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Balkan Conflicts: U.S. Humanitarian Assistance and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in 1991, there have been four wars in the Balkans. U.S. Humanitarian assistance programs have been a key part of the overall multilateral effort to relieve human suffering and assist refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) during these conflicts and in their immediate aftermath. With the emergency phase of the Kosovo crisis winding down and a political transformation well underway in Serbia, Congress and the Administration can be expected to assess the status of U.S. humanitarian assistance in the Balkans.

The Balkans serve as a leading example of a new category of crisis, the complex humanitarian emergency, in which the United States played a significant role in the provision of humanitarian assistance. The very nature of humanitarian disasters–the need to respond quickly in order to save lives and provide relief–has resulted in an unrestricted definition of what this type of assistance consists of on both a policy and operational level. U.S. humanitarian assistance in the region over the past decade, including projected spending for FY2001, is over $2 billion. However, exact dollar amounts are difficult to determine with any accuracy as each agency has its own budget, accounting detail and regional specificity. Nevertheless, the U.S. response can be captured in terms of spending and relief efforts in trends over time.

Members of Congress have expressed concern that the United States is carrying too much of the cost of the conflicts in the Balkans, particularly with regard to the war in Kosovo. The Europeans are now paying a much greater portion of the reconstruction costs in the region. Due to differences in purpose and scope, comparisons in spending are not easily calculated. For example, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has spent over $2 billion in the region in the past decade, but this does not include substantial bilateral assistance by member states. Ongoing challenges in the region remain, particularly with regard to the 1.7 million refugees and IDPs, and demonstrate the need for continued humanitarian assistance.

The U.S. role as part of a multilateral effort is one area of potential interest to Congress. Another is the link between humanitarian assistance and broader foreign policy goals. Other issues include current levels of commitment, determining which agencies and departments are the best providers and the overall effectiveness of emergency aid, not only in the Balkans but with application to future complex humanitarian emergencies.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Balkan Conflicts: U.S. Humanitarian Assistance and Issues for Congress

Introduction

Many observers believe U.S. humanitarian assistance to the Balkans may need to be reassessed in light of recent developments in Yugoslavia–the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic, political transformation underway in Serbia and the de-escalation of the emergency phase of the Kosovo crisis. While the long-term plan is to replace emergency relief with non-emergency aid[1] to support reconstruction efforts, U.S. humanitarian assistance in the region is still viewed widely as integral to the overall multilateral effort to assist Yugoslavia with its recovery. The purpose of this report is to clarify the United States' interest and role in humanitarian assistance, examine its relevance to burden sharing and coordination with European partners, and raise policy questions for Congress and the new Administration in the overall discussion of involvement in the Balkans.[2]

Overview of the Balkan Humanitarian Crisis

The complex humanitarian emergency has emerged as a new category of crisis which can be defined in different ways. It can be viewed according to the situation on the ground–scale and intensity of population dislocation, destruction of social networks/community and infrastructure, insecurity of civilians and noncombatants, human rights abuses; by the complexity of the response needed to address these problems; or by the multi-causal factors which may have contributed to the escalation of conflict in the first place.

During the 1990s crisis operations increased in war-torn countries and regions throughout the world along with the numbers of those providing relief, primarily humanitarian organizations and international actors. Multinational military forces also served a greater peacekeeping role in these internal wars. The media added a new measure of influence to the response to such crises in the form of greater access and

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[1] For further information, please refer to (name redacted), "The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: U.S. Economic Assistance," CRS Report RS20737, November 30, 2000.

[2] For the purposes of this report, the Balkans includes those countries that made up the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia prior to 1991 (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) (Serbia–includes Kosovo–and Montenegro.) It also includes states in the region that served as transit routes or were adversely affected by the conflicts, i.e. those receiving war-related aid, such as Albania.

live reporting. In these situations the plight of the refugee[3] was one critical element of population movement; the internally displaced person (IDP)[4] became another.

Conducting a humanitarian operation under these circumstances in the Balkans meant that access to populations in need and the distribution of emergency relief supplies was often hampered by security concerns, not only for those needing assistance, but for humanitarian personnel as well. The sheer volume of players in the field included a range of actors and interests creating a much greater coordination challenge and often contributing to duplication of efforts or competition over the same sources of money and projects.

The Balkans serve as an important case study of a complex humanitarian emergency operation, a leading example of the challenges required in the provision of humanitarian assistance in the last decade.[5] According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the war in Yugoslavia became the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.[6] In Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, the humanitarian relief operation was a massive undertaking which provided humanitarian supplies to over 2.7 million refugees and IDPs. Security risks, logistical complexity and lack of cooperation from the parties to the conflict expanded the scope of the operation and increased the difficulties faced by U.N. agencies and humanitarian personnel, which at times exceeded 3,000 individuals from more than 250 organizations.[7]

In 1998, the situation in Kosovo, which over the past decade had resulted in several hundred thousand Albanians leaving the province, dramatically changed course. Well before the Rambouillet negotiations[8], under increasing threat from Yugoslav forces and paramilitaries, Kosovar Albanians had begun to flee, creating over 170,000 refugees from, and 260,000 IDPs within, Kosovo. By the end of the NATO campaign in June 1999, 800,000 Kosovar Albanians had fled or were expelled with a majority seeking refuge in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Albania, and Montenegro. Negotiations to keep neighboring borders open resulted in the "humanitarian evacuation program" for the provision of temporary asylum in countries outside the region and the involvement of NATO military forces

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[3] Defined broadly as those seeking asylum outside their country of citizenship with protection provided under international law.

[4] A direct result of internal wars, the internally displaced are also seeking asylum but within their state's borders. IDPs do not have the same protection as refugees under international law. The plight of this group has gained international recognition as a problem that needs to be addressed.

[5] This report is not intended to give a political or historical description of the events on the ground. An analysis of the key chronological events can be found in other CRS reports., including: Kosovo and the Balkans: Information Pack, CRS Report IP466K; Steven R. Bowman, "Bosnia: U.S. Military Operations," CRS Report IB93056; (name redacted) and (name redacted), "Kosovo and U.S. Policy," CRS Report IB98041, January 10, 2001.

[6] UNCHR, State of the World's Refugees, 2000, p. 218.

[7] UNHCR State of the World's Refugees, p. 218.

[8] International negotiations over Kosovo took place in March 1999 in Rambouillet, France.

in camp construction and logistical support.[9] The scale and speed at which the exodus took place surprised the humanitarian community as did the spontaneous returns after the signing of the peace agreement on June 10, 1999.

Four wars in the past decade have inflicted huge damage to the Balkan region. The task of reconstruction will take time. Meanwhile, other elements of a more short-term humanitarian focus also remain. This is clearly evident upon review of the latest available estimates of refugees and IDPs still seeking solutions:

Table 1. Current Location of Refugees and IDPs

Country	Refugees/IDPs
FRY	717,000
Croatia	65,200
BiH[a]	856,150
FYROM[b]	7,000
Outside region	63,100
TOTAL	**1,708,450**

[a] Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)
[b] Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

Source: UNHCR Report, August 31, 2000, distributed by the State Department, Population, Migration and Refugees.

The U.S. Role in Humanitarian Assistance

Responding to the Crisis in the Balkans

While there was, and continues to be, debate about the U.S. involvement in the Balkans in terms of its strategic, geopolitical, or vital interests, humanitarian assistance was viewed as much less controversial and was provided quickly. Congress has consistently supported humanitarian efforts during natural or manmade disasters as a means of responding to crises in the short term, taking the lead and promoting a U.S. presence. Humanitarian assistance may not reach the threshold of actual intervention, but as a limited response, enjoys a strong measure of bipartisan support and priority. This was also the case in the Balkans over the past decade.

[9] UNHCR, State of the World's Refugees, p. 219.

Sanctions: Exemptions for Humanitarian Assistance

Sanctions imposed on Serbia by the United States, European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) over several years specifically exempt humanitarian assistance.[10] Through FY2000, specific U.S. laws prohibited reconstruction aid in Serbia, but exempted humanitarian and democratization assistance in Serbia and all aid to Kosovo and Montenegro. The EU Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) states that its humanitarian assistance is not "subject to political conditionality."[11] While the European sanction restrictions may differ from those of the United States, in general humanitarian assistance is exempt from the regulations imposed by sanctions.[12]

Historically, Congress has consistently exempted humanitarian assistance from restrictions placed on foreign assistance. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (P.L. 87-195), allows the President to provide disaster assistance "not withstanding any other provision of this or any other Act,"which means that humanitarian assistance is excluded from the potential restrictions of certain programs.

Agencies Involved in U.S. Humanitarian Assistance

Within the U.S. government there are three main sources of humanitarian assistance: The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the State Department and the Department of Defense (DOD). Each is guided by specific legislative authority, including but not limited to the Foreign Assistance Act (1961), the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act (1962), and the Refugee Act (1980). Specific legislation includes Title II of PL 480 (Food for Peace) appropriated through the Department of Agriculture and administered by USAID; Section 416 (b) of the Agricultural Act; Department of State Emergency Refugee and Migration Account; and Title 10, Section 2551 of the Foreign Assistance Act and the current Foreign operations appropriations bill.[13]

While humanitarian assistance is assumed to be urgent food, shelter and medical needs, those agencies within the U.S. Government providing this support expand or contract the definition in response to circumstances. Funds may be used to deliver the service required or provided as grants to international organizations (IOs), international governmental and non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and private or religious voluntary agencies (PVOs).

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[10] See International Crisis Group, Balkans Briefing Paper, Current Sanctions Against Yugoslavia, October 10, 2000.

[11] European Community External Cooperation Programmes: Policies, Management and Distribution, Overseas Development Institute, 1999, p. 34.

[12] The decision as to what is considered humanitarian versus non-humanitarian is often made on a case-by-case basis. For example, in the India-Pakistan situation in 1998, sanctions were applied following India's nuclear tests; under the Pressler Amendment, all aid was cut off except for specific relief assistance programs.

[13] For further information on these sources, please refer to Lois McHugh, International Disasters: How the United States Responds, CRS Report RS20622, July 6, 2000.

USAID has three offices that administer U.S. humanitarian aid:

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). As part of the Bureau of Humanitarian Response (BHR), it is responsible for the provision of non-food humanitarian assistance. Most of its activities are carried out through IOs, NGOs and PVOs; it often provides assistance through Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs).

Food For Peace (FFP). FFP under PL 480 and Title II (including Title II/World Food Program) provides relief and development food aid which does not have to be repaid and includes an emergency and private assistance donations program. In addition, Section 416 (b), managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, allows for the donation of surplus U.S. agricultural commodities held by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC.)

Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). OTI provides post-disaster transition assistance, which includes mainly short-term peace and democratization projects with some attention to humanitarian elements (e.g. community projects such as housing, electricity, water) but not emergency relief.[14]

Department of State

Emergency Refugee and Migration Account (ERMA). This fund is available until spent[15] and provides wide latitude to the President in responding to refugee emergencies. Emergencies lasting more than a year come out of the regular Migration and Refugee Account through the Population, Migration and Refugees (PRM) bureau.

Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). PRM[16] covers refugees worldwide, conflict victims, and populations of concern to UNHCR (now extended to IDPs). Humanitarian assistance includes a range of services from basic needs to community services to tolerance building and dialogue initiatives. Key issues include protection (refugee, asylum issues, identification, returns, tracing activities) and quick impact, small community projects.

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[14] Other departments within USAID may provide some form of humanitarian assistance, but it is unclear how much. For example the aid program Support for East European Democracy Act of 1989 (SEED) allocates resources to address women's health, child survival, trauma counseling and social welfare, and demining, activities which may well be considered by some to be humanitarian.

[15] Governed by P.L. 103-326, the maximum amount is $100 million. Authorized in sections 2 and 3 or P.L. 87-510 of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962.

[16] When there is functional or programmatic overlap between USAID and PRM, they coordinate with each other and define partners. Traditionally PRM is a funder of UNHCR and other multilateral actors; USAID creates bilateral arrangements with NGOs. There is now a shift in partnering due to funding and resources required. PRM coordinates with a European Refugee liaison in Brussels.

Department of Defense

Office of Humanitarian Assistance and Peacekeeping. DOD's mandate is "transport of humanitarian relief for other humanitarian purposes"[17] up to the amount appropriated by Congress every year.[18] It provides humanitarian support to stabilize emergency situations (as opposed to a military mission which focuses on security, military, troops, force protection) and deals with a range of tasks from provision of food, shelter and supplies, medical evacuations, disaster preparedness, coordination between U.S. contractors/military set up, and camp construction. Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 2547 authorizes donation of excess non-lethal supplies under the Denton Program.[19]

Funding of U.S. Humanitarian Assistance to the Balkans

Defining Humanitarian Assistance

The very nature of humanitarian disasters–the need to respond quickly in order to save lives and provide relief–has resulted in an unrestricted definition of what this type of assistance consists of on both a policy and operational level.

Although there are guidelines set out through legislation on foreign relations and specific laws governing humanitarian assistance, in practice, the President has the flexibility to decide what disaster assistance to provide and to set out its terms and conditions. As stated in the Foreign Assistance Act, "The President is authorized to furnish assistance to any foreign country, international organization, or private voluntary organization on such terms and conditions as he may determine, for international disaster relief and rehabilitation..."[20] Further, the President is granted Special Authority to draw down military equipment of up to $100 million per year if an unforeseen emergency requires immediate military assistance to a foreign country or international organization and it cannot be met under any other provision.[21]

Congress does not define what it considers to be humanitarian activities in an effort to keep it as broad as possible and flexible enough to adapt to humanitarian needs. The focus of humanitarian assistance may include basic needs, child survival, education, refugees, but in practice the provision of humanitarian assistance is typically case and time specific. Essentially, all the legislation governing humanitarian or disaster assistance leaves the definition up to the President.

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[17] Title 10, Section 2551, Para. 402, 404.

[18] Assessment often coordinated with OFDA.

[19] The Denton Program allows DOD to provide transportation of privately donated humanitarian cargo to foreign countries on military aircraft on a space-available basis.

[20] Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, PL 87-195, as amended, Chapter 9, Sec 491.

[21] Section 506 (a) (1) of Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

What becomes evident is that the U.S. role in humanitarian assistance is broad, far reaching and covers many elements directly concerned with the provision of relief and strategies for strengthening how people survive over time.[22] What is less clear is when an activity might be described as humanitarian, post-conflict transition, or reconstruction and to what degree this needs to remain flexible to adapt to changes in policy or operations on the ground.

Explaining the Numbers

Questions about authority, definitions and categories of services make up part of the reason it is a challenge to grasp the concept and function of humanitarian assistance. Another factor has to do with how the numbers are generated in budgets within the U.S. government and the degree of accuracy they reflect. Each agency has its own budget, with its own criteria, accounting detail and regional specificity. The fact that an urgent response to humanitarian crises is often required only compounds the problem. Budgets may reflect regional support (i.e. the Balkans), a certain area (the Former Yugoslavia), specific countries (Serbia) or a combination thereof over time and changing events. For example, since 1999 some budgets have separated Kosovo from Serbia, while others have kept them together. Particularly in comparing assistance levels with other countries, financial sources may be compared against other forms of assistance (blankets, etc.) or they may reflect commitments of support rather than overall obligations. All of these variables make reading the numbers and drawing accurate conclusions nearly impossible.

As it is not possible to compare levels of participation accurately dollar for dollar, the following column chart will instead demonstrate trends over the course of the conflict and overall assistance provided by the United States between Fiscal Years 1992 and 1999. It is also important to note that greater assistance levels may well indicate an overall increase in amounts provided, but higher spending may also occur because it was more difficult, and therefore expensive (due to events on the ground), to get aid through. The information entered for this chart is based on estimates and may be incomplete. Overall spending by the United States on humanitarian assistance in the Balkans between 1992-1999 is close to $2 billion.

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[22] A livelihood strategy considers the specific context and circumstances of the conflict in designing effective programs that work with local capacities and abilities to cope with emergencies.

Figure 1. Levels and Sources of U.S. Humanitarian Aid in the Balkans

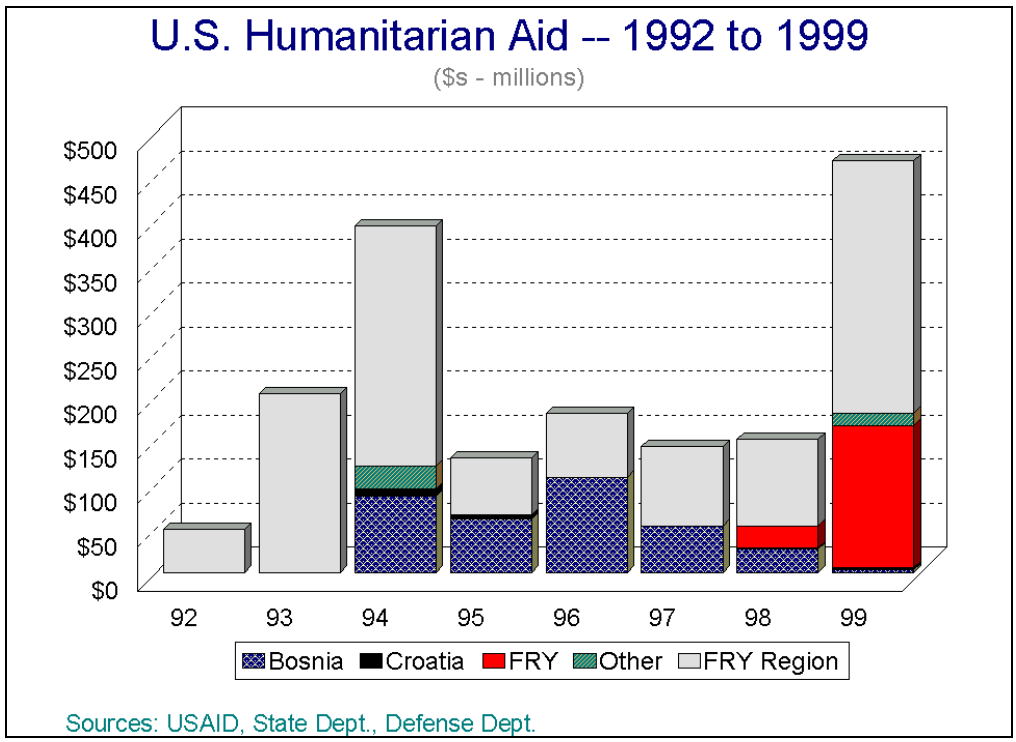

Table 2. U.S. Humanitarian Assistance, 2000
(in U.S. $)

	USAID			STATE	DOD
	OFDA	FFP	OTI	PRM	HA/PK
Albania	312,898	0	934,000	0	0
Bosnia	0	0	1,059,000	0	0
Croatia	0	0	1,656,000	0	0
FRY	22,249,681	58,194,600	0	0	0
Serbia	0	0	3,405,000	0	0
Montenegro	0	0	1,000,000	0	0
Kosovo	0	0	7,799,000	0	0
FYROM	687,780	0	0	0	0
Regional	0	0	0	135,000,000	0
TOTAL	23,250,359	58,194,600	15,853,000	135,000,000	0

European Burden Sharing

Closely linked to the U.S. humanitarian assistance efforts in the Balkans is the question of burden sharing with the Europeans–what they have done and are doing. Members of Congress have expressed concern that the United States is carrying too much of the cost of the conflicts in the Balkans, particularly with regard to the war in Kosovo as it shouldered most of the military expenses associated with the bombing campaign. Adding fuel to the fire was the perception that the Europeans are "quick to pledge but slow to deliver" on humanitarian and reconstruction aid. Congress demonstrated an interest in setting burden sharing goals with Europe, including for humanitarian assistance, as demonstrated in several legislative proposals.[23] What percentage of the humanitarian expenses the United States pays in terms of the overall conflict and by comparison with its European allies is very difficult to determine with any accuracy.

European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO)

ECHO, the humanitarian arm of the EU, was created to aid people in emergency situations in non-EU countries. It funds and coordinates humanitarian activities through its partners: NGOs, and specialized IOs like UNHCR, WFP, etc. Its work encompasses a broad range of actions–emergency relief, disaster prevention and preparedness, refugees, short term rehabilitation and reconstruction work. The boundaries between ECHO's humanitarian and medium-term development activities overlap and the distinction is far from explicit. It views relief, rehabilitation and development as linked along a continuum whereby long-term development can reduce the need for emergency relief, effective emergency relief can contribute to development, and better rehabilitation can ease the transition between the two in order to save the lives of victims and rescue the suffering.[24]

As within the U.S. government, comparing budgets and numbers is difficult due to the differences in purpose and scope. While the exact amounts spent in each area may not be clear, it is very evident in the overall picture that humanitarian assistance is being sent to the region from both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, other donors, like Japan, although not a focus of this report, also make substantial contributions.[25]

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[23] In both the FY2000 (P.L. 106-113) and FY2001 (P.L. 106-429) foreign aid appropriations, Congress placed a 15% limit on its share of most funding for Kosovo. In the House, an amendment (Kasich) to the 2001 Defense Authorization (HR 4205) was adopted that would have ended the U.S. military presence in Kosovo unless the President could certify that the EU had obligated or contracted 85% of humanitarian commitments (among other demands.) The language was removed from the enacted bill. Similar amendments were introduced in the Senate (Byrd-Warner) but not adopted.

[24] The European Community External Cooperation Programmes: Policies, Management and Distribution, p. 34.

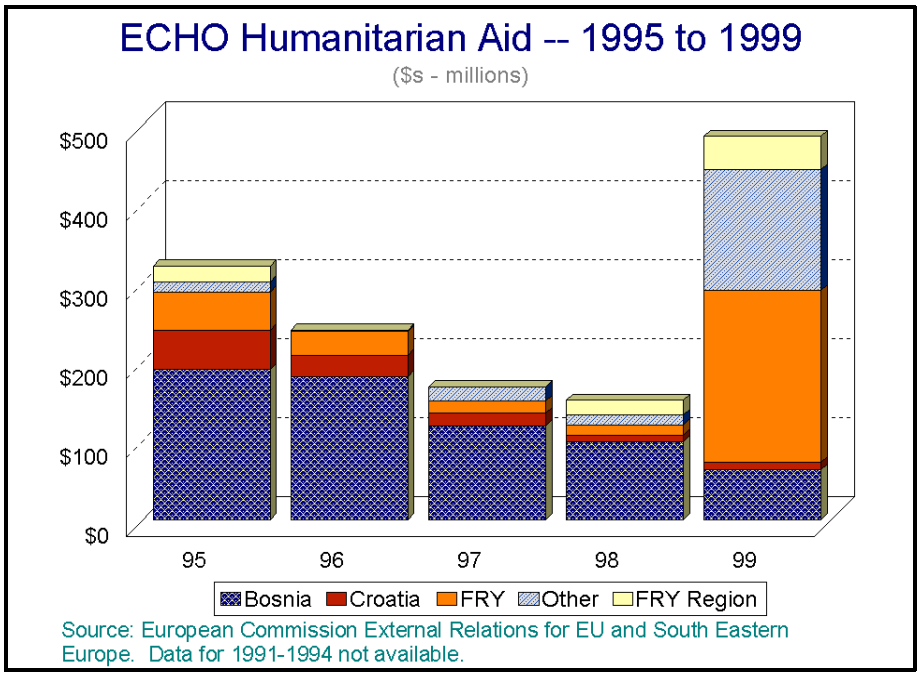
[25] For example, contributions to the 1999 UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the Southeastern Europe Humanitarian Operation reveal substantial donations from Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and many others.

In 1999, ECHO spent 378 million euros[26] ($347.53 million) in response to the Kosovo conflict; in 2000, over 250 million euros ($229.85 million). When humanitarian assistance and the contribution of member states is included, the sum given for the wider region is roughly 17 billion euros ($15.63 billion).[27] However, it is important to note that the following graphs do not include direct support from governments or private sources outside the EU or bilateral assistance by EU Member States.

It is impossible to determine exactly what percent of the total humanitarian funding comes from Europe and what percent from the United States. For example, ECHO has spent over $2 billion in the region in the past decade, but this does not include substantial bilateral assistance by member states. However, it is clear that the Europeans are now carrying a much greater portion of regional reconstruction costs.

As with the column chart for U.S. spending, the information is presented to reveal trends over time during the Balkan conflict. The information entered for this chart is based on estimates in euros and may be incomplete. U.S. dollar to euro calculations are based on the annual exchange rates provided by the European Central Bank Monthly Bulletin.

Figure 2. Levels and Sources of ECHO Humanitarian Assistance to the Balkans



[26] Source: European Community Humanitarian Office. U.S. $ calculations are estimates. The exchange rate between the U.S. $ and euro is calculated taking an average at each quarter.

[27] EU Member States have agreed to inform ECHO (which is coordinating with UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs) when they approve funding for humanitarian aid using a 14-point report system. Its basic purpose is to list all decisions to supply humanitarian aid by any government department. The definition of humanitarian assistance is up to the Member States.

Table 3. ECHO Humanitarian Assistance in the Balkans, 2000

	Euros	U.S. dollars
Albania	3,400,000	3,125,960
Bosnia	400,000	367,760
Croatia	0	0
Serbia	50,450,000	46,383,730
Montenegro	9,190,000	8,449,286
Kosovo	28,835,000	26,510,899
FYROM	5,350,000	4,918,790
Regional	1,075,000	988,355
TOTAL	**98,700,000**	**90,744,780**

Note: All figures are estimates. The exchange rate between the U.S. $ and euro is calculated taking an average at each quarter. The approximate $ to euro ratio in 2000 is 0.9194.
Source: European Community Humanitarian Office.

Ongoing Challenges and Commitments

Since the fall of Milosevic in Yugoslavia, the United States, the Europeans, the United Nations and other donors have reviewed Yugoslavia's most urgent needs and taken action to start the flow of assistance. In looking at the current issues before the 107th Congress, it is also important to consider the ongoing challenges in two respects: developments since the October 1999 elections in Serbia, and the change of Administration in the United States.

Official assessments conclude that the current situation in the Balkans requires a wide range of ongoing humanitarian activities, the main objectives of which are:

- Assistance for refugees, IDPs, and the elderly: includes shelter, food, medicines, water supply and sanitation– basic humanitarian support to the populations in need;
- Energy assistance;
- Basic security measures;
- Transition assistance to refugees and IDPs. Although no longer part of relief operations, refugees and IDPs still need to return, receive settlement assistance, and services. An overall strategy is needed to determine how many will go home, how many will be integrated within their current community, and how many will permanently settle elsewhere;

- Assistance for democratization, peace and reconciliation; community based rehabilitation.

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance, FY2001. The United States has pledged $35 million in emergency food aid to the region, plus $142.7 million[28] in other humanitarian assistance.[29] It is important to note that current projections may be lower than FY2000 and appear to represent a decline in humanitarian assistance. Part of the planning and budgeting process results in funds being held back until needs are more fully identified. Thus additional monies are likely available for humanitarian assistance, just not earmarked at this time for a specific line item.

European Humanitarian Assistance, 2001. Based on rough estimates, the EU has committed 200 million euros (roughly $183 million) now in humanitarian assistance and an additional 76-92 million euros (between roughly $69.9 million and $91.4 million) this year.[30]

Links to Broader Foreign Policy Goals

Humanitarian assistance is the most flexible policy tool that can be quickly brought to bear in a crisis. When there is no consensus on how or when to intervene, it can buy time and keep options open. As was the case in the Balkans, it may be an avenue to achieve minimal consensus and still demonstrate action. According to UNHCR in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, the international community was unable to agree on how to intervene and with what strategy, but was able to reach consensus to support the humanitarian relief operation led by UNHCR. Governments were willing to fund the relief operation, with little agreement on anything else. Essentially, UNHCR's view is that "the humanitarian operation increasingly became a 'fig leaf' and the only visible response of the international community to the war."[31]

Sometimes the easiest decision in terms of finding a path of least resistance, humanitarian assistance can expand beyond its immediate function. It may provide the means to maintain some form of contact with a country/region, or mitigate tensions over policy towards a region within the U.S. government or between or among its allies. Humanitarian assistance means doing something to avert a crisis, to provide support to allies, and to maintain a presence in the region. Some of these factors may have been at play during the Kosovo crisis. The images of human suffering portrayed by the media only reinforced the need to do something. UNHCR says that donor governments responded to the publicity in much greater numbers than

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[28] Sources: USAID and State Department. The Defense Department is not providing humanitarian assistance to the Balkans in FY2001.

[29] In longer-term assistance, the Administration plans to disburse $100 million in aid appropriated by Congress for Serbia and $89 million appropriated for Montenegro, although specific conditions apply.

[30] Source: European Community Humanitarian Office. U.S. $ calculations are estimates.

[31] UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, p. 220.

for crises elsewhere, such as Africa.[32] Political considerations play a role in the way assistance is given and to whom. UNHCR officials have suggested that the direct correlation between the bombing and escalation of violence on the ground in Kosovo (and increase in the refugee crisis) may have influenced further the degree to which the international community wanted to be seen caring for the refugees; and that assistance was often provided directly to specific NGOs and to the Macedonian and Albanian governments, with little regard for the coordination requirements of a multilateral initiative.[33]

Humanitarian assistance carries some weight as a point of "neutral" intervention in crisis. How it is used and whether it becomes more of a strategic, policy tool depends upon the situation, what other governments are doing, and the degree to which the United States has further interest in the region. Should the United States decide to reduce its humanitarian assistance support, does it diminish its standing among its allies or affect its interests in other ways? In the Balkans, issues involving burden sharing, general stability in South Eastern Europe, and the impact of refugee flows were additional inter-related causes of concern.

Issues for Congress

The provision of humanitarian assistance in the Balkans region has been a priority for the United States, although it remains to be seen how the new Administration views humanitarian intervention in general and its policy towards the Balkans in particular. Congress may consider some of the following issues.

What are the foreign policy ramifications of complex humanitarian emergencies? It is worth considering whether the complex humanitarian emergency in the Balkans is an example of something new or a pattern that can be anticipated to repeat itself. If it is new (or perceived as such) how does this affect the U.S. response? Furthermore, since the President has a great deal of flexibility over U.S. involvement, once commitment to a humanitarian effort takes place, does this make the long-term participation in reconstruction and political solutions more likely? Is it possible to do the former without taking on the latter?

What commitment to humanitarian assistance is now required by the United States? The Europeans are making the case that they are carrying most of the humanitarian and reconstruction costs in the Balkans. Still, the United States remains a vital part of the overall allied effort in the Balkans. A critical point concerns unresolved questions within Yugoslavia: the impact of potential trouble spots in Kosovo, relations between Serbia and Montenegro, and relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Despite the positive developments of the last few months, many uncertainties remain which could have serious implications should the situation escalate again, even if it does not result in large-scale conflict. The U.S. presence in

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[32] UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, p. 239.

[33] UNHCR, The State of the World's Refugees, p. 239.

the region, in addition to its contribution to humanitarian assistance, may be a key stabilizing factor.

Are the right agencies and departments providing U.S. assistance? Many of the unresolved issues in Yugoslavia are affected by the role played by agencies and departments within the United States. Some have argued that the military is over-engaged by default just because DOD is the only place where funds are readily available. Whether or not funds could be transferred to other agencies, particularly for the tasks of reconstruction, are important points of discussion in shifting from relief to development and in planning an overall exit strategy. In keeping with its mandate, OTI plans to wrap up its work in Kosovo by September 2001. But the large problem of refugees and IDPs throughout the region remains, particularly in Serbia. Whether humanitarian assistance should continue to support reintegration efforts, or whether such aid should be phased out in favor of other kinds of aid (yet to be determined) is open to question as is the U.S. role in these kinds of programs.

How can the United States contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance? Although the provision of relief in the Kosovo conflict was reasonably effective, this was not always the case in the Balkans when assistance was delivered in areas of open conflict. First, it is important to examine whether humanitarian assistance is going to those for whom it is intended. Evaluating and tracking provision of supplies is difficult during a conflict and impossible to completely control. At the same time, there is the role of the NGO–including its mission and sources of funding–in what has become a major independent enterprise in these kinds of conflicts. There is the potential for misuse, intended or unintended, which may require closer analysis of the performance of providers. The safety and protection of refugees and humanitarian workers is another important issue. Last year, the U.N. Secretary General reported to the General Assembly on the Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel.[34] A growing number of humanitarian workers in various parts of the world have been put at great risk or lost their lives in providing humanitarian assistance. The degree to which a security force (e.g. NATO in the Kosovo crisis) protects humanitarian relief workers and parties to the conflict will have some bearing on who is in charge, the security measures taken and provided, and the perception of whether the humanitarian community has taken sides in the conflict.

Some of the issues of U.S. humanitarian assistance in the Balkans may have relevance to the world-wide character of contemporary conflict and may be useful in an examination of the lessons learned in dealing with future complex humanitarian emergencies. In any case, as crises proliferate, some problems similar to those faced in this region will probably arise, and the level and sources of U.S. humanitarian assistance will inevitably have an important impact, as they have in the Balkans.

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[34] U.N. Document A/55/494.