals and has authored a Text book on Cr.P.C and Juvenile Delinquency law.



### **Subhrajit Chanda**

BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.



## ***ABOUT US***

WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

# **POLITICISATION OF HUMANITARIAN AID**

AUTHORED BY – AARUSHI

## **ABSTRACT**

Politics and wars are as closely related as cause and effect. When negotiations fail, wars ensue with a need for humanitarian aid in conflict zones. Often this aid comes at the cost of political allegiance towards the external power. Even historically, humanitarian aid has been weaponized for political influence. Taking the examples of contemporary case studies of Ukraine, Serbia, Afghanistan, Gaza, etc, this paper examines how the extension of “aid” is not only helping the recipient state but also the donor power in creating a loyal “sphere of influence” thus impacting governance and sovereignty of the recipient state. This also creates an economic dependence on the donor states which is used in furtherance of their political ideas. Such influence on humanitarian aid is not only morally wrong, but may also constitute a war crime as it results in the exploitation of the already devastated civilian population. These relations have usually been overlooked by the third parties to the war because either they are indifferent towards humanitarian aid or they themselves are involved in such political manoeuvring. No precedents exist for the persecution of any such “crimes”. Even international institutions often feel pressured to follow in the steps of the dominating powers because their funds are largely controlled by the donor powers. And therefore, the already existing legal frameworks are disregarded. By delving into the relationship between politics and humanitarian aid, this paper aims to contribute to the discussions involving the ethical and legal consequences of political influence on humanitarian aid.

Keywords - Humanitarian aid; political influence; weaponization of aid; war; international institutions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At present around 362 million people are affected because of disasters that are either natural in the form of earthquakes, etc. or man-made conflicts and humanitarian aid is their only lifeline in this time of crisis. Humanitarian Aid is the assistance given to people to save their lives and alleviate their suffering in times when disaster strikes and conflicts ensue. This aid is essential for development and rebuilding measures addressing the immediate needs of the disaster struck

population.<sup>1</sup> Often Humanitarian aid makes the difference between life and death and survival and suffering.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of humanitarian aid is based on the 4 guiding principles by the United Nations (hereinafter referred to as UN). These are:

1. Humanity
2. Impartiality
3. Neutrality
4. Independence<sup>3</sup>

These 4 principles given by the International Red Cross (hereinafter referred to as IRC) and Red Crescent Movement (hereinafter referred to as RCRC) are the fundamental principles in regards with humanitarian aid. These guidelines have also been reaffirmed by several UN General Assembly Resolutions.<sup>4</sup>

However, while distributing humanitarian aid, these are the same principles that are not being followed. There are people who use humanitarian aid to manipulate political negotiations as is visible from the recent case of Ukraine affecting its sovereignty and economic independence.

While some argue that humanitarian aid even at the cost of political allegiance is still “aid”, this paper explores how this aid is more detrimental than beneficial when manipulated by the interested stakeholders, by analysing the historical use of aid in political manipulation and the recent examples of Ukraine and Afghanistan.

## **INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICS AND HUMANITARIAN AID**

Humanitarian aid has always been politically motivated. The economic status of a recipient country has been affected by the current political stance of the donor country. Despite what the

---

<sup>1</sup> What is Humanitarian Aid and why is it important, *available at:* <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-humanitarian-aid-and-why-it-important> (last visited on March 25, 2025).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Humanitarian aid, explained, *available at:* <https://www.concern.net/news/humanitarian-aid-explained> (last visited on March 25, 2025).

<sup>4</sup>Defining Humanitarian Assistance, *available at:* <https://web.archive.org/web/20171102215158/http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/data-guides/defining-humanitarian-aid> (last visited on March 24, 2025).

donor proclaims, the motive behind humanitarian aid has always been to create liberal global governance. And this is evident by how the same humanitarian aid is being distributed to different affected areas, depending on their geopolitical status or the degree to which they can be manipulated, rather exploited by the donor nations.<sup>5</sup>

## **1. Causes of politicisation of humanitarian aid**

### **1.1 Geopolitical Changes**

When the Cold War ended, major powers like the United States of America (hereinafter referred to as the USA) and the Soviet pulled back from the geopolitical arena, often leaving development and humanitarian organizations as the main representatives of the West in countries that were no longer seen as strategically important like Pakistan and Afghanistan. These organizations were expected to step in where diplomacy had withdrawn. Moreover, the Cold War era was marked with a deep emphasis on state sovereignty which diminished at the end of the Cold War paving the way for a more interventionist approach to global relations.<sup>6</sup> This encouraged the donor states—who indirectly controlled most of these int'l organisations providing aid, to constantly and more openly interfere in the internal working of the recipient state.

### **1.2 Changing nature of Conflict**

The definition of security has changed—now, problems like poverty, terrorism, and refugee crises are seen as threats to global stability. Because of this, donor countries argue that improving security involves changing the internal policies of aid-receiving nations. Researchers like Duffield explain that domestic issues such as economic policies, human rights, and even social structures are now viewed as security concerns.<sup>7</sup> This has allowed donor countries to influence how recipient states govern their people, often conditioning aid on specific political and economic reforms. Essentially, humanitarian aid has become a tool for shaping the policies and behavior of other nations under the justification of global security.

---

<sup>5</sup>Humanitarian Policy Group, “Politics and Humanitarian Aid: Debates, Dilemmas and Dissension Report of a Conference organised by ODI POLIS at the University of Leeds and CAFOD, London, 1 February 2001” (April, 2001).

<sup>6</sup>Cold War History, available at: <https://www.history.com/articles/cold-war-history> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Duffield, “Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid”, 25 *Disasters* 314 (2002).

### **1.3 Guise of a Responsible Global Citizen**

In many donor countries such as the USA who has long since portrayed itself as the picture and forerunner of democracy, the idea of national interest has changed. Instead of just focusing on economic benefits or immediate security threats, these countries now justify their involvement in other nations by claiming to be “responsible global citizens”. Macrae explains that this shift has made humanitarian aid and conflict resolution more interventionist, meaning donor states are more directly involved in shaping policies in recipient countries.<sup>8</sup>

### **1.4 Security Concerns**

A lot of donor countries pose as a concerned power for the security of nations whose sovereignty are at risk. Countries like the USA and Russia carry out mass production of weapons and then give a “false” promise of security to countries like Ukraine. This allows the donor states to negotiate trade deals on their terms in exchange for security leading to an economic dependence of the recipient state.

## **2. Methods of politicisation of humanitarian aid**

### **2.1 Political Influence**

Donor countries often use foreign aid as a means to advance their foreign policy interests.<sup>9</sup> Rather than being purely humanitarian, aid is frequently used to create a sphere of political influence, reward allies, and strengthen relationships with strategically important nations.<sup>10</sup> Several factors determine which countries receive more aid, including colonial ties, military alliances, and alignment with donor countries in international organizations like the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council (hereinafter referred to as the UNSC). Research has consistently shown that donors tend to favour their former colonies when distributing aid, including in areas like climate change adaptation<sup>11</sup>. Political alignment also plays a key role—countries that vote in line with major donors in the UN General Assembly tend to receive more funding<sup>12</sup>. For example, when a country becomes a temporary member of the UNSC,

---

<sup>8</sup> Joanna Macrae, “The Politics of Coherence 1 HPG Research In Focus” (October 2000).

<sup>9</sup>Alex Dreher, Valentin Lang, *et.al.*, “Aid effectiveness and donor motives”, 176 *World Development* 15 (2024).

<sup>10</sup>A. Alesina and D. Dollar, “Who gives foreign aid to whom and why?”, 5 *Journal of Economic Growth* 53 (2000).

<sup>11</sup> F. Weiler, C. Klock, *et.al.*, “Vulnerability, good governance, or donor interests? The allocation of aid for climate change adaptation” 104 *World Development* 71 (2018).

<sup>12</sup> A. Hoeffler and V. Outram, “Need, merit, or self-interest—What determines the allocation of aid?” 15 *Review of Development Economics* 246 (2011).

US aid to that country increases by 59%.<sup>13</sup> The USA also directs more military and economic aid toward countries that pose a risk to its resolutions at the UNSC, using aid as a bargaining tool to ensure favourable votes.<sup>14</sup> Similar patterns are observed with Japan and China<sup>15</sup>, where aid is allocated based on geopolitical and economic interests rather than purely humanitarian concerns.

The domestic politics of donor countries also shape their aid decisions<sup>16</sup>—left-leaning governments prefer grants over loans<sup>17</sup>, while conservative governments prioritize trade-related aid. At the same time, donors assess the political environment of recipient countries, favouring governments that share their ideology and using aid to help friendly regimes remain in power<sup>18</sup>. In Kenya<sup>19</sup> and India,<sup>20</sup> Studies show that foreign aid can help incumbent governments win elections, revealing its role in domestic political manipulation. Similarly, Japan has been known to reward countries with aid when they join the pro-whaling bloc in the International Whaling Commission,<sup>21</sup> showing how aid can be used to influence policy decisions on a global scale. With growing competition between the U.S. and China, soft power strategies have become increasingly important. Research suggests that when China completes a development project in a recipient country, public support for the Chinese government increases by about 3%.<sup>22</sup> This demonstrates how aid is not just about relief but also a means of shaping public opinion and geopolitical alliances.

Aid is frequently tied to political loyalty, strategic interests, and regime stability, making it an extension of foreign policy rather than purely humanitarian support.

---

<sup>13</sup> I. Kuziemko and E. Werker, “How much is a seat on the security council worth? Foreign aid and bribery at the United Nations” 114 *Journal of Political Economy* 911 (2006).

<sup>14</sup> D. Alexander and B. Rooney, “Vote-buying by the United States in the United Nations” 63 *Int’l Studies Quarterly* 173 (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Alex Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, *et.al.*, “Banking on Beijing: The aims and impacts of China’s overseas development program” (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> H.V. Milner and D.H. Tingley, “The political economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American legislators and the domestic politics of aid” 22 *Economics & Politics* 227 (2010).

<sup>17</sup> V. Brench and N. Potrafke, “Donor ideology and types of foreign aid”, 42 *Journal of Comparative Economics* 68 (2014).

<sup>18</sup> M. Faye and P. Niehaus, “Political aid cycles”, 102 *American Economic Review*, 3524 (2012).

<sup>19</sup> R.S. Jablonski, “How aid targets votes: The impact of electoral incentives on foreign aid distribution”, 66 *World Politics* (2014).

<sup>20</sup> H. Ohler and P. Nunnenkamp, “Needs-based targeting or favouritism? The regional allocation of multilateral aid within recipient countries”, 67 *Kyklos* 435 (2014).

<sup>21</sup> C. Dippel, “Foreign aid and voting in international organizations: Evidence from the IWC”, 132 *Journal of Public Economics* 6 (2015).

<sup>22</sup> L. Welner, A. Dreher, *et.al.*, “Can Aid Buy Foreign Public Support? Evidence from Chinese Development Finance”, 75 *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 06 (2025).

## 2.2 Manipulation of International Organisations

Humanitarian aid which is provided by international organisations such as ICRC, UN Developmental Programmes (hereinafter referred to as UNDP), etc. are also not free from the clutches of politics. Recently, the USA administration decided to cut off the US Agency for International Development (hereinafter referred to as USAID)<sup>23</sup> which was established to oversee humanitarian aid programs on behalf of the USA government. This agency oversaw and funded humanitarian aid in regions affected by armed conflict too, like providing prosthetic legs for soldiers, providing food for the civilians, etc.<sup>24</sup> Now, all the communities who were benefiting from this agency are left to grapple on their own because the government decided that such agency was no longer serving its purpose.

ICRC relies heavily on voluntary contributions from states.<sup>25</sup> USA is one of the top funders of the ICRC, and if a step to stop funding to ICRC is taken just as was done with the USAID, the organization could face significant operational difficulties.<sup>26</sup> ICRC is the primary humanitarian organization providing aid in conflict zones. The dependence of ICRC on major donor states for funding raises the question of whether the ICRC can truly remain neutral and independent. If its funding is at risk, would it be compelled to act in a way that aligns with the interests of its top contributors rather than its core humanitarian mission?

This issue extends beyond the ICRC to other international organizations under the UN, which also operate on voluntary contributions from wealthy nations. Programs such as the UNDP and the World Food Programme (hereinafter referred to as the WFP) actively solicit donations to sustain their efforts.<sup>27</sup> If a donor government is dissatisfied with how a program is run, it can abruptly cut off funding, jeopardizing crucial humanitarian initiatives. This system allows major powers to introduce politics into humanitarian

---

<sup>23</sup> Rajeev Kumar Jha, "Aid interrupted: The fallout of USAID funding cuts", *Times of India*, April 29, 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Understanding USAID: Its Roots and Global Impact, available at: <https://www2.fundsfornfos.org/articles/understanding-usaid-its-roots-and-global-impact/#:~:text=USAID's%20Humanitarian%20Assistance%20and%20Disaster,crises%20through%20training%20and%20resources>. (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross - Our Finances, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/our-finances> (last visited on April 16, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> No immediate US threat to ICRC funding, available at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/international-geneva/us-funding-for-the-icrc-is-being-maintained-for-the-time-being/89141192#:~:text=The%20ICRC%20obtains%20US%20funding%20not%20through,US%20State%20Department%2C%20Kr%C3%A4henb%C3%BChl%20told%20Le%20Tems.&text=%E2%80%9COur%20primary%20objective%20is%20to%20protect%20civilians,the%20defence%20of%20humanitarian%20law%E2%80%9D%2C%20said%20Kr%C3%A4henb%C3%BChl>. (last visited on April 16, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> UNDP, *Report on Core Funding in Action* (December 8, 2023).

efforts, thus impacting the extent to which humanitarian aid reaches the affected populations.

The broader structure of international organizations further reflects this imbalance. The UNSC, for example, is dominated by five permanent members—the USA, Russia, China, the United Kingdom (hereinafter referred to as the UK), and France—who hold veto power. This means they can block any resolution that does not serve their national interests,<sup>28</sup> even if it is aimed at providing humanitarian relief. Similarly, developed countries control global trade policies, setting conditions such as tariffs and trade agreements that often disadvantage developing nations.<sup>29</sup> These power dynamics not only shape the flow of humanitarian aid but also impact the four guiding principles of humanitarian action—humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, the heavy reliance on voluntary funding from major powers introduces politics into humanitarian aid, making it difficult for aid organizations to function without external influence.

### 2.3 Military Presence and Base Establishments

The strategic placement of foreign military bases in recipient states is another way aiding states extend their influence. Under the pretext of providing security assistance, foreign powers establish military facilities that serve their own regional security objectives rather than those of the host country.<sup>31</sup> These bases often become symbols of external control and can even provoke domestic unrest or regional tensions.<sup>32</sup> The presence of a foreign military force within a sovereign nation restricts its ability to independently manage its defence affairs and makes it vulnerable to being drawn into conflicts that primarily serve the interests of the aiding state.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Clive Archer, *International Organisations* 73 (Informa PLC, London, 3rd ed. 2001).

<sup>29</sup>Brent Radcliff, “The Basics of Tariffs and Trade Barriers”, *Investopedia*, February 02, 2025, available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/08/tariff-trade-barrier-basics.asp#:~:text=National%20Security,goods%20from%20the%20United%20States>. (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>30</sup>*Supra* note 3.

<sup>31</sup>The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. Response, 1978-1980, available at: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/soviet-invasion-afghanistan> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>32</sup>S. Lartey, “Analysing the Widening Impact of Military Bases on Global Political Dynamics” (2024).

<sup>33</sup>Human Rights Implications of Foreign U.S. Military Bases, available at: <https://warpreventioninitiative.org/peace-science-digest/human-rights-implications-foreign-u-s-military-bases/#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20the%20U.S.,as%20for%20the%20U.S.%20public.&text=Base%20Nation:%20How%20US%20Military,New%20York:%20Metropolitan%20Books%2C%202015.&text=Bases%20of%20Empire:%20The%20Global,New%20York:%20NYU%20Press%2C%202009.&text=Authentic%20hope:%20it's%20the%20end,Maryknoll%2C%20N.Y.:%20Orbis%20Books>. (last visited on May 15, 2025).

Ultimately, while military aid is often framed as a means of strengthening the recipient state's security, it frequently serves as a tool for geopolitical influence. Instead of fostering self-reliance, it can create long-term dependency, reshape military doctrines to align with donor interests, and even contribute to political instability. This further demonstrates how humanitarian and security assistance are often entangled with the strategic goals of powerful states, rather than being purely based on the needs of the recipient.

### **3. Implications of such intervention of politics into humanitarian aid with contemporary cases.**

#### **3.1 Proxy Wars and Consequent Destabilization**

In global geopolitics, major powers often engage in proxy wars as a way to pursue their interests without directly confronting one another. These conflicts are often driven by ideological differences, economic interests, and the desire to maintain a balance of power.<sup>34</sup> Historical examples of proxy wars include the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Ukraine, Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, where superpowers covertly supported opposing factions in the guise of "humanitarian aid", leading to long-term regional instability.<sup>35</sup>

##### **3.1.1 AFGHANISTAN**

The proxy war in Afghanistan<sup>36</sup> began when the Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the communist government, triggering a Cold War-era struggle for influence. The USA, along with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, supported the Afghan resistance, the Mujahideen, which was further radicalized by religious motives, especially from Saudi backing.<sup>37</sup> The support was given by the USA in the form of military aid, where the Mujahideen were trained and provided weapons from the USA.<sup>38</sup> After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan

---

<sup>34</sup>Proxy Warfare in Strategic Competition, available at: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA307-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA307-1.html) (May 15, 2025).

<sup>35</sup>Meherab Hossain and AL-Kasmin Islam, "Proxy Wars and the Global Stage: How Major Powers Fight Without Fighting", *Modern Diplomacy*, April 9, 2024, available at: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/04/09/proxy-wars-and-the-global-stage-how-major-powers-fight-without-fighting/> (last visited on March 19, 2025).

<sup>36</sup>Proxy War, available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/proxy-war> (last visited on March 6, 2025).

<sup>37</sup>Middle Powers in the Gulf: Navigating the Return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/middle-powers-in-the-gulf-navigating-the-return-of-the-taliban-in-afghanistan> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>38</sup>Mujahideen, available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mujahideen-Afghani-rebels> (last visited on March 6, 2025).

plunged into civil war, with various Mujahideen factions competing for control. Amid the chaos, the Taliban emerged in the mid-1990s, supported by Pakistan, promising to restore order.<sup>39</sup> However, their rule became oppressive, enforcing strict Islamic law and providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. The rise of the Taliban was a direct result of the proxy war, as foreign powers focused on defeating the Soviets in the name of humanitarian aid but failed to support post-war peacebuilding efforts.<sup>40</sup> Once the motive of the USA was achieved, suddenly there was no more requirement of aid and development in Afghanistan anymore. This failure allowed extremist elements to take power, creating a vacuum for terrorism.<sup>41</sup> The war also laid the foundation for global terrorism, as many Mujahideen fighters turned to extremism after the conflict. The Afghan proxy war ultimately contributed to long-term instability, paving the way for the Taliban's rise and the growth of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda.

### 3.1.2 YEMEN

Yemen has been engulfed in conflict since 2014, which has led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history. The conflict began as a rebellion by the Houthi movement, a Shia group, against the Yemeni government.<sup>42</sup> This quickly escalated into a regional war when Saudi Arabia intervened, supporting the Yemeni government in the form of military aid.<sup>43</sup> However, this was not done to protect the people of Yemen. Rather, Saudi Arabia feared that the Houthi advancement could be a sign of Iranian influence in their southern neighbour.<sup>44</sup> Though Iran denied directly supporting the Houthis, there are widespread allegations of their involvement.<sup>45</sup> As a result, Yemen became a battleground

---

<sup>39</sup>Pakistan Army and Terrorism; an unholy alliance, available at: <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/pakistan-army-and-terrorism%3B-an-unholy-alliance/#:~:text=During%20the%20Zia%20Dul%20Haq%20regime%2C%20these%20Rajakar%20members,funds%20from%20wealthy%20Arabs%20and%20local%20patrons.&text=Pakistan%20used%20the%20same%20tactics%20and%20indoctrination.and%20anti%20India%20sentiment%20in%20the%20Kashmir%20Valley>. (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>40</sup>News Desk, "A historical timeline of Afghanistan", *PBS News*, August 20, 2021, available at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Conflict in Yemen and the Red Sea, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>43</sup>Third Way, "Country Brief: Saudi Arabia and its role in Yemen", *Jstor* (2025).

<sup>44</sup>Ban Hubbard, "How a Saudi-Led Alliance Battling an Iran-Backed Militia Devastated Yemen", *The New York Times*, April 7, 2022, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/07/world/middleeast/yemen-war-saudi-arabia.html> (last visited on March 28, 2025).

<sup>45</sup>Xinhua, "Iran rejects accusations of involvement in Houthi attacks on Israel", *Chinadaily*, May 5, 2025, available at: <https://www.chinadailyasia.com/hk/article/610990> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

for the regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, causing immense suffering for the Yemeni people. The war has led to famine, disease, and a collapse in infrastructure, with airstrikes and shelling severely affecting basic services such as food and healthcare.<sup>46</sup> Yemen's tragedy highlights the devastating impact of proxy wars on civilian populations motivated not by compassion or goodwill but political advancements.

### 3.1.3 UKRAINE

The conflict in Ukraine, which escalated after Russia's invasion in 2022, has become a modern example of a proxy war in Europe. Russia justified its actions by claiming it needed to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine,<sup>47</sup> leading to territorial occupations and massive civilian casualties. But in reality, this was an invasion to discourage Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (hereinafter referred to as NATO).<sup>48</sup> In response, Western countries, particularly the USA, have provided significant military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. But even this was not without ulterior motives. The entry of Russia so near to NATO was a threat for its members.<sup>49</sup> The situation in Ukraine illustrates how major powers back opposing sides to further their strategic goals without direct military engagement. The conflict is a stark example of how geopolitical rivalries are now fought in proxy, with serious implications for global stability.

## 3.2 Sovereignty

When donor states use humanitarian aid as a political tool, the sovereignty of the recipient state is significantly compromised. Instead of aid serving as a neutral mechanism for relief and development, it becomes a means for the donor to exert control,<sup>50</sup> often shaping the recipient state's policies, economy, and governance in ways that align with the donor's interests rather than the needs of the local population.

---

<sup>46</sup>Yemen: Why is the war there getting more violent?, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>47</sup>Paul Kirby, "Why did Putin's Russia invade Ukraine?", *BBC*, May 15, 2025, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj0q964851po> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

<sup>48</sup>Tom Switzer, "Why NATO Expansion Explains Russia's Actions in Ukraine", *Australian Outlook*, July 26, 2024, available at: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/why-nato-expansion-explains-russias-actions-in-ukraine/> (last visited on March 31, 2025).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Pszczel, "The consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for international security - NATO and beyond", *NATO Review* (2022).

<sup>50</sup> H. Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid", 56 *American Political Science Review* 304 (1962).

### 3.2.1 POLITICAL REFORMS

One of the primary ways sovereignty is affected is through policy influence.<sup>51</sup> Donor states often attach conditions to aid, requiring recipient governments to implement specific political reforms. These conditions may include alignment with the donor's political stance.<sup>52</sup> This undermines the recipient state's ability to make independent policy decisions, forcing it to prioritize the donor's agenda over its own national interests. A contemporary example is Ukraine, where Western aid, particularly from the United States<sup>53</sup> and the European Union,<sup>54</sup> has come with conditions regarding anti-corruption measures, military restructuring, and economic liberalization. While these reforms may be beneficial in some ways, they also limit Ukraine's ability to make independent decisions, forcing alignment with Western geopolitical interests in exchange for continued support.

### 3.2.2 INTERFERENCE WITH GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Donors may favour certain political parties or leaders who align with their interests, channelling funds to support them while sidelining opposition groups.<sup>55</sup> This not only distorts democratic processes but can also deepen divisions within the country, leading to internal instability. In many African nations, such as Ethiopia<sup>56</sup> and Kenya, Western governments have been accused of channelling funds to opposition groups or preferred political candidates to steer elections in their favour. The U.S. has historically been known to provide economic and military support to regimes that align with its interests, while sidelining governments that resist foreign influence. In Venezuela, the U.S. has used humanitarian aid as a tool to support opposition leader Juan Guaidó, while refusing to recognize the Maduro government.<sup>57</sup> This selective aid distribution

---

<sup>51</sup> Policy Centre For the New South, "Policy Brief on The Sovereignty of Developing Countries: The Challenge of Foreign Aid" 3 (July, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Anastasiia Lapatina, "How America's Aid to Ukraine Actually Works", *Lawfare*, July 16, 2024, available at: <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/how-america-s-aid-to-ukraine-actually-works> (last visited on June 13, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Explanatory Memorandum to COM(2023)228 - Establishing the Ukraine Facility, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* 152 (PublicAffairs, New York City, 1st edn., 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Ryan S. Jablonski, "How Aid Targets Votes: The Impact of Electoral Incentives on Foreign Aid Distribution" 66 *World Politics* 293 (April, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> "Venezuela crisis: US sending aid 'at Guaido's request'", *BBC*, February 3, 2019, available at:

not only affects the country's internal political stability but also exacerbates divisions, undermining the recipient state's sovereignty by delegitimizing its leadership.

### 3.2.3 CONTROL OVER DEFENCE AND SECURITY

The presence of foreign military aid and personnel can erode sovereignty by limiting a state's control over its own defence and security. As has already been established, a donor state provides military assistance such as stationing troops, establishing military bases, or demanding involvement in strategic operations then the recipient state's ability to manage its own security becomes constrained. After the US military aid was pulled from Afghanistan in 2020, the interim government immediately fell and the governance went into the hands of Taliban.<sup>58</sup> The long-term dependence on foreign military presence had rendered the Afghan government incapable of taking the reins of their own country.<sup>59</sup>

## 3.3 Economic Dependence

Economic dependence on foreign aid can weaken a state's ability to function autonomously. If a government relies heavily on external funding for essential services, infrastructure, or military support, it risks losing the ability to sustain itself without donor intervention. This dependency allows donors to dictate terms, making it difficult for the recipient state to act against the donor's wishes, even if such actions would benefit its own people. IMF and World Bank loans to developing nations, such as Pakistan, frequently come with structural adjustment conditions, requiring privatization of state-owned enterprises, removal of subsidies, and austerity measures.<sup>60</sup> These conditions, often designed to suit the interests of Western financial institutions, can lead to economic hardship for local populations while reducing the government's control over its own economy.<sup>61</sup>

---

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-47109380> (last visited on June 13, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, "Withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan", available at: <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/withdrawal-united-states-troops-afghanistan-2020> (last visited on June 13, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Instability in Afghanistan, February 12, 2025, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-afghanistan> (last visited on June 13, 2025).

<sup>60</sup> Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility Policy Framework Paper, 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Shahzeb Usman, "How the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes in Pakistan violate ILO Conventions" *Pakistan Institute of Development Economics*, 2024, available at: <https://pide.org.pk/research/how-the-imfs-structural-adjustment-programmes-in-pakistan-violate-ilo-conventions/> (last visited on June 13, 2025).

## **CONCLUSION**

The manipulation of humanitarian aid for political purposes poses serious threats to the foundational principles of international relief—neutrality, impartiality, independence, and humanity. When aid becomes a tool for advancing geopolitical agendas, these values are compromised, eroding both the sovereignty of recipient states and the legitimacy of global aid systems.

Donor nations often impose political or economic conditionalities that reshape internal governance, elections, and security frameworks in aid-receiving countries. This undermines national autonomy and fosters long-term dependency. In conflict zones like Afghanistan, Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria, aid has been used not just for relief but as leverage to bolster allies or destabilize opponents, deepening crises and prolonging conflicts.

To counter this trend, the international community must adopt enforceable legal and institutional reforms. Strategic sanctions and expanded mandates for bodies like the International Criminal Court (hereinafter referred as ICC) could deter political misuse of aid. Moreover, restructuring the funding of humanitarian agencies to reduce dependence on voluntary contributions would protect their operational independence.

A binding international treaty under UN oversight is essential to regulate aid delivery, enforce transparency, and impose penalties for violations. Independent monitoring mechanisms should investigate misuse, while greater involvement of local communities in aid planning would ensure more responsive and sustainable support.

Ultimately, humanitarian aid must be safeguarded from political interference. It is not a strategic asset, but a global moral obligation—one that demands renewed commitment to justice, equity, and human dignity.