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ICRC operational security: staff safety in armed conflict and internal violence

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Abstract

Humanitarian work, especially in conflict areas, has become more dangerous and every humanitarian organization is affected by serious security problems, constituting a threat to their staff and hampering much-needed activities on behalf of the victims of armed conflicts and other situations of collective armed violence. The article outlines the general approach of the ICRC to security issues and describes the pillars of the security policy it has adopted in the field to protect its operational staff.

It seems that the world is a riskier place to be an aid worker.[1] Although violence against aid workers was on the decline after 1996, it rose again in 2003–2005, and no improvement is in sight. The general security environment has clearly deteriorated in certain contexts, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Chad, Somalia, Lebanon, Yemen, Palestine and Sudan[2]. Armed conflicts are also tending to become more polarized and radicalized. Humanitarian agencies and their staff face a high risk of being rejected (perceived in some contexts as aligned with the government or the opposition group) or instrumentalized (humanitarian action is seen as one of the means employed to win the support of the population).

There are several reasons for this: the blurring of lines between political, military and humanitarian action, casting in doubt neutral and independent humanitarian action[3] and reducing the scope for humanitarian action; the various consequences of the 'global war on terror' and the change of identity and

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internationalization of certain armed groups;[4] the increase in asymmetric wars waged by highly developed armed forces against unequal adversaries;[5] the regionalization of conflicts and banditry; or some stakeholders' negative perception of humanitarian action. These trends are worrying and support the feeling that humanitarian work, especially in conflict areas, has become more dangerous.

Although not unknown to the ICRC, violence has become more specifically targeted against aid workers and some evidence shows that a growing number of such attacks are politically motivated,[6] compared with targeting for economic gain (threats, robberies, car looting, hold-ups for theft). Nevertheless, the latter incidents are still in the majority and are usually analysed as being resource-related, meaning that 'what we have' is a greater risk than 'who we are'. Targeted political threats or violent acts such as ambushes, direct attacks or hostage-takings, however, have a far greater impact, as they demonstrate the unwillingness of a party to conflict to accept a humanitarian organization. Whereas the number of ICRC personnel working in the field and the volume of operations conducted by the organization have constantly increased in recent years,[7] the annual number of security incidents affecting the ICRC remained

1 A joint report from the Overseas Development Institute, UK, and the Center on International Cooperation at New York University, USA, collates data on violence against aid workers and analyses how perceptions of increased risk have shaped new security measures and programming approaches. Since 1997 the number of major acts of violence (killings, kidnappings and armed attacks resulting in serious injury) committed against aid workers has more than quadrupled. Overall, there were 792 reported acts of major violence against aid workers from 1997 to 2008, involving 1618 victims and resulting in 711 fatalities. Violence is most prevalent in Sudan (Darfur), Afghanistan and Somalia, which together accounted for more than 60% of incidents. Most aid worker victims are deliberately targeted for political and/or economic purposes, rather than being randomly exposed to violence. See Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Victoria DiDomenico, '*Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update*', Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief No. 34, April 2009, available at http://www.cic.nyu.edu/Lead%20Page%20PDF/HPG_2009%20.pdf (visited 20 April 2009).

2 In Darfur in 2006 and 2007, there were about 30 security incidents per year involving the ICRC (out of a total of 100 ICRC security incidents on average worldwide each year), fewer than other organizations considering the greater exposure of the ICRC in terms of field trips, travel by road rather than air, and geographical coverage.

3 See Pierre Krähenbühl, 'The ICRC's approach to contemporary security challenges: A future for independent and neutral humanitarian action', *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 86, No. 855, September 2004, pp. 505–514.

4 International and transnational groups often affiliated to Al Qaeda, e.g. the Groupe salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Group for Call and Combat – GSPC) becoming *Al Qaida au Magreb islamique* (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb – AQMI), or Al Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula.

5 See Toni Pfanner, 'Asymmetrical warfare from the perspective of humanitarian law and humanitarian action', *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 87, No. 857, March 2005, pp. 149–174.

6 E.g. on UNHCR, Algiers, December 2007 (the attack led to formation of an Independent Panel on Safety and Security, under Lakhdar Brahimi – see The Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises Worldwide, *Towards a Culture of Security and Accountability: Report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises Worldwide*, 9 June 2008, available at http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/UN_panelonsafety_9Jun08.pdf (visited 21 April 2009); on MSF-NL in Somalia, January 2008; on the children's NGO Plan International in Pakistan, February 2008; on the International Rescue Committee in Afghanistan, August 2008.

7 Currently the ICRC maintains a permanent presence in over 60 countries and conducts operations in about 80 with 12,473 employees, 1542 expatriates and 10,931 national staff.

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stable.[8] The hostage-taking of three ICRC staff members in the Philippines on 15 January 2009 was a reminder that serious security incidents can happen in any conflict area.[9]

These developments have prompted the ICRC to focus even more on the safety and security of its personnel and field activities. The following is an outline of its general approach to security.

Issues and approaches

The ICRC strives at all times to reconcile its operational goal of standing by the conflict victims and vulnerable persons with its responsibility towards its personnel. It must therefore weigh every operation and its humanitarian impact against the risks involved. The ICRC aims to be predictable and transparent and to say what it does and do what it says. To preserve its capacity to operate by using a mode of action that is understood and shared, it builds up a network of contacts with all parties to a conflict. The players that must be mobilized for an operation to run smoothly have become more diverse and more numerous, and some of them can be hard or impossible to reach.

In an increasingly interconnected world, the requirements of political independence and neutrality are predicated on how well the ICRC can analyse, mobilize and communicate, as well as on its understanding of how others view its independence at the local, regional and global levels. In all circumstances, it must be mindful of how it is perceived, of the image projected by its work, and the private and professional conduct of its staff.

It is the responsibility of the people directing ICRC field operations to manage security. The ICRC makes no distinction between security management and the conduct of operations. Its approach to security is akin to that of 'risk management', the emphasis obviously being on prevention before the fact. This is supplemented with after-the-fact 'incident management', through which the ICRC learns from experience and adopts 'best practices'. Although local, regional and global risks are interrelated, the ICRC's security management model is based on decentralized initiative, decision-making and responsibility for field security: the head of delegation decides on and implements the measures required by the general environment and the context in which the delegation works. The security and stress unit plays an advisory role.[10]

The field staff exercise this extensive autonomy within a clearly defined institutional framework that has three components: the ICRC's mandate, its principles and its security concept. In the field, each delegation assesses its security

8 Security incidents are internally defined as 'events that may constitute a threat to the physical or mental integrity of ICRC staff and that may have implications for operational matters'.
9 All three have now been released.
10 In the areas of operational support, training, situation monitoring and security policy.

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environment in light of the current situation and on the basis of the organization's frame of reference, the 'pillars of security'. In addition, present-day security management involves developing methods to increase awareness of and preparedness for dangers originating outside a given context but nevertheless potentially threatening for the ICRC. In situations in which the ICRC is responsible for directing and co-ordinating a joint operation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement under the Seville Agreement, it is in charge of establishing, managing and maintaining a security framework for Movement components operating within a co-ordinated Movement approach.[11]

Facing security risks

In view of the nature of its mission, the ICRC has chosen to make insecurity a given in defining its operational policy. Assessing risks and threats is an integral step in the process of establishing operational strategy. Danger is a part of every delegate's routine; it is often characteristic of the working environment and determines operational choices. The risks inherent in carrying out the ICRC's mandate vary, depending on the theatre of operations.

The field security concept covers both conflict situations and banditry or crime. Indeed, it is often difficult to distinguish clearly between the two.

The definition of risk

Risk has three cumulative components:

- the danger (or 'threat') as such, defined by its nature (theft, abduction, shelling, etc.);
- the possibility that the dangerous event will occur over time (imminent, long-term or permanent risk);
- the adverse consequences (human, operational or material).

The ICRC's policy is to reduce the risk to the lowest possible level without being able to eliminate it. It is this residual unavoidable risk that underlies the ICRC's approach to security matters, and staff members have to agree to accept that degree of risk.

A certain level of risk is considered acceptable only if it is justified by the humanitarian impact of the operation. A balance must always be struck between

11 Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities of the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereinafter Seville Agreement), Seville, 26 November 1997, Art. 6.1.2(A)(c) provides that in situations where the ICRC is acting as lead agency, it has the specific responsibility 'to define and ensure the application of any measure which may prove necessary to guarantee, to the greatest extent possible, the physical safety of personnel engaged in relief operations in the field'.

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the risk an action entails and its anticipated effect. It is important to assess the effects of operational activities in terms of quality rather than quantity, and regularly to ask the question whether the impact of a planned activity is worth the risk it involves. If the answer is 'no', the operation should in principle be suspended, postponed or discontinued.

Even in situations fraught with danger, ICRC staff must never take unconsidered risks or try to get between parties during active hostilities. They can work properly and effectively only if there is at least a temporary truce or the fighting has eased off. The level of risk goes up when delegates are foolhardy, count too heavily on luck, or consider danger to be banal, routine or a challenge to be met. On the other hand, security measures that are inappropriate, exaggerated or not reviewed – perhaps once valid but now needlessly prolonged – can paralyse an operation or result in decisions comprising additional risk factors.

As a rule, security measures are aimed at:

- preventing serious incidents by eliminating the possibility of them occurring (the idea here is to remove potential targets, for example by avoiding cash transfers, making sure that expatriates stay out of no-go areas, or prohibiting travel by road where there may be landmines);
- reducing risk by means of deterrents such as perimeter protection, alarms and guards, or by precautionary measures (image, attitude, discretion) that promote respect for the ICRC's activities, staff and property;
- limiting the consequences of an incident if it nevertheless occurs (medical evacuations, insurance, etc.).

The ICRC's seven pillars of security

Security is predicated on what the ICRC does, how it is perceived and accepted, how its individual staff members conduct themselves, and on the organization's ability to listen, to talk and communicate with all those involved in a situation of armed conflict or internal violence, and to project an unchanging and coherent image of itself.

The seven pillars described below are the principles on which the ICRC has based its 'security culture' in the field.[12] The first is exclusive to the ICRC, while the others are adopted by most organizations or multinational corporations to protect their staff. The importance assigned to each of them will vary according to the type of threat encountered.

12 See also by Philippe Dind, 'Security in ICRC field operations', *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 323, 1998, pp. 335–345.

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Acceptance of the ICRC

Acceptance is the main pillar, the vital component in the ICRC's field security concept; acceptance of the ICRC is fundamental and indispensable in situations of armed conflict and internal violence.

To be able to operate, the ICRC must first ensure that it is accepted by the parties to a conflict. They will accept its presence and working procedures if they understand its role as an exclusively humanitarian (independent and impartial) organization and the purpose of its activities, and if a relationship of trust has been established. The ICRC has no means of exerting pressure to impose its activities. Persuasion, influence and credibility are its only weapons.

It is crucial to ensure that the ICRC is accepted at least by all those who influence the course of events. However, the fragmentation of society has led to the rise of players such as warlords, transnational terrorist or mafia networks, armed resistance groups, mercenaries and paramilitary forces, whose degree of acceptance of the ICRC is hard to assess.

In order to be able to contact all the various parties during a conflict situation, the ICRC seeks to establish channels of communication to those likely to misunderstand or reject its work. It may be difficult or impossible to have direct access to certain extremists; such alternative channels are therefore a necessary additional means of reinforcing a sound, widespread and diversified networking process.

Within the framework of its integrated operational and mobilization strategies, the ICRC gains acceptance by the relevance of its operational choices, through dialogue, negotiation and communication, by projecting a coherent image and by spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement at all levels.

In many situations, there are two further means of reinforcing acceptance: promotion of the ICRC's activities with a view to making them easier to understand, and media campaigns to spread information about those activities. These means should not be employed unless they lead to greater acceptance. Acceptance is built up over time through action and dialogue; in the meantime, some degree of fragility and vulnerability is inevitable. Public communication approaches and messages must be conceived and developed within an integrated strategy that takes account of the security parameters applying to local, regional and global communication.

Another factor conducive to acceptance is the expatriates' understanding of the culture in which they are working. If they are familiar with the local language, values and socio-cultural customs and rules, they can act in a manner consistent with their environment. This insight is essential if they are to be able to adjust to different situations and help make the ICRC an accepted part of the environment, to contribute to the way in which a particular society functions without having to become part of it. Poor understanding of the context and inappropriate private or professional conduct can place the acceptance and work of the ICRC at risk.

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Identification

Once its special role has been accepted, the ICRC must be uniquely identifiable. Identification is based on the use of the red cross, red crescent or red crystal emblem. To distinguish itself from other humanitarian agencies, the ICRC uses a logo consisting of a red cross surrounded by two concentric black circles between which appear the words 'Comité international Genève'. ICRC vehicles and buildings are marked with a protective sign or logo of appropriate size; flags are used in sensitive situations as they attract special attention. Care must be taken, however, not to overuse these means.[13]

The emblem *per se* is not enough to protect the ICRC. At all times, the attitude and behaviour of each and every ICRC delegate has a positive or negative influence on how the organization is perceived by the local people and the parties to the conflict, and on the credibility and legitimacy of the emblem.

To supplement the ICRC's visual identification and ensure it remains an open book, the buildings and means of transport it uses and its employees' movements in the field are communicated to all parties to the conflict. Because modern methods of warfare make it possible to destroy a target long before visual contact has been established, notification is the only effective form of protection. This is particularly important for the use of ICRC aircraft during an armed conflict in which long-range artillery is employed; here notification is an essential precaution, as is the compulsory filing of a flight plan and field mission form.

Political tension of a previously unknown kind will sometimes lead the delegation to redefine the operation's level of visibility in order to lower exposure to risks. Where there are problems of banditry or criminality, it is best to act with discretion and keep a low profile. The head of delegation may suggest that exceptions be made to the principle of identification (when the level of acceptance is insufficient). In exceptional circumstances, the ICRC may decide not to use its emblem. It may also provisionally decide to use another protective device recognized by the Geneva Conventions or their Additional Protocols.[14]

Information

Information is a fundamental element of security. The security goal of internal fact-gathering and sharing of information is to make the ICRC better-known, to enhance its understanding of the environment in which it works and of the players which are part of it. Using reliable internal information, the ICRC can anticipate

13 On the use of the emblem, see Habib Slim, 'Protection of the red cross and red crescent emblems and the repression of misuse', *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 272, 1989, pp. 420–437.

14 For questions and answers about the adoption of an additional emblem, see http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/emblem-questions-answers-281005?opendocument (visited on 25 March 2009).

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events and react appropriately as situations evolve or when dangers arise during field trips. Internal information should therefore flow in all directions – from senior delegation staff downwards and vice versa, between headquarters and the field, between delegations, and between ICRC colleagues and outside contacts.

All field personnel, whether expatriates or field officers, must acquire the conditioned reflex to collect and pass on information on security matters, whether relating to the past or the present situation or to emergent trends. Their attitude is crucial: they must show empathy, be good listeners, and be attentive to cultural aspects and information. Field personnel must be especially alert to any signs or hints that the security situation is deteriorating; they must be careful not to take such developments for granted, so as not to unconsciously raise their threshold of tolerance to danger.

Internal information must be monitored; this is the job of the head of delegation, of the person designated by him and ultimately of every delegation staff member. Care must be taken never to try to obtain military information, and never to pass on to unauthorized persons any information obtained thanks to the ICRC's specific role and the confidence its policy of discretion has earned it.

All security incidents must be analysed in terms of the facts and circumstances so as to establish to what extent, if any, the delegates' conduct was a contributory factor. They must be described in detail in a written report so that the delegation can take steps to prevent recurrences or to forestall more serious incidents.

The head of delegation is responsible for circulating general information and organizing exchanges of information both within the delegation and among locally hired staff, National Society personnel participating in an operation directed and co-ordinated by the ICRC and seconded staff (including drivers and aircraft and ships' crews), who are not only entitled to be kept abreast of developments but are also a very important source of news about local developments and changes in the overall operational environment. The head of delegation must ensure that the families of ICRC expatriates are likewise kept informed, and are notified of all relevant security decisions.

The head of delegation must also promote the regional exchange of information with neighbouring delegations. Local armed conflicts, the parties involved and their impact in political, military, economic and humanitarian terms do not stop at a country's borders.

In the exchange of security information between the ICRC and other organizations and entities, it is essential to adopt an attitude that is as open as possible. If there is one area in which the ICRC wants to learn as much as it can and hence to exchange information, it is security – though with all due caution when the information is sensitive or confidential. The ICRC also analyses incidents involving other organizations in order to draw lessons from them.

Similarly, headquarters passes on to the field any incoming information that could affect security: a global threat, developments in the political situation, possible reactions to ongoing negotiations, information obtained from other humanitarian organizations, changes in the military situation, and in particular the

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roles played by neighbouring countries or others further afield and by the major international organizations.

Security regulations

The security regulations for expatriate staff are drawn up under the authority of the head of delegation and are thus specific to each country. Based on the analysis of the situation, they lay down appropriate rules and procedures designed to take account of the dangers and risks. They must be regularly reviewed and scaled up or down as the situation changes. A copy of the regulations is signed by the individual ICRC staff members on arrival in the field or when they take up their duties; they are briefed at the same time. If the regulations undergo a major overhaul, they must be signed anew.

The head of delegation is responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulations; violations are penalized and, if serious, can result in the staff member's return to headquarters or dismissal. The regulations must leave everyone room to manoeuvre: they do not absolve staff from responsibility for their behaviour and for those affected by their decisions.

The regulations should be as brief as possible, but comprehensive. They must cover all points, but say only what is essential for the greatest impact. They must be continuously reviewed in light of the situation and must cover both preventive action and reactions to incidents.

The ICRC recommends that security regulations be drawn up for delegation employees as required by the specific context. Such regulations must also be signed by every employee concerned. The personnel of Participating National Societies (PNS) working in situations in which the ICRC is directing and co-ordinating a Movement operation are subject to the same security regulations as ICRC expatriate staff.[15] The host country's National Society (the 'Operating National Society') that is implementing a particular ICRC objective is also subject to the ICRC's security regulations.

Personality

The safety of the ICRC's field activities depends to a large extent on the personal attributes of each staff member. In dangerous or threatening situations or in other difficult circumstances, the security of several individuals may depend on one person's reactions, attitude and ability to gauge a situation, in particular when that person is a hierarchical superior. The quality of a staff member is determined by the person's character and level of resilience. Staff members must be professionally competent and believe in the organization's mission, because they understand and accept it. They must also display a number of fundamental traits, in particular a sense of responsibility (towards themselves and others) and solidarity. Each

15 Seville Agreement, above note 11, Art. 6.1.2(A)(c).

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delegation draws up a document setting out the rules of conduct that are appropriate in the local context; those rules apply to every ICRC expatriate staff member and delegation employee.

Staff members who stay in good mental and physical shape, who try to combat fatigue and nervous tension and to recognize their own limits show a sense of responsibility. Their conduct implies a degree of self-discipline aimed at maintaining a healthy lifestyle, in particular by eating properly and getting enough sleep and time off, rather than resorting to alcohol and medicines. The use of drugs and other substances banned under national legislation is prohibited. Despite their efforts to keep to a healthy routine, some staff members nevertheless experience fear, despair or premonitions of death. It is important to recognize these feelings and to talk about them openly with colleagues or a supervisor, with a view to preventing risky behaviour. In the face of danger, such reactions are common; they can play a useful role in alerting us to and regulating stress, just as they can precipitate inappropriate behaviour. If they are acknowledged and discussed, they can be monitored and soon dissipate. If they are ignored or suppressed, they lead to the taking of unnecessary risks. It is therefore the responsibility of each staff member, and of his or her superiors in particular, to foster a climate of trust in the delegation so that staff do not hesitate to express their fears and feelings.

In this connection, solidarity is of fundamental importance. Everyone's resilience varies according to the circumstances and their individual perceptions and sensitivities; staff must therefore be supportive of and listen to each other in the delegations and during field operations. Talking over one's concerns and emotions openly, in a spirit of tolerance, is ultimately always the best way to strengthen team spirit, maintain personal well-being and encourage an individual sense of responsibility.

Telecommunication

Effective telecommunication equipment and networks are a key component of security in the field. However, the equipment alone is no guarantee of safety. In the long run, security comes down to establishing and reviewing telecommunication procedures, regularly training staff to apply them and ensuring that they are strictly enforced.

Today's humanitarian practitioners, including the ICRC, can choose from a wide range of technological telecommunication aids: HF and VHF radio systems, fixed and mobile telephones, satellites and computer networks. Used in a combination adapted to both the geographical[16] and political[17] context, these

16 'Geographical' refers to the physical environment in which the ICRC works (mountains, town, countryside, flatland, etc.).

17 'Political' refers to the following factors: licences delivered by the authorities, import of material, conflict context (banditry, belligerents' use of technology, etc.).

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systems are a sure means of meeting security needs. They play an important role in transmitting information and notifications, monitoring and checking movements in the field, alerting others to deteriorating situations, and dealing with any crisis that may arise.

The means made available are geared to the specific situation, in terms of both quality and quantity:

- modern, reliable equipment, which can be operated independently of the local infrastructure and is serviced by the ICRC;
- ICRC staff on site to set up and develop a system that is appropriate in the geographical and political situation;
- clear procedures that are adapted to the operational context;
- round-the-clock radio monitoring, if circumstances require;
- user training, facilitated by the greatest possible level of standardization.

Protective measures

Protective measures are used to strengthen the other pillars of security. They include any step or measure taken to increase the security of ICRC staff, buildings, infrastructure and operations. Such measures may be active (e.g. guards) or passive (e.g. reinforced buildings), but none of these measures is an absolute guarantee of security should the situation worsen. The ICRC is accustomed to deteriorating situations, each of which has its own specific characteristics. Some things, however, hold true for any high-risk situation, of which there are basically two kinds:

(a) Indiscriminate attacks: in such situations, the ICRC's special status is not an effective means of protection. For preventive purposes, the delegation is situated with a careful eye to its neighbours (far from official buildings and military premises), in buildings that are not in an exposed position and that are solidly built. Passive protective measures are introduced, essentially anti-blast protection for windows (3M), safe areas, sandbag barricades and bomb shelters;

(b) Crime/banditry: in such situations, ICRC expatriate staff are in the same position as other foreigners living in the country. The means by which they can be identified (the emblem) and notifications no longer afford protection. Vulnerability becomes a risk factor: delegations must make sure they are hard targets by adopting traditional protective measures such as physical barriers (doors, fences, and perimeter walls), motion detectors, alarm systems, guards, etc. They must maintain a discreet presence, reducing their visibility (no logos, unmarked vehicles) and the predictability of ICRC movements (irregular hours, different routes). In order to increase vigilance and frustrate the plans of potential attackers, surveillance and counter-surveillance measures can be used to detect whether the ICRC is being observed in any way.

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There might be situations[18] in which human lives may be saved only by accepting an armed escort, because refusing such an escort would lead to the paralysis of humanitarian activities and consequently the possibility that the victims would die. In such cases, the principle of humanity requires the components of the Movement to thoroughly assess the situation, attempt to find the best solution and, in certain circumstances, accept changes to their normal operating procedures.

However, the use of armed escorts may affect the image of the entire Movement, now and in the future. It may risk impairing acceptance of the emblem and the future possibility of access and action by other components of the Movement in that area. In other words, armed protection may help to get one aid convoy through but eventually jeopardize the operation as a whole. Armed protection can therefore only very exceptionally be used.[19]

Implementation of the field security concept

Roles and responsibilities

The field

ICRC security hinges on the total collective and joint responsibility assumed at every level of the operational hierarchy, ranging from the Director of Operations, who has the authority to commit the ICRC to a new theatre of operations,[20] to staff members who must decide on their own whether or not to continue a field mission in the face of an unexpected risk. This shared responsibility is a fundamental part of the security concept, for the ICRC considers that it has a major stake in the safety of its personnel.

The head of delegation plays a key role in deciding on the direction the delegation's operations should take, their conduct and management. It is at his or her level that initiatives are taken and responsibility is placed for defining the operation and its objectives and implementing the strategies. He or she bears primary responsibility for analysing the situation, incorporating operational and security parameters, establishing the relevant indicators and monitoring changes in them. He or she is also required to:

– see to it that the security arrangements are coherent and based on the seven pillars of security (in particular ensuring that the ICRC is accepted at the political and operational levels) and adjust those arrangements whenever necessary;

18 Situations where banditry prevails.

19 See 'Report on the use of armed protection for humanitarian assistance', extract from a working paper submitted jointly by the ICRC and the International Federation, Council of Delegates, Geneva, 1–2 December 1995, available at http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57jneg?opendocument (visited on 25 March 2009).

20 Within the framework established by the Assembly Council.

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– ensure that expatriates invest the necessary time and effort to gain some insight into the situation and the local culture;
– be willing to particularly listen to delegation employees and consult local sources, including the Operating National Society;
– anticipate the dangers, determine the risks by keeping abreast of developments and circulating information;
– draw up security regulations, safety procedures and rules of conduct, ensure compliance with them, and punish violations;
– combat the development of a nonchalant attitude to danger and react if something happens;
– manage staff members' stress;
– make sure plans are made for emergency situations and evacuations;
– provide training, supervision and control.

The head of delegation can delegate day-to-day security management, but in no case may he or she delegate his or her primary responsibility for security.

Headquarters

If heads of delegation need information they cannot obtain on the spot, they turn to neighbouring delegations and ICRC headquarters (operational meetings, regions, security unit), who help to analyse the situation, especially from the regional and global points of view, and provide the information needed for a more penetrating analysis of the local context.

The Director of Operations bears ultimate overall responsibility for the conduct and management of field operations. The Director-General and the President are regularly informed of changes in operational contexts and are mobilized or asked to intercede formally where institutional decisions are concerned.

Voluntary service and availability

The ICRC's expatriate and locally hired staff are employed on the basis of their clearly expressed willingness to accept an inevitable degree of risk. The organization can therefore ask all staff to work in any theatre of operations. The place of assignment is decided on the basis of needs, constraints and the availability of staff.

There may be cases, however, in which expatriates have very definite reasons for refusing certain postings. The ICRC will accept such reservations provided they are an exception; otherwise the whole principle of the staff member's continued employment may be called into question. To remain effective, the ICRC must be able to count on the willingness of all its personnel to go anywhere and do any type of work. In principle, no especially dangerous postings or periods are assigned to 'volunteers'.

The ICRC must be forthright when describing to its staff the especially high risks they may encounter in certain contexts. It may decide to limit

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assignments in the presence of specific risks and for specific reasons, e.g. the delegate's sex, nationality, etc.

The level of risk must be the same for everyone, whether the employee is an expatriate under contract or has been seconded to the organization (including drivers and the crew of aircraft and ships), a delegation employee or a member of a Participating or Operating National Society engaged in an ICRC operation.

In particular, delegation employees must not be sent on missions deemed too risky for delegates, unless their nationality, sex, language, ethnic origin or field knowledge is a decisive additional security factor. Likewise, expatriates are to be preferred to national employees for missions where their status as foreigners is a security factor. Delegation employees may be subject to political pressure where expatriates are not. The confidential information to which they are privy may be a risk factor in their case, and as a rule they cannot be evacuated or benefit from legal protection under the headquarters agreement, as expatriates can.

Training

For the ICRC, training is a key vector of security. It therefore prioritizes efforts in that regard, the aim being to inculcate a permanent awareness of risks, to ensure consistency of security measures and to provide each individual with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Security training is intended for expatriate and delegation employees alike. It is geared to the general context and the specific risks each person faces, and is adapted to their actual tasks and duties. Training takes place at headquarters and in the delegations and involves self-learning. The ultimate goal is to improve security arrangements, while drawing each participant's attention to the limits of the ICRC's mandate, so as to prevent staff from taking risks that would overstep those limits (e.g. by intervening in fighting or being present on front lines). The ICRC makes sure that National Society staff participating in Movement operations directed and co-ordinated by it receive security training from their National Societies.

Exceptional situations

The field security concept is the frame of reference for security matters. It applies to all operational situations. In exceptional circumstances,[21] the ICRC may nevertheless consider waiving the applicability of one of the pillars of security. In such circumstances, the Directorate of Operations should draw up a specific set of parameters for action in that operation, to be submitted for decision and approval to the Directorate and the President. At the same time the ICRC will pursue its efforts to restore the applicability of the entire frame of reference, with a view

21 For instance, in Iraq in 2004–2008 at the height of the conflict, following several serious security incidents in 2003.

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to reinforcing the acceptance of its staff and work by all parties to the conflict, including those not directly involved.

When deciding to act thus, the ICRC takes several factors into account: the urgency of the situation, the number of lives at stake, the absence or presence of other aid agencies and their ability to function, the impact of its operation, and its unique, specific mandate for protection and detention-related activities. Where security conditions have seriously deteriorated, the ICRC makes sure that the staff posted there have expressly confirmed their willingness to remain on a voluntary basis.

Experience has shown that such situations can last, even though they should remain exceptions. The special course of action devised to cope with them must therefore be the subject of a formal *ad hoc* decision and regularly reassessed, so as not to undermine the coherence of the security concept as a whole.

Conclusion

The ever-changing context in which war is waged has heightened the pressure on humanitarian endeavour, its principles and those engaged in it. Security in the field depends on coherence between the mandate, principles and action. Constant care must be taken to decide which operational modes will enable the ICRC to maintain its capacity for universal action in aid of the victims of armed conflicts and situations of violence. The balance between the operation's impact and the risks involved must also be constantly reassessed.

The ICRC has chosen to make lack of security a permanent consideration in its operational policy: it takes every possible step to reduce risk to a minimum, without being entirely able to eliminate it. Security management is decentralized and is the responsibility of the operational hierarchy at every level and across the board. It is supported and reinforced by the circulation and exchange of information locally, regionally and globally, and between headquarters and the field.

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