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# Humanitarian Diplomacy in Theory and Practice

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Not a single day passes by that we do not hear of a humanitarian crisis around the world. In every corner of our planet political and military conflicts and environmental disasters produce scores of human tragedies. Nowadays, the majority of the troubling scenes involve asylum seekers running away from shattered countries like Libya and Syria.

The source of the most recent and the most dramatic human crises- since World War II- has been the conflict in Syria, as a result of a stalemate between the Assad regime and the opposition. Millions of people have left their homes for neighboring countries like Turkey, Jordan and Iraq; in addition millions of others have been displaced within Syria. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Egypt and other African countries only intensify the human plight across the region.

Other devastating and dramatic scenes- which repeat often- take place in the Mediterranean Sea, either in the form of sinking boats full of asylum

seekers or boats surrounded by security guards and those inside being arrested and deported back.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that security measures are not going to be enough to deter those who have lost everything that they possessed, including a tiny hope of possibility that they might continue living a decent life or remaining alive at home.

Despite strict rules and policies against flocks of uninvited asylum seekers, European countries, especially over the last few months, have started to face waves of mass migrations on their borders as a spillover effect of the crisis in Syria.<sup>2</sup> Borders between France and the United Kingdom, Serbia and Hungary, along with the borders between Greece and Macedonia, are sites of the most recent scenes where thousands wait for acceptance around the fences, a situation which declares to the world that the conflict in Syria deserves more attention from the international community.

European countries prepare- albeit unwillingly- for the continuing of migration. Strict regulations, more policing, more fences and tear gas do not

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seem to deter those who flee from chaos for hope. As the number one target country in the last migrant flow, Germany called for comprehensive reform in Europe's approach to the crises: if it is not taken care of now collectively it will have grave consequences for Europe.<sup>3</sup> Let us hope that while Europeans try to find a proper solution to the migrant crises from Syria it will not be too late. With winter approaching and hundreds of thousands of people on the move, a lack of food or shelter will mean life or death for many civilians. It seems that, at least for now, migrants and their troubled stories have persuaded European leaders to revisit their migration policies.

Although Europe started to feel the humanitarian pressure of the conflict in Syria in the summer of 2015, the neighboring countries have been silently taking the heat of this wave of migrants since the crisis started in 2011. Current UNHCR data indicate<sup>4</sup> that a great majority of displaced Syrians have been hosted by Turkey (1,900,000), Lebanon (1,100,000), Jordan (630,000) and Iraq (250,000), whereas asylum applications for European countries since 2011 is around 350,000, a minuscule number compared to the ever increasing flood of civilians from Syria.

On a relevant note one might want to invite the United States and the Gulf Countries to step up and contribute more financially and coordinate better humanitarian policies towards the

easing of the plight of Syrian migrants. President Obama's call for acceptance of 10,000 Syrians<sup>5</sup> to the US is symbolic in nature but encouraging for other actors.

It seems that refugees and their humanitarian plights are going to be one of the major issues that the free and stable world has to deal with and try to find sustainable solutions for.

Due to the persistent nature of the refugee problems around the world, humanitarian diplomacy has to re-emerge stronger from its negligence in the field of international affairs. Several aspects of humanitarian diplomacy await visitation from the scholars in the field including, but not limited to, negotiating across different cultures for human cause, protecting children, women and the vulnerable through diplomacy, state and non-state actors in humanitarian relief efforts, considering the increasingly politicized context of humanitarian aid, access of non-state actors to conflict zones, and the relevance (or irrelevance thereof) of the Geneva Convention of 1856 and relevant international law.<sup>6</sup>

In 2013, a group of scholars gathered together to address some of the issues that humanitarian diplomacy endeavors to cover. Hoping that it would be a small step to trigger several other big ones, an international conference was held on 6 December 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey: *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Theory and Perspectives from the Field*. The

contributions that appear in this issue are edited and peer reviewed versions of selected presentations from that conference.

Mojtaba Mahdavi's article deals with one of the most pressing issues in international relations, the responsibility to protect (R2P). In his article, the "responsibility to protect in the Middle East: A Postcolonial Critique," Mahdavi argues that the "hegemonic neo-liberal discourse of Humanitarianism and paternalistic legacy of Orientalism" cause an expansion of the rift between ethical norms and their practice in international relations. He draws our attention to the conflicting attitudes developed by international actors towards the crises in Libya during the Arab Spring, and Syria. In order to save international ethical norms from the "hegemonic discourse of the neo-liberal order" he proposes a radical reform in the United Nations system and democratization of the world order. In sum, Mahdavi argues this will be possible only with the accomplishment of a just implementation of the R2P doctrine in international affairs.

Bruce Gilley's article, "Turkey, Middle Powers, and the New Humanitarianism," focuses on Turkey's humanitarian policies. As one of the new emerging economies, Turkey has risen to third position, in terms of foreign humanitarian aid, after the United States and the United Kingdom. Gilley highlights some of the political motivations involved in the new

humanitarian efforts of Turkey's official and non-official NGOs. In his analysis, Bruce Gilley uses the lens of "middle power activism" to better contextualize Turkey's rising humanitarian efforts. He states that Turkey's approach to humanitarian aid might appeal to other emerging actors.

Işıl Acehan's study deals with the formation of the Turkish Red Crescent Societies in the United States. Several studies dealt earlier with the diaspora efforts of Greeks and Armenians in America during World War I and/or during the War of Independence in Turkey after the occupation of the country in 1918. Acehan tries to fill this gap by focusing on the mobilization of the Ottoman diaspora in the United States and their role in providing humanitarian aid to the post-war reconstruction efforts in Turkey. Acehan highlights the heroic efforts of Turkish laborers in the New England region of the United States to raise money for the nationalist struggle against the occupying powers and later reconstruction efforts in the young republic. However modest the results of their efforts might have been, Turkish Americans contributed through their societies in cash and by other means, including an iron lung, which was a much needed medical supply in 1939.

In terms of humanitarian crises, one of the most enduring issues in the world has been the plight of Palestinian refugees. After the Ottoman defeat in World

War I, the partitioning of its Middle Eastern provinces produced several new states and new borders. The Jewish settlements in Palestine following World War I and subsequent wars with Israel after the declaration of its independence (especially in 1948 and 1967) produced huge numbers of displaced Palestinians. Many still live in camps in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria under terrible conditions, and millions of others left their home to seek livelihood in other countries. Jinan Bastaki's article takes on this enduring issue of almost 10 million Palestinian refugees, and discusses problems with their right to return and/or compensation.

Mark Wild's contribution concerns the humanitarian efforts of China, especially in Africa. Its rapid and continuous development led China to expand its markets around the world. Despite its reception as a powerful rival by the Western world, Wild asserts, China was able to establish new cordial relations with several countries. He argues that China adopted a humanitarian aid policy by supplying credits and financing infrastructural facilities in return for oil and mining rights. "The New Face of Humanitarian Aid and Intervention: China and Its Growing Role in the Realm of African Development" suggests that the conventional style of Western aid operating under the "guise of solving human rights issues,"

and democratization may not be so appealing for several nations, as China's style of humanitarian aid provides an alternative.

In this issue we have two more contributions; one concerns the rapid economic growth in China and the other the EU's democracy promotion in Africa.

Samirataou Dipama and Emel Parlar Dal's article, "The effectiveness of Political Conditionality as an Instrument of Democracy Promotion by the EU: Case Studies of Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast and Niger," takes on the issue of effectiveness when political conditions are attached to foreign aid. The authors examine the EU's decision of discontinuation of development aid towards three states, namely Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast and Niger based on violations of human rights.

K. Ali Akkemik's "Rapid Economic Growth and Its Sustainability," deals with the question of whether China can sustain its rapid economic growth and if so, under what conditions. He argues that the decline in China's growth may continue primarily because of high investment rates and much needed reform in the financial sector.

This issue of *Perceptions* presents three book reviews: Yusuf Turan Çetiner's *Turkey and the West: From Neutrality to Commitment* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2014) reviewed by İbrahim Erdoğan of Balıkesir University.

*Turkey and the European Union: Processes of Europeanization* edited by Çiğdem Nas and Yonca Özer (Ashgate, 2012) is reviewed by Nevra Esentürk of Yalova University.

*Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia and Turkey* by Şener Aktürk (Cambridge University Press, 2012) is reviewed by Gloria Shkurti from Sakarya University.

Last but not least, the *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Theory and Perspectives from the Field* conference was organized and co-sponsored by the following institutions:

the Ankara Center for Political and Economic Research (ASEM), the Center for Strategic Research of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SAM), the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Department of Political Science and International Relations and the Center for Modern Turkish Studies of İstanbul Şehir University. I thank all these institutions for their support. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Ali Resul Usul, the editor in chief, and Birgül Demirtaş, deputy editor of *Perceptions*.

## Endnotes

- 1 Robert Young Pelton, “How Much for a Spot on a Rubber Raft and a Slim Chance at a Better Life?”, at <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/09/02/attempts-to-deter-migrants-dont-work-why-europe-should-embrace-them-instead/> (Last visited 2 September 2015).
- 2 “Migrants in the Balkans, Funneling Them Forward”, *The Economist*, Vol. 416, No. 8947, (18- 24 July 2015), pp. 24–25.
- 3 “Europe’s Migrant Crisis, Merkel the Bold”, *The Economist*, Vol. 416, No. 8954, (5-11 September), p. 16.
- 4 See for details, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html> (last visited 30 August 2015).
- 5 “President Obama directs administration to accept at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next fiscal year”, *Washington Post*, 10 September 2015.
- 6 See for further details, Hazel Smith and Larry Minear, *Humanitarian Diplomacy Practitioners and Their Craft*, United Nations University, 2007; Philippe Regnier, The Emerging Concept of Humanitarian Diplomacy, Identification of a Community of Practice and Prospects for International Recognition, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93. No. 884 (December 2011), pp. 1211-1237, Michael O’Flaherty, Zdzislaw Kedzia, Amrei Müller and George Ulrich (eds.), *Human Rights Diplomacy: Contemporary Perspectives*, Leiden, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2011.