

# Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and its Impact on US Foreign Policy

Abby Stoddard

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Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and its Impact on US Foreign Policy Abby Stoddard Two opposing images of humanitarian NGOs challenge efforts to understand their role in international relations. Do they function as autonomous - and influential - non-state actors in pursuit of their own value-driven agendas? Or do they serve merely as the paid agents of national governments, providing a service delivery function in line with those nations' foreign policy goals?

Stoddard proposes a third view: that humanitarian NGOs, even those dependent on their home government for most of their funding, can and do influence state policy formation, but not in the manner of interest-based advocacy groups. Instead, these operational groups have the greatest impact on policy by providing hands-on information taken from experience. This information can shape what governments and other actors know, and how the policy problem is framed.

Using case illustrations of US policy in the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, Angola, DR Congo, Sudan, and Kosovo, *Humanitarian Alert* charts the course of NGO information from its formation on the ground to its use by officials in all levels of government. An array of sources, from embassy telegrams to interviews with state and non-state actors, creates a compelling picture of how narratives and numbers in humanitarian crises help or hinder response.



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