PPHA 35570
Conflict and Humanitarian Intervention: Blurring Humanitarian, Development, and Security Policy

Prof. Rebecca Wolfe
Mon, Wed 3:00-4:20 PM

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10 AM-12 PM/or by appointment.
Please book using this link: https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/selfschedsstoken=UUUxd2dNb0o4NnJZfGRIZmF1bHR8MDlkOGlyODg5YzMwZWRhOTdlYmM1ZjVmYWVvMTY0ZtGLinks to an external site.

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Overview
When do States and the International system intervene in humanitarian crises? How are those decisions made? What are the ethical dilemmas? And if and how are humanitarian principles maintained in conflict-related crises? Is there a case for non-intervention? Traditionally, the ideal form of humanitarian intervention was about saving lives. However, as humanitarian aid has become politicized, more humanitarian spending is focused on protracted, conflict-related crises, and the closing of humanitarian space due to State and Non-State actors, the ability to maintain these principles is increasingly challenged. If and how does the humanitarian system need to change?

In this course, we will cover various topics related to humanitarian interventions, including:

- Principles of humanitarian intervention
- Conflation of humanitarian aid and security policy
- Politics of (non) intervention
- Coercive humanitarianism
- Humanitarian access and security
- Critical and local perspectives on the humanitarian sector
- New models of humanitarian intervention

The course will include a number of readings (more on that below) and guests who will shed light on the perspectives of various actors—states, multilateral, implementers and recipients.[1]

After this course, students will have strong knowledge of the core debates in the humanitarian field. They also will learn how to analyze the politics of future interventions, understand the incentives and constraints on actors, and strategize how to move actors in support of intervention (or not). [2]

Course Structure: This course combines lectures and discussions. There are no clear-cut answers to many of the questions we will explore in the course. My aim is to have you become more comfortable with the questions and think through how to wrestle with the dilemmas they pose, and think critically about the ethical and political arguments for or against intervention. Mondays will typically have a longer lecture than Wednesdays. All classes will be synchronous, with recordings posted within 24 hours of class.

Communication: Direct all administrative questions (e.g., finding a reading, Canvas issues, etc.) to the TAs. They are very happy to help you. This also allows me to focus my time on the content of the course, grading, and substantive questions.

In terms of replies, you can expect replies from the TAs or me during the hours of 8 AM to 6 PM CT. You may receive replies outside of these times. However, if you contact us after 6 PM, there is a good chance you will not receive a reply until the next day.

Assignments

*Note: All written assignments are expected to be in single-spaced, 12-point font with one-inch margins. Those submitted that don’t follow these instructions will not be graded.*

Individual Assignments/Grades:

**Participation and Weekly Bullets (10%):** In class, it is expected students come to discussions prepared to discuss the topic and some of the readings. This is your opportunity to engage more with the material, ask me questions, and debate the thorny issues that are at the heart of humanitarian interventions. In your professional career, you will need to back your opinions with evidence (most of the time), so use the class as an opportunity to hone those skills.
Additionally, **five times over the term**, you must share 2-3 bullet points on the week’s reading. These are meant to be brief so the rest of the teaching team and I see what is of interest to students and what students are wrestling with. **These are due at 8 AM on Wednesdays.**

I encourage you to use both of these opportunities for engagement. In this class, there are few, if any, straightforward answers. Wrestling with the ethical and practical issues related to humanitarian interventions will make you a better professional.

*Note: Students who elect to use the Zoom option will not be called on to participate.*

**Op-Ed (25%):** You will pick a current crisis and write an op-ed either for or against a government to intervene in a humanitarian disaster. The crisis may be “natural” or man-made. A strong Op-Ed does the following:

- Is an issue that is currently being debated. Sending more aid to ward off a famine in Somalia would work; what the world could have or should have done in the 80s to ward off famine in Ethiopia doesn’t.
- Gives the reader enough context about the situation to follow the argument. You don’t have much space, so this likely is only a paragraph. But if you assume too much of your readers, they may not follow what you are saying.
- Consider the political implications both at home and abroad when making your arguments. If there weren’t political constraints, many humanitarian dilemmas wouldn’t be dilemmas. Even financial constraints are political to some degree (i.e., which places receive aid). There is a reason this issue is a debate, and you need to acknowledge it.
- Provides evidence or a basis for your argument. Humanitarian principles? Ability to save lives? Has the policy worked elsewhere?

*Formatting: single-spaced 12 point font. Submissions over 800 words will not be accepted.*

Due: April 14, midnight.

**Perspective-taking reflection paper (25%):** In this course, we will spend considerable time discussing the politics of intervention. However, there are people who suffer while those in power decide what to do. That does not mean intervention is always the answer, but I want you to consider how these crises impact people. For this, you will pick a memoir, film/documentary, piece of art, poem, or novel created by someone who has lived through a humanitarian crisis (I will provide some suggestions on Canvas) and reflect on how that perspective changed or provided you new insight into the crisis. For the paper:
• Provide a brief overview of the crisis, including statistics on displacement, food security, injured, killed, etc., and if and how the international community intervened (no more than 1 page). Please use citations for this section (footnotes/endnotes, parenthetical citations, or hyperlinks).
• Describe how the piece influenced your thinking about the crisis. Did it change how you feel about whether the world intervened or not? How people make a choice to stay or flee? Choose to fight? The nature of suffering?

*Formatting: single-spaced 12 point font. Submissions over 2 pages will not be accepted.*

Due: May 5, midnight.

**Group Assignments**

Over the course of the term, you will work with a group of students (4) to analyze a humanitarian crisis and come up with a recommendation for a response. It should be a current crisis (there are plenty...), and you will be advising an agency (multilateral, bilateral, or INGO) on one of the following: to get involved, to get involved differently, to not get involved, or to pull out. For example, the Biden administration has committed to more humanitarian aid for the Tigray region of Ethiopia and announced an envoy. Will this be enough to stop the humanitarian crisis? Does the US have enough clout? Or should they foster a multi-lateral effort? If so, who should be involved?

*The TAs can help organize groups.*

**Background to the Crisis (10%):** This is a brief crisis summary. All crises are very complicated. However, a skill—whether for briefing or proposal writing—succinctly describes the situation and why it matters. The summary will include the following elements: 1) What started the crisis; 2) The humanitarian toll (stats on lives lost, food insecurity, children out of school, etc.); and 3) The response by international actors to date. **Due: March 31, midnight. Submissions over 2 pages will not be accepted.**

**Briefing Packet (25%):** The packet will include a 1-page summary of the evidence and your recommendation and a clear statement of your recommendation; background on the crisis (2 pages—updated from your first assignment based on feedback); an analysis of how other actors are responding or not (2 pages); and an analysis of the political incentives and constraints on intervening (2 pages). This exercise will assess writing and analysis skills and understanding of the various issues shaping decisions on whether or not to intervene and how. **Due: May 27, midnight. Submissions over 7 pages will not be accepted.**

**Group Project Participation (5%):** For your group project, you will evaluate your peers on their contributions to both assignments and teamwork. **Due May 26, midnight.**
General Policies & Announcements

**Late policy:** Unless arrangements are made in advance, *any late assignment* will receive a 10% penalty for each day late.

**Academic Integrity:** All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another’s work as their own, use unallowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain an unfair academic advantage. All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University. In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty of 0 on the assignment and cannot earn higher than a C in the course for students who have committed academic dishonesty. The Harris policy and procedures related to academic integrity can be found at [https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies](https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies). The University of Chicago Policy on Academic Honesty & Plagiarism can be found at [https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/](https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/)

**Pass/Fail Option:** Students who wish to take the course pass/fail rather than for a letter grade must use the Harris Pass/Fail request form ([https://harris.uchicago.edu/form/pass-fail](https://harris.uchicago.edu/form/pass-fail)) and must meet the Harris deadline, which is generally 9am on the Monday of the 5th week of courses. Students who take the course pass/fail must attend class meetings and turn in all assignments, achieving marks that are commensurate with at least a C- letter grade.

**ADA student accommodations:** The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies). Students with disability accommodations awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office should inform the Harris Dean of Students Office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the students’ accommodations implementation.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** The Harris School welcomes, values, and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and we believe that rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the expression and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions. The University and the Harris School have developed distinct but overlapping principles and guidelines to ensure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

- The University’s policies are available [here](https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies). Specifically, the University identifies the freedom of expression as being “vital to our shared goal of the pursuit of knowledge, as is the right of all members of the community to
explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University.

- The Harris School's commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available here: “Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to open discourse and free expression, Harris encourages members of the leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of different backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial.” We foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members not only to speak freely about all issues but also to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others.

**Remote Options:** I will continue to use Zoom to record lectures, and this option is available for those who cannot come to class. Participating this way for 1-2 classes over the term will not affect your grade. If you need to use it more frequently, please come see me.

**Recorded material policy:** The University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding the use of video/audio recordings: these policies are explicitly described in the University's [student manual](#) as well as in the guidelines for instructors available here. A couple of points I want to highlight here:

*By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:*

1. They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
2. They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with persons not authorized to be in the session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
3. Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
4. Any policy violation will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.

**Self Care:** If you find yourself overwhelmed, please do not hesitate to reach out to Student Counseling Services.

*Note: All SCS services are covered by the Student Life Fee, and there is no additional cost for students to access their services. See [https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/student-counseling-service-spring-quarter-faq/](https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/student-counseling-service-spring-quarter-faq/). Students seeking new services/resources can call 773.702.9800 during business hours (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.) and ask to speak*
with a clinician. Students needing urgent mental health care can speak with clinicians over the phone 24/7 by calling the SCS at 773.702.3625.

Readings

This is a relatively heavy writing and reading course. However, I offer alternatives when possible—podcasts, documentaries, and research summaries.

Books for the Course: There are two that I will rely on for the course. I rarely assign all of the books, but many of them are compelling reads in their own right and are available to use (for example, there are copies of Reiff's A Bed for the Night on Amazon for as low as $1.50). The books are also on reserve.


Optional: Power, S. (2019). An Education of an Idealist: Memoir. NY: Dey Street Books (also available as an audiobook). I ask you to read the 2nd half of the book, but I would encourage you to read it all. Understanding her thinking will be important for understanding US foreign aid policy. Alternatively, read her Foreign Affairs piece that she wrote before she was confirmed: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-20/samantha-power-can-do-power

Links to an external site.

Podcast series: Rethinking Humanitarianism: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/podcastLinks to an external site. I recommend all of the episodes, though the one on the US election is somewhat less relevant now. As there often is not a clear 1:1 between episodes and class topics, listen as you, please. For example, we will talk about decolonizing aid in several classes.

Course Schedule and Readings

Weeks 1-2: Introduction to Humanitarian Intervention

March 20: Introduction and course expectations

- “First, Do No Harm” – Samantha Power: http://articles.latimes.com/2002/oct/06/books/bk-power6Links to an external site.

March 22: History of humanitarian intervention: When did the world start intervening?
Alternatives

- A Brief History on R2P (film): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zql34A4elhY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zql34A4elhY) [Links to an external site.]

March 27: Humanitarian Principles


Optional

- Code of Conduct for the ICRC and NGOs in Disaster Relief - [https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p1067.htm](https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p1067.htm) [Links to an external site.]

**Week 2-3: Types of Crises: Natural vs. Man-made Disasters**

March 29: “Natural” Disasters.

Review. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/alex-de-waal-starvation-crimes/Links to an external site.

- Cases: Ethiopia and Yemen

Optional:


**April 3: Protracted Crises: What’s Different?**

- Mercy Corps (2015), Root Causes of Complex Crises (on Canvas)
- Backgrounders on Yemen:
  - Video alternative: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpPpXM7hSXk
- Case: Yemen (part II)

**Weeks 3-4: Politics of Intervention—Perspectives from States & Multi-laterals**

**April 5: Overview of actors, tools, and the calculus of intervening**


Optional


April 10: Is intervention always the answer? Examining short and long-term objectives

• Reiff, Chapter 5
• Powers, Problem, Chapter 10
  o Video option: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1TshBplITFo
• Case: Rwanda

April 12: Coercive Humanitarianism

• Reiff, Chapters 4 & 6
• Powers, Problem, Chapter 9
• Cases: Bosnia and Kosovo

Optional:

Alternatives:

- **Death of Yugoslavia**
  (film): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URZA6r5LLtk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URZA6r5LLtk)

- **NATO bombing of Serbia**
  (podcast): [https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csywx7](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csywx7)

April 17: Idealism vs. Reality: Use of Aid to Enhance National Security

  - Alternative: An Education of An Idealist (Focus on the 2rd half of the book; Especially with Power’s role, it’s important to get insight into her thinking)

- **Dayal, A (2019). Deterrence, Mass Atrocity and Samantha Power’s The Education of an Idealist.**


Alternatives:


- **Obama at War (film):** [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/obama-at-war](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/obama-at-war)
**Weeks 5-6: Politics of Intervention: Perspectives from Implementers**

**April 19: Closing of humanitarian space**

- & 2 (skim)
- Case: Afghanistan

**Alternatives**

- The E-team: [https://www.netflix.com/title/70299286](https://www.netflix.com/title/70299286) (Links to an external site.)

**April 24: Maintaining humanitarian principles**

- Reiff, Chapter 7
- Barnett, Chapter 10 (On Reserve)
- Case: Syria (Part II)

**Weeks 6-7: Politics of Intervention: Perspectives from Recipients**

**April 26: Local perspectives on interventions**

- Dionne, KY (2018). *Doomed Interventions*. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (On Reserve)
- Autesserre, S. (2014). Chapters 2 and 3 (On Reserve)

**May 1: Voices of Refugees**

• Policy Options
  o Brief: https://www.cgdev.org/app/reader/3125211?page=0
  
• Optional: De-bunking stereotypes of refugees
  o Summary article: https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05507-0#ref-CR1

May 3: Paternalism and the political economy of humanitarian interventions

• Barnett, Chapter 10 (On Reserve)
• Mahmood Mamdani (2010) Responsibility to Protect or Right to Punish?, JOURNAL OF INTERVENTION AND STATEBUILDING, 4:1, 53-67, DOI: 10.1080/17502970903541721
• https://panafriicanreview.rw/african-agency-not-the-western-saviour-will-save-africa/
May 8: Protection, safeguarding and abuses

***Note we will talk about sensitive issues in this class

- The Humanitarian #MeToo Movement
- https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2018/03/23/humanitarian-metoo-moment-where-do-we-go-hereLinks to an external site. (Review summary article; watching event video is optional)
- UK Parliament Review of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Aid Sector (Read Introduction and Conclusion; further reading/skimming optional) https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/840/84002.htmLinks to an external site.

Cases: Save the Children and Oxfam

Week 8: What is the evidence on humanitarian and foreign aid? And why do we help?

May 10: How do we measure success? Saving lives vs. extending the crisis

  


Optional


May 15: When and why do we help? The psychology of altruism

  
  Shorter article version: https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000142412788732468840457854552384389986. Links to an external site.


Video:
HUMAN TRAGEDIES: THE MORE WHO DIE, THE LESS WE CARE | Paul Slovic | TEDxKakumaCamp: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIt-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIt-)

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**May 17: Fixing the Humanitarian System: New Models and Reform**


**Alternatives:**


**Optional:**


Appendix: Full Harris Academic Integrity Procedures

Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty

First Violation

If a student is accused by an instructor or teaching assistant of plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic dishonesty, the student will be summoned to meet with the Dean of Students and the instructor. In the meeting, the student and instructor both present information about the situation. If it is determined by the instructor and the Dean of Students that the student has, in fact, plagiarized or cheated, the following sanctions will be imposed for the first violation:

• The student will generally receive a grade of 0 on the assignment or exam in question. Please note that grading decisions are fully at the discretion of the instructor, who may decide to impose harsher grade penalties.
• The student may be asked to re-do the assignment or retake the exam (without credit) to ensure that the student has learned how to properly cite sources or demonstrate that he or she has command of material covered.
• A formal letter of finding is sent to the student stating that the student has been found in violation of the code of academic honesty and what the sanctions were. The letter, along with any evidence presented, is archived in Harris Student Affairs records until the student graduates if the student has no other violations.
• Students found in violation of the academic honesty policy are not permitted to withdraw from the course to avoid grade penalties from the instructor.
• In cases where plagiarism or academic dishonesty is egregious, the case may be referred to the Area Disciplinary Committee even on a first offense. The Dean makes all decisions about which cases will go before the Area Disciplinary Committee.

Second Violation

If a student who has already been found in violation academic dishonesty is again accused of academic dishonesty, the case will be sent to the Harris Area Disciplinary
Committee. Details about the Area Disciplinary Committee procedures can be found in the University Student Manual. Information about the first violation, including the formal letter of finding any evidence, will be presented to the Area Disciplinary Committee, along with evidence of the current allegation. If the student is found in violation of academic honesty a second time, the Area Disciplinary Committee can assign sanctions, including transcript notes, disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Academic Dishonesty Appeals**

If a student has been found in violation of academic honesty and does not believe that either the finding or the sanction is fair or correct, the student has the right to appeal the finding by requesting a hearing from the Area Disciplinary Committee. More information about the Area Disciplinary Committee is available here.