

that conflict. Even if nuclear weapons could have vanquished Iraqi forces more cheaply, the marginal savings would have been more than outweighed by (prudential concerns about) the damage to the tradition of nonuse and to the nonproliferation regime, not to mention to relations with the Arab states and other great powers.

In all, however, Tannenwald is well aware of the limits of the nuclear taboo. She points out that the taboo was not strong enough to prevent Eisenhower from planning to use nuclear weapons in the Korean War had it not fortuitously ended in 1953. Nor did the taboo dissuade President George H.W. Bush from making veiled nuclear threats against Iraq in the Gulf War, to deter Iraqi use of biological and chemical weapons. Nor has it ever been strong enough to lead the United States to adopt a no-first-use declaratory policy or treaty. By providing a thorough and thoughtful examination of U.S. nuclear policies ranging from the reluctant to the threatening, *The Nuclear Taboo* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of norms and international security.

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The Disaster Gypsies: Humanitarian Workers in the World's Deadliest Conflicts by John Norris. Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2007. 184 pp. \$44.95.

The book is an engrossing read, providing a vivid memoir of John Norris's stints—for the United States Agency for International Development, the International Crisis Group, and the UN—in a number of the world's most difficult humanitarian emergencies and civil wars over the past two decades, from Rwanda to the Balkans, through Afghanistan to less-covered conflicts in Liberia, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Norris peppers the book with rich anecdotes from his many travels, offering readers a glimpse of the strange community of disaster professionals who seem to roam from conflict to conflict—"I haven't seen you since Mogadishu" (p. 20). As one of Norris's colleagues put it, the disaster business provides "Band-Aids to gunshot wounds" (p. 6), though their role has evolved beyond relief to conflict management. These adrenaline junkies, like Norris himself, are portrayed with considerable sympathy and occasional ambivalence: "The disaster business ruined more than its fair share of people.... There were the drunks and misanthropes, people who were reduced to a husk of their former selves by cynicism and personal and professional estrangement" (p. 100).

Even as the book is about these itinerant humanitarian workers, Norris does an exceptionally good job of encapsulating the political context of each of these conflicts and emergencies in a few short pages. The feel is both authentic and authoritative. Norris's prose retains a sense of empathy for the victims and innocents, despite his encounters with unseemly inhumanity and

immense suffering. He also captures the absurdities of the situations he chronicles, the refugee in the Balkans who offers a grenade in gratitude because “we have plenty of them” (p. 50).

Norris masterfully sets up some of the tensions in contemporary relief work, the possibility that insurgents and fighters are being sustained and supported by aid. About Rwanda and the refugee camps teeming with killers across the border in then Zaire, Norris writes: “Would you want to deliver food to soldiers who killed entire families in cold blood? Would you prefer to let thousands of innocent people die because you did not want to feed those killers?” (p. 31). Later, in writing about Afghanistan, he describes the difficulty aid groups have in maintaining neutrality in war zones: “For Afghans at the village level, aid groups and the U.S. military were all seen as part of an occupying force, and many relief workers rightfully complained that this made them legitimate targets for the Taliban and others” (p. 129).

The book has such richness of dialogue and detail that one is left wondering how Norris captured all of these episodes. I pictured him scribbling furiously in a notebook in the midst of all of these encounters. Some of the details he describes—his meeting with the notorious former Liberian strongman Charles Taylor, for one—may have been so memorable that they were impossible to forget.

Norris does not say how relative peace came to Liberia, and he describes what little effect his actions in Sri Lanka had on the situation: “I never took a deep breath and pieced together all the obvious signs that Sri Lanka was not ready for peace” (p. 101). Liberia struck me as a place, like Sri Lanka, not primed for peace. In his final pages, Norris struck an optimistic tone that the world “has gotten better at dealing with the hard business of conflict” (p. 165). I wanted to know what it was that allowed Liberia and Liberians to get beyond where they were, and what role foreigners played in that process or should aspire to play in other conflicts, when his narrative ended. I look forward to Norris’s next effort, which may more fully answer those questions.

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Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict by Marc Howard Ross. *Cambridge, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2007. 384 pp. Cloth, \$78.90; paper, \$34.99.*

In this book, Marc Howard Ross does not explain the emergence of ethnic conflicts, but provides insights into why many such conflicts are “so intense and hard to settle” (p. 1). To answer this question, Ross argues, we must look at the role of culture—and more specifically, public expressions and performance of culture—in framing interests and threats, shaping group narratives and claims, and providing the emotional and psychological content that