

The Private Humanitarian Company

Vinay Gupta, London, November 4 2010

The delivery of humanitarian aid is in crisis. Over \$10 billion was raised for relief and reconstruction in Haiti, yet nearly a year after the earthquake, the majority of those made homeless by the earthquake are still homeless, over a million people.

On first blush, the budget is adequate - \$10,000 per person homeless, or \$1000 per member of entire Haitian population. Even with losses to corruption and inefficiency, for this money some kinds of services should have been provided in a year, and yet we hear of people being evacuated from rotting tents to seek shelter from tropical storms. Why is nothing being done?

The bottom line is that *it does not matter why nothing is being done*. What matters is that the technological capacity exists to do fast shelter and essential services for extremely large numbers of people at reasonable prices, and that existing groups have not delivered this innovative capability in the field. In the past 20 years, new technologies like the biosand water filter, solar water disinfection, the GATR satellite dish, the hexayurt and even the cell phone itself have revolutionized the technical potential to deliver aid - but glacially slow deployment of innovation still leaves the victims of disaster without effective assistance.

A new kind of company could step into this gap and deliver the much-needed humanitarian innovation which would save lives and rebuild shattered communities.

What, then, is the Private Humanitarian Company? Private Military Companies typically use former special forces talent to provide force and protection to clients who are not adequately protected by local rule of law. A Private Humanitarian Company might use operations and logistics talent to provide essential services and supply chains to clients who are not adequately provided for by the free market due to disturbances in the normal flow of goods and services.

The PHC could be hired by existing humanitarian groups, including governments and consortiums of charities to provide much-needed expeditionary building and logistics capability, augmenting the normal general contractor and commercial supply chains which humanitarian groups use when possible. An integrated operational and logistical package would allow various synergies and efficiencies to be realized, keeping the cost of service delivery to a manageable level.

PMCs have expanded to fill gaps in the capability landscape in Iraq and Afghanistan. As these wars draw to a close, veterans will come to the labor market and the budget available for PMCs will likely drop sharply, as contracts increasingly emanate from corporate rather than government sources. Expanding the re-use of military expertise from security to humanitarian roles may provide established companies with continued funding, and veterans with employment which uses their extensive and unusual skills. Some project 150 million climate refugees by 2050, and capacity building to meet those challenges must begin today. Where else could this vital capacity come from?