

Humanitarian actors' risk management in complex environments: are private security companies a solution?

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Summary:

The starting point of the paper is the observation, on the one hand, of the deterioration – in relative and absolute terms – of humanitarian actors' security operating in complex environments, and, on the other hand, of the increasing presence of private security actors in the same contexts. In addition, whether humanitarian organisations are targeted or being victims of "collateral damages", the paper highlights their increasing dilemma of having to choose between staying in extremely dangerous contexts at their own risk or giving up and leaving behind populations in need. The paper then raises the question of whether the use of private security can contribute to bring solutions – or not – to this dilemma.

Both empirical and conceptual approaches are used to answer this question. As a first step, the paper identifies the various actors – humanitarians and security providers –, and analyses their respective risk management strategies. As a second step, the paper studies how the principles of humanitarian action influences humanitarians' decision making processes, and confronts them to the use of morality by private security companies as a legitimizing factor.

As a conclusion, the paper offers hypothesis of future development of risk management by humanitarian actors and the role of private security companies in it.

Introduction:

It is not only an impression: the number of aid workers victims of violence has increased sharply in the past decade. Sad news depicting yet another killing, wounding or kidnapping seem to be daily news. One does not forget Margaret Hassan's assassination in Iraq, in September 2004, nor the killing of five *Médecins Sans Frontières* staff in Afghanistan the same year. Who has forgotten the bombing of the UN and then ICRC's headquarters in Iraq in 2003? Who has not heard of the brutal assassination of seventeen staff from *Action Contre la Faim* in Sri Lanka, in August 2006? From Chechnya to Haiti, passing by DR Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq or Afghanistan, aid workers have fallen.

In its report "Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations", the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) has provided excellent picture and analysis of this violence that occurred from 1997 to 2005. According to the report, "violent incidents involving aid workers have indeed nearly doubled over the past decade. However, the study found that the population of aid workers in the field also expanded significantly during that time period, with the result that the relative incidence of violence rose only by a small amount [...]. National staff, who already constitute the bulk of victims in absolute terms, face increasing relative risk from year to year in the areas with the highest number of violent incidents against aid workers [...] while that of international staff is declining in these contexts. [...] UN and ICRC aid workers have in the past few years seen a decrease in major violent incidents, while NGO staffers have endured increasing numbers of these incidents in absolute, relative and proportional terms"¹. In 2006, 85 aid workers, nearly all of them local staff, have been killed².

Similarly, serious injuries have also increased "by 234%"³ from 2002 to 2005 compared to the 1997 to 2001 period.

Interestingly, and although the HPG report specifies its data is far from being accurate on that aspect, "[e]ven when the exact motives or combination of motives were unknown, however, in many cases it was clear that the victims were targeted in some way because they were aid workers."⁴ Preceding criminality, political motivations are indeed said to be the most frequent motivations behind such acts of violence.

Why does humanitarian work seem more difficult and dangerous than in the past? According to Pierre Gassman, "[s]ome argue that part of the reason is that humanitarian actors are no longer neutral. Of course, international agencies have always been perceived by some parties as stooges of neo-

¹ Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Katherine Haver, "Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations", HPG report 23, September 2006.

² Peter Apps, "Under fire, aid workers face life as a soft target", Reuters, 19 June 2007, <http://wap.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L1918902.htm>, accessed 26 July 2007.

³ Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Katherine Haver, HPG report 23, "Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations", September 2006, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19.

colonial or neo-imperialistic designs. During the Cold War, few organisations were truly politically neutral in their choices of beneficiaries, or in their decisions about which regions they wanted to help. More recently, claims to political neutrality have been further weakened as many humanitarian agencies have associated themselves ever-more closely with broader concepts of human security, and have deepened their links to their governmental donors. The most significant threat to the actual and perceived neutrality of humanitarian organisations has been agencies' calls for military interventions to stop systematic and large-scale human rights abuses, and to open up humanitarian space."⁵

Therefore, it is now common to see humanitarian organisations deciding to close temporarily or definitely their programs in a given country. Despite of the various range of measures put into place in order to mitigate the threat, the risk taken is considered as being too dangerous to justify any longer presence. While these kinds of closure happen nearly systematically after an organisation has faced a serious security incident⁶, it increasingly happens without such incident, precisely to prevent its happening. Humanitarian organisations then face a dilemma where they have to choose between staying in extremely dangerous contexts at their own risk or giving up and leaving behind populations in need.

In parallel of this trend that sees aid workers being increasingly victims of acts of violence, private security companies have tremendously scaled up. The development of the private security presence took various forms, to the point that it's now hard to consider it as a simple "phenomenon". Although the use of private security companies is not new – Watchguard International Inc. was already offering services as early as 1967 - its huge expansion is recent. This expansion can be seen through a multiplication of personnel working for private security businesses, a multiplication of such companies, a multiplication of the types of activities in which they are involved, and a multiplication of their areas of operations.

According to humanitarian law, governments are obliged to not hamper humanitarian actors operating within their country, and, if they can, provide them with protection. However, a variety of reasons makes it increasingly difficult, or sometimes, impossible. The reasons can be as various as lack of political will, lack of capacity, inexistence of the state, multiplication of the humanitarian actors involved in different dangerous areas, including in places where the Government has no access to, etc. Also, humanitarian organisations are usually adverse to be protected by a party to the conflict, even if it is a legitimate Government. Therefore, private security can be perceived by both outsiders and insiders as an option for the humanitarians to improve their protection as well as the one of the population at risk.

Put yourself in the position of a humanitarian organisation's country director whose staff is increasingly at risk, but still willing to deliver aid in a dangerous zone. Furthermore criminality is rising and even the premises of the organisation are vulnerable to a robbery or even an attack. He knows that there are various private security companies offering services that could potentially secure both his staff and his organisation's premises. Even, another humanitarian organisation whose office is located in the same area may have already chosen such an option. His headquarters are increasingly putting pressure on him as they want him to decide on whether the organisation should stay and operate further –but how?- or evacuate the country. Since the security situation is seriously deteriorating, the needs of the population are in parallel growing. What should this country director do?

In other words, when facing the dilemma of having to choose between staying in extremely dangerous contexts at their own risk or giving up and leaving behind populations in need, can the use of private security bring solutions to humanitarians?

I/ Approach to security management diverges depending on humanitarian organisations' ethos:

A) Type of measures used by humanitarian organisations to improve security:

Aware of the increasing dangerousness of their work, aid workers have taken measures to reduce their vulnerability and therefore, reduce the risks. These measures range from better

⁵ Pierre Gassman, "Rethinking Humanitarian Security", Humanitarian Exchange nb 30, June 2005.

⁶ Sadly, the killing of an expatriate staff is *de facto* often considered as more serious than the killing of national staff. In the first case, the organisation will almost always close down its programs, while in the second case it will possibly look for alternative operating ways. This unconscious way of seeing the things is often magnified by the Medias, which often put more emphasis on incident faced by internationals rather than locals.

networking with local stakeholders, staff sensitization and training, improved coordination, to harder physical protection, closer (or more distant) working relationship with armed personnel of all type, etc. However and despite the measures implemented – and even with a long presence in a given context, humanitarian organisations cannot always ensure sufficient security to their personnel. The relief provided, even if life-saving, is then not considered as worth the risk taken; in this case, humanitarian organisations often decide to relocate or evacuate⁷ their staff, in particular their international staff. This has been the case in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Colombia, DR Congo, Iraq, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan or Uganda. However the threshold point – the last limit where the risk is considered as not acceptable anymore – diverges within contexts and organisations.

In Iraq for instance, there have been three waves of relocation / evacuation. The first wave occurred in autumn 2003, after the bombings in August and then again in September of the Canal Hotel, headquarter of the United Nations, followed by the bombing of the ICRC headquarter in October. The second wave followed the increase in kidnappings, specifically but randomly targeting foreigners from April 2004. The third wave occurred in autumn 2004, with the kidnapping and murdering of several aid workers, directly targeted at their offices.

During and after this period, while some organisations closed definitely their offices in Iraq, others started operating from neighboring countries, in particular from Jordan and Kuwait, or from safer areas within Iraq, with a part prohibiting their staff to go to Iraq or hot zones in Iraq, and another part putting into place a system of short round trips. These various procedures became known as *remote-control* (decision making process kept by aid workers outside Iraq but implementation is left to local staff inside Iraq), *remote-support* (transfer of decision making to local staff in country and support from expatriates from outside) or *localization* (transferring complete responsibilities to local staff or other local structures such as communities, local partners, contractors, etc). Last, some organisations decided to stay in Iraq, at all cost. This meant, despite the security incidents they were facing, and regardless of the type of measures that was considered as needed, including the use of armed guards and armed escorts provided by the Multi National Force (MNF) or private security companies.

The decision eventually taken by a humanitarian organisation regarding the management of its security often depends on a subjective perception of insecurity and how to deal with it. In other words, two humanitarian organisations implementing the same kind of work in the same areas might have completely opposite approaches to security management: the first might lower its profile to be unnoticed while the second will visibly “bunkerise” itself behind high concrete walls and barb wires. The perception of their vulnerability and the potential threats surrounding them depends very much on the organisation’s history, its staff, the type of projects implemented, the source of funding, their sensitivity to the context, etc. Also and foremost, the organisation’s *ethos* – which is *the distinctive spirit of an organisation* - is crucial in its positioning in general and within a given context: is the organisation risk adverse or has it built itself as a “frontline” organisation? Is it focusing on life saving activities or rather long term development projects? Is it sensitive to external pressure, be it political or financial? Does it claim to follow humanitarian principles of action expressed in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief? Is it receiving funding originating from a party involved in the conflict? Etc.

Hence, while humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in particular, are often seen as a block, it is more often than not composed of widely different types of organisations, with widely different ways of implementing projects or managing security. However, humanitarian security is about *ways and means to access vulnerable populations* and not necessary *only* about keeping staff safe. The HCR is nearly the only organisation that put it bluntly: “[g]iven the danger in the environment in which UNHCR must operate if it is to protect and assist refugees, it is inevitable that staff members will be hurt and killed. It has happened in the past and it will happen again.”⁸

B) The ethos of each humanitarian organisation influences its security management:

The organisation’s ethos often guides its policy and therefore the way it implements projects or manages security. It is also of crucial influence when the organisation is confronted with a serious choice to make or a dilemma.

⁷ Relocation is the process of transferring the staff outside of the dangerous zone, but still *inside* the country. Evacuation is a transfer *outside* of the country.

⁸ Report of the Steering Committee on Security Policy and Policy Implementation (Geneva: UNHCR, 20 September 2004), p. 12. Quote taken from Pierre Gassman, “Rethinking Humanitarian Security”, Humanitarian Exchange nb 30, June 2005.

In order to analyze this ethos, categories must be made within the diversity of humanitarian organisations. The first step is to distinguish organisations within the United Nations' system, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and among the NGOs.

Within the UN system, "[f]our United Nations entities – UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP - have primary roles in protection and providing assistance in humanitarian crises"⁹, while, OCHA, IOM, the FAO and WHO also contribute to it¹⁰; the paper focuses primarily on these four agencies. Among the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC is acting as the Movement's lead agency in situations of armed conflicts and internal strife; it then has the 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"¹¹. Among the NGOs, the focus will be on the non-governmental non-for-profit organisations engaged in relief or humanitarian activities.

The following typology is influenced by Michel Schloms' categorization of humanitarian organisations facing a humanitarian dilemma. According to Schloms, "humanitarian organisations are confronted to three sources of moral obligations: the humanitarian imperative [(saving lives and alleviating suffering)], the organisation's ethical framework and the political environment. Therefore an agency can take decisions based upon one of these three factors. It can be guided by the humanitarian imperative only (*affective approach*), it can be guided by its own principles and mandate (*introvert approach*) or it can build its choice upon the political environment (*extrovert approach*)"¹². Humanitarian agencies will then seek to confront their dilemma depending mainly on one of these approaches.

Influenced by this categorization but with alternative definitions of these approaches, we propose a similar typology, but based on humanitarian organisations' ethos: agencies can be divided into three types depending on to which approach their ethos will bring them toward¹³.

- *Principled approach*: humanitarian organisations that, in front of a given dilemma, will decide to take a decision based *firstly* upon their mandate and/or principles, which claim the strict respect of the humanitarian principles such as neutrality, independence and impartiality. The well known ICRC and *Médecins Sans Frontières* are typical of this category.

- *Pragmatic approach*: organisations with such approach prefer to take a decision *firstly* based upon the wider environment in which they locate themselves. This environment is not only political but also geographical, financial or social (religious). Organisations such as Care, International Medical Corps, the UN World Food Program, UNDP or World Vision are to be included in this category.

- *Affective approach*: those that will seek to act *firstly* depending on their perceived obligation toward the humanitarian imperative. These organisations will favour an affective approach towards their beneficiaries and will make their decision whether to stay or leave a given context primarily on the emotional relation they have with their beneficiaries. Small organisations, "NGOs with a large mandate and whose action is based on other values than humanitarian ethics (solidarity, peace, fight against poverty)"¹⁴ such as Catholic Relief Services, Concern, Oxfam as well as UNICEF usually adopt this approach.

Although all organisations claim to be operating in a given context primarily because of the existing needs, these approaches are crucial when taking a decision – even if the decision making process is modelled in an unconscious way. Indeed, humanitarian organisations have different interests and different objectives: some are present to implement the humanitarian imperative, other by political convictions or financial interest, etc.

⁹ <http://www.un.org/ha/moreha.htm>

¹⁰ Through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, other UN agencies and non UN organisations cooperate together to strengthen humanitarian assistance.

¹¹ Article 6.1.2.A).c of the 1997 Agreement on the organisation of the international activities of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

<http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList86/E2FA7CA239060364C1256B66005B9280>

¹² Michael Schloms, « Le dilemme inévitable de l'action humanitaire », *Cultures & Conflits* n°60 (2005) pp. 85-102. Translation from the author.

¹³ It is important to recall that this typology is above all theoretical. These three types do not exist *per se*, and it goes without saying that these organisations don't necessary see themselves as being part of one type. Although it fairly classifies the different types of humanitarian organisations that exist, an organisation *might* be using the affective approach in one context and the principled one in another. Therefore the typology is based upon the *probable first and most influential element* in the decision making process.

¹⁴ Michael Schloms, « Le dilemme inévitable de l'action humanitaire », *Cultures & Conflits* n°60 (2005) pp. 85-102.

These approaches also model the organisations' risk management, and therefore their decision to relocate or evacuate their staff.

- *Principled approach*: these organisations will do their best not to be perceived as close to one party to the conflict and will therefore try to have contacts and communicate with all parties. They will stay in a given context until the moment they feel the security situation does not allow them to operate *while still respecting* the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence or impartiality.

- *Pragmatic approach*: these organisations will be more likely to “bunkerise” themselves, or “choose a side” in order to get some physical security. Depending on the environment they operate in, different reasons might motivate these organisations to stay despite the serious deterioration of the security: they believe that for political reasons, staying is the right thing to do, or because they are under huge pressure from their donors to accomplish the projects¹⁵, or because the funding they have received is far too important to be given up¹⁶. Furthermore and in particular contexts, some organisations may put aside the humanitarian principles they have agreed to in order to please a donor¹⁷.

- *Affective approach*: organisations basing their decisions on mainly affective ground will diverge in their security management. For some, their willingness to stay close to their beneficiaries will cease when they will realise that such a policy endangers their staff, or when such a policy will lead them to not respect the humanitarian principles anymore; on the opposite, their willingness to stay close to their beneficiaries can also bring them to stay at any cost.

When confronted to the dilemma of “staying at our own risks or leaving behind populations in need because we are in danger”, humanitarian organisations will decide depending on how their respective approaches to risk management frame their decision making process. Similarly, choosing the private security option to overcome the dilemma will also depend on these respective approaches.

II/ PSC differ depending on their ethos and their approach to morality:

The most commonly shared image of private securities as perceived by aid workers is that, at best, of ex-militaries providing technical services and, at worst, of mercenaries with no ethics. Although most humanitarian organisations today have a “security officer” or a “security adviser”, for long they have seen this position as useless since a technical expert in security was not seen as better than an in-house-growing experienced personnel. Similarly, aid workers don't feel too close -or even don't like- militaries, whether regular or so-called irregular ones, and more broadly any kind of institutions or individuals handling weapons. While a gun is depicted by some as an excellent tool of protection and as a “peace enforcer”, aid workers tend to see it as a potential threat.

Traditionally indeed, humanitarian organisations are committed not to use weapons (for their protection), including when they are operating in a war zone. They have even made a principle of it, stating it in various codes of conduct¹⁸. However, aid workers have increasingly used the services of different security providers – armies, local security companies, militia - using weapons. Although officially the weapon is still banned, unofficially, in various contexts¹⁹ many humanitarian organisations are actually protected by people carrying guns. Now, private security companies are perceived as the archetypical entities providing security through guns.

But what actually are the private security companies?

A) Typology of PSC based on their ethos:

Commercial privatisation of security is typical of security services provided by *corporate* entities and often described as encompassing two types of security providers: the local guarding

¹⁵ Some donors, and USAID in particular, see the humanitarian organisations they fund merely as service providers or even contractors, paid to implement their policy.

¹⁶ When receiving a funding from a donor, an aid organisation often allocates a certain percentage of it to the functioning of the organisation. Hence, when deciding that they cannot continue to operate in a given context, they will often have to give the money back to the donor and therefore forget about this percentage...

¹⁷ The Iraq example is very relevant: some US NGOs in particular have accepted to work closely and even receive funding from the US government despite their usual reluctance to accept money from a party to the conflict. Their decision can be partially explained by their fear to displease a donor, which may hinder their possibility to get funding by the same donor in other contexts.

¹⁸ The NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) for instance states in the article five of its Code of conduct that “[w]hile recognizing the high-risk environment in which NGOs are currently operating in Iraq, NGOs carrying weapons risk placing the beneficiary population and their staff at unnecessary danger. Carrying weapons also sends a confused perception of our behavior and violates the basic humanitarian principles, which are providing assistance and not hurting people.” <http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?article6>

¹⁹ Iraq, but not only. It is also the case in Afghanistan, DR Congo, Chechnya, Haiti, Somalia, etc.

private security companies (best described as “*sociétés de gardiennage*” in French) and the international like, offering in particular military type or military related services. As put by Peter Singer, “[t]he identifying marker of the privatized military industry is their offer of services traditionally falling within the domain of national militaries (combat operations, strategic planning, military logistics and information warfare). [...] they are far different from the security guards that work at local shopping malls. A number of such ‘private security firms’ are neither quiescent in their operations, nor are the settings in which they operate either peaceful or even civilian in nature.”²⁰ The lines between the guarding and international PSC are however increasingly blurred: on the one side there are many guarding private security companies operating in conflict zones and on the other there are many international private security companies involved in countries which are not at war. Also, the type of services, the type of personnel, the type of clients, the kind of weapons, or even the size of the company tend to get similar one to another. The main difference lies on the fact that the guarding security companies offer services that are closer (although far less developed) and limited to law enforcement, than the international ones.

Like humanitarian organisations, private security companies should not be seen as a cohesive block. There are differences among them and depending on the companies’ ethos, we can differentiate:

- *Guarding companies*: these firms are providing only or essentially local guards to protect premises. Highly visible uniformed employees act as watchmen. They might also offer mobile protection or canine protection, but, as specified earlier, their ethos remains the same: the provision of law enforcement type services with a local profile. This category encompasses companies as diverse as Group 4 Securicor, with its nearly half a million employees in over hundred countries, or PaP Sécurité and Global Sécurité SA, small companies offering services limited to Port au Prince, Haiti.
- *Non lethal security providers*: these companies offer non-lethal risk management or intelligence type services ranging from analysis to private investigation. Atlantic Intelligence & BD Consultants, Riskline²¹ or Stratfor for instance are to be put into this category.
- *Weaponised companies*: these companies compose the bulk of the international private security companies operating in conflicts. The range of security services they offer is wide and diverse but they share the characteristic of employing primarily ex-militaries and using weapons for the accomplishment of their activities or offering security services to a weaponised entity²² – such as the US army. Typically, the Afghan and Iraq wars have brought attention to them. Aegis, ArmorGroup, Control Risks, DynCorp, Triple Canopy are representatives of this category. It is to be noted that, as long as weapons are used or as long as their clients are weaponised, their visibility or absence of visibility (low or high profile) in a given context is not taken into consideration when considering them as weaponised companies.

Since the security business is evolving quickly, a company might, because it has been bought by another company, had legal issues or because it has developed new kinds of services for instance, move from one category to another. Before it first entered the armed protection market in Iraq in 2003, Control Risks for example would have been included in the *non lethal security* category.

B) The use of morality as a legitimising factor:

These companies however share a common feature: being for-profit organisations, they need to have clients to exist. But the type of clients or the type of contract they would accept differs depending on each company’s ethos. Indeed, based on the relation each company has with morality, we can differentiate companies that display a high regard for it, and those whose “way of life” and choices are not influenced by any moral consideration. The latter type is composed of companies (whose leaders) are basically willing to sign a contract with any type of client, and implement any type of service as long as it is legal – or sometimes not even. The earlier type is composed of companies, (whose leaders) refuse illegal or illegitimate contracts or *at least, claim to do so*. The element of claim is here important since the motivations behind the respect of morality could be explained diversely, ranging from those that are truly guided by morality, and those who simply use it as a selling argument.

²⁰ Peter W. Singer, “Corporate Warriors – The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry”, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2003.

²¹ Interestingly, its website specifically emphasizes their differences with the weaponised type PSC: “unlike other major security risk firms – we have no physical security wing and our assessments are not aimed at selling additional security products: they remain as in depth and objective as we can make them.”
<http://www.riskline.com/index.php?content=page&id=25>, accessed 1st August 2007.

²² MPRI’s famous involvement in support of the Croat army in Krajina in 1995 typically exemplifies the category. See Olsson for more information.

However, since we are not able to maintain someone's sincerity and since private sector's first finality is making profit, we'll consider in this paper that private security companies claiming to be guided by morality do it primarily for commercial purposes. Furthermore, and as put by Christian Olsson, "if all companies in general claim their respect of a rigorous ethics, and of international norms and military code, their social practices are not up to their claim"²³.

The use of morality is expressed differently depending on the companies, but the most visible example is without doubt the International Peace Operations Association (IPOA). Although the name might lead a novice to consider it as a non-for-profit entity involved in improving peace operations, experts are well aware that IPOA is the most important US lobby of private security companies and other companies operating in armed conflicts. Their stated "mission" is among others "to engage in a constructive dialogue with policy-makers about the growing and positive contribution of these firms to the enhancement of international peace, development, and human security"²⁴. As explained by its president, we should "recognize that there is a commercial value to *humanitarian security*"²⁵. IPOA's claimed strict respect for morality is fascinating. It has developed a code of conduct that maintains the respect for the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights and of different international treaties on human rights; their journal highlights their close relation with NGOs or humanitarian organisations; they have put into place a system of complaints for anyone to use if witnessing an abuse from one of its members; and they are even associated with the American University for the provision of regular trainings on humanitarian issues²⁶.

Similar to this trend, some companies, such as ArmorGroup or Control Risks, have developed a specific strategy to attract humanitarian organisations, be it NGOs or the United Nations.

Other private security companies such as Aegis, Blackwater or USPI have developed their own foundation whose objective is to provide assistance to local communities located in particular in Iraq and Afghanistan. The assistance usually consists of the provision of items.

Atlantic Intelligence & BD Consultants have put into place a "security training for NGOs working in conflict areas" lead by an ex-ICRC member. Indeed, several PSC tend to recruit ex-aid workers, which are appreciated both for their experience and for the fact that they contribute to improving the company's image.

Wackenhut Services Inc. (WSI) on its side offers annual "humanitarian awards" to some of its employees²⁷. Another private security company has named itself "Sécurité Sans Frontières" (security without borders), an analogy to the well reputed "sans-frontières" humanitarian movement.

In other words, we notice a trend to integrate humanitarian action into security strategies, or at least, we notice an active process of appropriation of humanitarian values.

III/ The use of moral by PSC has little effect on humanitarian organisations:

A) Deconstruction of the use of moral by PSC:

However, does the use of moral by PSC make a difference? Will humanitarian organisations rather hire a PSC that claims highly its regards for ethics? In order to answer this question, we need to decrypt such use of moral by the private security sector.

Nowadays, the most debated topic among security contractors, governments and academics turns around the idea of regulation and its enforcement. Indeed, since there is a consent that the private security sector will not disappear, the best considered thing to do is therefore to regulate its activities through international and national laws and make sure that these laws are respected, including the

²³ Christian Olsson, Vrai procès et faux débats : perspectives critiques sur les argumentaires de légitimation des entreprises de coercition para-privées, Cultures et Conflits n°52, (4/2003), pp 11-48. Translation from the author.

²⁴ http://ipoaonline.org/php/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=130&Itemid=130#16

²⁵ Doug Brooks, "Ruthless Humanitarianism",

http://www.goodmagazine.com/section/Provocations/ruthless_humanitarianism. Accessed 18 August 2007. Italic is from the author.

²⁶ Such as the "Humanitarian Conducted and Enhanced Operations: Specialized Trainings for Fields Managers and Independent Contractors" that took place on April 26 - 27 2007. The goal was "to serve as a mechanism by which the IPOA Code of Conduct and other standards can be operationalized by contractors active in conflict and post-conflict environments around the world. Participants [were] trained in essential areas such as international humanitarian law, NGO/IO interaction, cultural, gender & religious sensitivities and learn how to operationalize field guidelines, increase productivity levels and to improve interaction with other actors".

<http://www.american.edu/sis/peacebuilding/security/traininginfo.htm>

²⁷ As explained by WSI, "they were honored for their volunteer efforts in their local communities". <http://www.wsiblog.com/>

international humanitarian laws and including within war zones. However, despite the existence of such laws in few countries and the international efforts toward that direction, private security companies and in particular the weaponised like, remain *de facto* largely unregulated.

When looking closely at IPOA's strategy to "transfer international organisations and humanitarian NGOs' legitimacy toward the private military industry"²⁸, an uneasy feeling then appears. Somehow, and this is at the opposite extreme of the desired effect, IPOA's effort look very much as an *aggressive way to promote peace*. Why so?

Private security companies involved or supposedly involved in the promotion of peace (through greater privatisation), as well as PSCs seeking to appropriate humanitarian values for themselves, try to build legitimacy on a moral obligation that exist in all cultures: saving life. At that level of abstraction, no one can question the validity of such claim. However and as aptly explained by Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, "moral is compatible with law, but it can always justify behaviours that are not in accordance to it"²⁹. In other words, by focusing on relevant but *somehow* secondary issues, PSC divert the debate from the main issue: regulation. By looking for legitimacy through moral, PSCs avoid to commit themselves to the respect of law.

The case of the British Association of Private Security Companies (BAPSC) is a perfect example. The BAPSC is a lobby group which objective is "to promote the interests and regulate the activities of UK based firms that provide armed defensive security services in countries outside the UK"³⁰. In order to achieve this, "BAPSC and its members recognize that their objectives will best be achieved through effective self regulation"³¹. Self regulation is based on a system of legitimization through moral – do good- but not through law. In opposite to a system of sanctions established by law, itself based upon a workable regulatory framework, sanctions in a self regulation system are not of legal nature but moral one. Whether the IPOA's complaint's system or the BAPSC's principle of self regulation, the sanctions consist at worst of being expelled from the lobby group. Additionally thought, a company who eventually lost its membership from these groups might also fear the media hype around it. However and so far, no media has ever reporter such eviction. Indeed, the IPOAs' file complaint for instance presupposes that someone who has witnessed an abuse committed by a security contractor in a war zone, knows to which company the contractor belongs to, knows that the company is a member of IPOA, knows that such a complaint system exists, has access to internet and is able to understand the English website and launch a procedure in the United States. We don't say that the file complaints system or the push for self regulation are not positive steps, simply, it would not be surprising if no complaints are ever filled.

Similarly, and despite alleged cases of human rights abuses by private security contractors, not a single employee was brought to justice. The main sanction is to be fired from the company. And even such as sanction is not as bad for the employee as one might think if considering that one can relatively easily get recruited by another security company operating within the same theater of operations.

While IPOA's will to develop a Code of Conduct can be seen as a constructive step toward good behavior, it must not be confused with the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, signed by 427 humanitarian organisations. Indeed, the latter code specifies that "[t]he prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering"³², not earning money. In a simplistic way, it turns around the idea of "saving lives", while IPOA's code of conduct emphasizes on the idea of "be careful if you shoot". Its article 9.2.2 specifies for instance that "[a]ll Rules of Engagement should be in compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law and emphasize appropriate restraint and caution to minimize casualties and damage, while preserving a person's inherent right of self-defense"³³.

Regarding the assistance projects implemented by foundations supported by a PSC, "[o]ften confused with 'humanitarian action', assistance provided by PSC is merely seen as a technical task,

²⁸ Christian Olsson, « Vrai procès et faux débats : perspectives critiques sur les argumentaires de légitimation des entreprises de coercition para-privées », Cultures et Conflits n°52, (4/2003), pp 11-48. Translation from the author.

²⁹ Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, « Le Paradoxe Humanitaire? Normes et Pratiques », Cultures & Conflits n°60 (2006) pp. 15-37. Translation from the author.

³⁰ <http://www.bapsc.org.uk/default.asp>, accessed 18 August 2007. The BAPSC also look to legitimize the security industry by aiming at raising "the standards of operation of its members and this emergent industry and ensure compliance with the rules and principles of international humanitarian law and human rights standards" as well as respecting corporate social responsibility.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Article 1, <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/code.asp>

³³ See http://ipoaonline.org/php/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=100&Itemid=109

implemented without consideration of any of the principles that guide humanitarian action and sometimes even in a way contrary to such principles since those projects are also implemented for self-interest (give a positive image organisation, get closer to the communities in order to be accepted and protected or at least, not targeted, etc.)³⁴.

Generally speaking, PSCs' use of moral might seduce two types of persons. Those that are already sensitised to these moral discourses, for example because they consider that private security companies are indeed the best actors to improve peace operations; and those that have a limited understanding of what exactly humanitarian action consists of, and merely see it as limited to a technical task that supposes barely any other skills than logistical ones. In other words, the discourse will seduce those that are not aware of the historical debates and issues that turn around moral and ethics.

Aid workers on their side, struggle with moral since the very origin of humanitarian action. Two episodes in particular had a decisive effect on the building of humanitarian action: the Solferino battle in 1859 that eventually lead Henry Dunant to push for the creation of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Conflict in Biafra in 1969 that served as a catalyst to the creation of *Médecins Sans Frontières* and highlighted various ethical issues such as the relation with the Medias or the proximity to a party to the conflict. Still today, aid workers are involved in numerous debates raising moral considerations. Therefore they³⁵ are all too well aware of ethical issues and as such are much less likely to agree with the PSCs' moral discourses, seeing them merely as a marketing of peace.

However, between those supporting PSCs' humanitarian discourses and the aid workers' position, many are hesitant. The forming of their point of view will eventually depend a) on the evolution of the public opinion's perception of PSC, b) on the perceived capacity of traditional humanitarian organisation to keep their legitimacy by continuing to implement projects including in total war zones and c) on whether the actual neo-liberal ideology will continue to prevail.

Although humanitarian organisations signing a contract with a PSC usually chose a company that has an overall good reputation, this reputation is not built solely on the respect or claimed respect of moral. Strangely, it appears that, among aid workers, a PSC which has a good reputation is primarily a company that is flexible, low profile, and is able to understand the unique way humanitarian organisations are operating. Furthermore, when choosing a PSC, the cost of the services is often a more important element for an aid agency than solely reputation. Indeed, research shows that humanitarian organisations tend to select the less expensive PSC. The problem is that, when talking of security, the less expensive is not necessarily the best. Training, equipment, the retention of good staff are usually reflected in the prices. Therefore, the less expensive companies are usually not those with greater integrity.

B) Meeting point between PSC and humanitarian organisations:

Still, some PSC are currently under contracts with humanitarian organisations. By itself, it means that, somehow, there is a meeting point between PSC and aid agencies. Then, at what point do these organisations consider they have a mutual interest to work together?

It happens when aid workers and security contractors share both the same understanding of the origin of their insecurity (the threat) and on how to face this insecurity (counter the threat or protect from it).

An aid worker in Afghanistan recently explained that PSC "feel the need to carry guns at all time; they perceive Afghans as potential enemies while we see them as potential friends; maybe that's the fundamental difference"³⁶. Security is not objective (it doesn't exist *per se*) but is the product of discursive practices: securitization and desecuritization. However and as recalled by Olsson, the discourse itself is not enough to securitize or desecuritize; for that, the discourse need to be both considered as legitimate and expressed by entities considered as legitimate³⁷. This explains why, so far, PSC have signed only a limited number of contracts with humanitarian organisations throughout the world. Indeed, they have not managed to define the threat or offer means to protect oneself

³⁴ For more information, see Jean S. Renouf, "Perception Matters - Interactions between Private Security Companies and Humanitarian Organisations in Afghanistan", to be published soon.

³⁵ in particular humanitarian organisations following the principled approach as explained previously.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Christian Olsson, « Vrai procès et faux débats : perspectives critiques sur les argumentaires de légitimation des entreprises de coercition para-privées », *Cultures et Conflits* n°52, (4/2003), pp 11-48. Translation from the author.

against the threat in a sufficiently convincing way³⁸ for humanitarian organisations to be receptive to their discourses.

Aid workers and their analysts often use the well-known “security triangle” paradigm to define humanitarian organisations’ strategies of security management³⁹. According to this triangle they can choose between three strategies to security: *acceptance* (organisations are accepted by the population as well all parties in the conflict), *protection* (organisations need to put into place some protective measures such as building high walls to prevent entry in the premises) or *deterrence* (typically organisations use armed guards to counter a threat).

Humanitarians, who claim to be close to the populations, prefer to locate themselves in the triangle somewhere between the acceptance corner and the protection one. Private security companies on the opposite, whose mandate is primarily to ensure that their client is safe -not that their client can do its work-, usually locate themselves in the deterrence corner.

Typically, deterrence is described as using physical force. However, the deterrence approach also encompasses softer means in order to counter the threat, such as diplomacy. As an example, a NGO country director working in the Gaza strip and whose staff is threatened of kidnapping by elements of the Hamas, might be willing to meet the head of the movement. He would then recall that since the Hamas is looking for international legitimacy, letting some of its elements commit illegal acts against a humanitarian organisation would be counter productive. In such case, pressure and international law might counter an aggressive action.

However in a context where, for a range of different reasons, humanitarian actors are increasingly being targeted, acceptance strategy does not ensure sufficient security to aid workers anymore. Indeed, an organisation might very well be accepted by the beneficiaries they are here to help, but not by the military group, whether formal or informal, that controls the area. It might similarly be accepted by all parties but still be targeted simply because such an act will bring some attention sought after by the perpetrator. In this kind of context, a humanitarian organisation might then go for more protection or even (physical) deterrence. This is when a humanitarian organisation’s demand for security might meet the offer of security provided by the private sector.

We notice a militarization of the provision of relief⁴⁰, for instance through the dissemination inside the humanitarian communities of security reports looking increasingly similar to military situation reports, or through the increasing recruitment by humanitarian organisations of security managers with a previous military background. Choosing physical deterrence as the main approach to insecurity is also part of such militarization.

This militarization might eventually shape how aid agencies perceive the threat and therefore bring aid workers closer to security contractors.

IV/ So, can PSC help humanitarian organisations to overcome their dilemma?

So, if some humanitarian organisations consider the use of a PSC as a good way to improve their security, can the use of PSC be considered as an option to overcome the “leave or stay” dilemma? Prior to answering the question however, we need to consider which type of approaches to security management as per the typology explained in the beginning of the paper, would, generally speaking, favour the use of a private security company.

A) Depending on their ethos, humanitarian organisations will differ in their will to use a PSC:

- *Principled approach*: aid agencies referring to the humanitarian principles are very reluctant both to outsource their security to a third party – whatever it is – or favour an option including the use of arms. Indeed, by using such options, they might be assimilated as a party to the conflict, and for instance, not be perceived as neutral anymore. Furthermore, they have a strict understanding of what are the humanitarian principles. Since they consider these principles can be respected only by non for profit,

³⁸ That is because their protection strategies do not include acceptance strategies *per se*, they are about protection and barely on relationship building on an equal footing.

³⁹ The security triangle was developed by Koenraad Van Brabant in “Operational Security Management in Violent Environments: A Field Manual for Aid Agencies”, 2000, Good Practice Review 9. London: Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI.

⁴⁰ See among others, Sami Makki, *Militarisation de l’humanitaire, privatisation du militaire*, Cirpès, Paris, 2004 and from the same author « Militarisation de l’humanitaire : les enjeux de l’intégration civilo-militaire dans l’appareil de sécurité nationale américain », *Humanitaire*, n°8, automne 2003, pp. 88-107. Roland Marchal, Cultures et conflits, n°11, « La militarisation de l’humanitaire, l’exemple somalien », <http://www.conflicts.org/document429.html>.

(truly) non governmental organisations, they are critical of any kind of organisations not entering in this typology and claiming the respect for the humanitarian principles. Therefore they are not receptive to PSCs' moral discourse and even critical of it. Since they would only exceptionally favour the deterrence strategy, meeting points with PSC exist but are very rare.

- *Pragmatic approach*: depending on the environment they operate in, different reasons might motivate organisations with such approach to stay despite the serious deterioration of security. Whatever is the reason, it will have the pre-eminence over *how* to stay, *id est*, the solution that will be chosen in order to stay safely. Since they favour the objective over the means, they are less reluctant to use the deterrence strategy.

Their action is based on moral, but with a wide meaning of it. The respect of the humanitarian principles is not considered as essential as long as they perceive themselves as "doing good". Therefore, they easily share with PSC a blurred common ground relating to moral and are more receptive to their discourse.

Hence, they are much more likely to "go private".

- *Affective approach*: there is no clear answer for organisations having this approach to security management. The decision to use a PSC depends very much on the emotional involvement they have towards their beneficiaries. They are often torn between the perceived necessary respect of humanitarian principles and the humanitarian imperative to save lives. They refer to humanitarian principles as much as possible, but are likely to compromise depending on the context. Therefore, they are usually not so receptive to PSCs' moral discourse.

Some organisations will decide to leave a given context since the only perceived solution to stay relatively safely will be through the use of armed protection. Other will consider that given the fact that their projects are truly saving lives, that their staff is willing to work despite increasingly dangerous conditions, etc, they must stay, even if they have to use armed protection. Although they do not favour the deterrence strategy, they will use it if deemed as the only way to continue working.

B) Private security companies' services are barely useful to overcome the "leave or stay" dilemma:

Although it is not a common practice, humanitarian organisations have used and are using companies from the three defined above types of PSC throughout the world. However, the question specifically set down in this paper is whether the use of any of these types of companies can help aid agencies resolve their "leave or stay" dilemma.

- *Guarding companies* cannot provide any solutions to humanitarian organisations wondering if they should stay or leave a given context.

Indeed, while a humanitarian agency can decide to contract such a company for the provision of guards, these will essentially provide protection to the premises or, at the margin, for convoys transporting relief items. However, due to the nature of the services they offer, experience shows that humanitarian organisations have not perceived them as an important element of consideration when facing the dilemma. Indeed, humanitarian action is much more than working in an office and distributing goods. It consists also of staying within communities for weeks, building camps in dangerous areas, providing water and sanitation for villages located in deep forests or high mountains, managing hospitals under bombs, etc. While there is no doubts that guarding companies can definitely protect premises well, aid agencies don't consider they could actually help them implement the whole range of activities they are here for. Therefore, guarding companies are not to be considered as a solution for most humanitarian organisations facing the "leave or stay" dilemma.

- *Non-lethal security providers* appear only partially as a solution.

According to Pierre Gassman, "[m]ost agencies admit that they have insufficient knowledge of the contexts in which they operate, that they lack local networks and information sources and that most of their international staff are not familiar with local customs, language and culture. [...] More often than not, the security incidents suffered by aid agencies are due to foolish mistakes by ill-prepared individuals, and to faulty appraisals of local conditions. [...]"

During their field training, staffs were probably told that they should always weigh security risks against the urgency and importance of the mission, and its chances of success. This calculation is the essence of risk management, and it is precisely what most humanitarian organisations are struggling with. Risk management involves establishing an appropriate infrastructure and culture and applying a logical and systematic method of establishing the context, identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring and communicating the risks associated with any activity, function or process in a way that

will enable organisations to minimise losses and maximise their institutional objectives, and their compliance with their mandate”⁴¹.

Here, non-lethal security providers can be of some help in better understanding the context in which the humanitarian organisation operates, notably through the provision of useful advices or relevant analysis. Too often however, non-lethal security providers offer analyses that remain much too general as they are made by “analysts” located in western capitals. For the services to be relevant, this analysis has to be based on deep rooted networks of information as well as on an excellent understanding of the local dynamics.

At the margin, non-lethal security providers can also deploy a security officer in the field in order to help the humanitarian organisation to improve its security, protection, and therefore, implementation of activities. This might be useful for those organisations that do not have a security officer or safety advisor and poor technical security skills. However, for this to be useful, this *private security officer* must absolutely understand the humanitarians’ mindset.

One might argue that the private security officer has a wider knowledge of security management and practice than the *humanitarian security officer* (the security officer directly employed by an aid agency). However, they will still share a common bulk of knowledge, sufficient for the humanitarian organisation to manage its security. In other words, while the first may know more about arresting or tailing procedures for instance, these are not useful for the aid agency. Moreover, given the humanitarian security officer’s experience with humanitarian organisations and their ethos, he might have some specific understanding of security the other doesn’t share, such as the knowledge of humanitarian law and its impact on the way the organisation should interact with the parties to the conflict. Therefore, at the core of their activities, compared to a humanitarian security officer, a private security officer will not bring a *fundamental* difference to an experienced aid organisation.

Regarding agencies that do not have such experience or an in-house security officer, the reason of such absence often lies in the lack of financial capabilities. Hence, the solution is more to look for mechanisms of cooperation between aid organisations rather than outsourcing the expertise.

Therefore, the use of a non-lethal security provider can be perceived as a possible solution to overcome the “leave or stay” dilemma, but only for those organisations that have a) a poor understanding of the context in which they operate⁴², b) no available in-house expertise in security management, c) the budget to contract a PSC and d) are willing to outsource the management of their security to a private commercial entity.

- Then, what about the *weaponised security companies*? The answer actually depends on the point of view of the observer. From a strictly technical point of view, weaponised security companies can be perceived as a solution when looking to overcome the “leave or stay” dilemma. Indeed, when adopting a strictly technical understanding of a context, the observer sees a threat against him that can be countered or protected from by adding a line of defence in between. This line of defence consists of professional armed men and their accessories (fences with barb wires, armoured cars, aggressive driving, etc).

However this policy raises several questions, in particular when the observer is an aid worker operating in conflicts and post-conflicts environments. Indeed, through the use of military tactics and techniques, PSC contribute to the culture of war. Also, since it contributes to the confusion between the various actors involved in the conflict – militaries, humanitarians, contractors of all type –, it often alienates the local population against foreigners, be it security contractors or aid workers.

Indeed, technically, weaponised security companies might protect their humanitarian clients, but at what cost? The case of Iraq is a particularly relevant example. According to Greg Hansen, “[t]here are doubtful benefits to populations in need in Iraq when humanitarian organisations opt for a bunkerized approach to security, or “embed” themselves with Multi-National Forces. Some agencies that have withdrawn have relied relatively more heavily upon protective and deterrent strategies than on acceptance strategies. There is no evidence that bunkerizing or aggressive security postures have been either a guarantor of program survival or a useful tool to gain access to people in need. Some organisations that originally accepted protection from the MNF, or appear to have done so by visibly hardening their compounds or using private security contractors, have since withdrawn from Iraq on the stated grounds of insecurity of personnel, or insufficient humanitarian impact weighed against high

⁴¹ Pierre Gassman, “Rethinking Humanitarian Security”, Humanitarian Exchange nb 30, June 2005.

⁴² This can be explained variously: newly arrived staff or newly open projects, extremely difficult context to handle during an emergency crisis where the load of work is huge, but also incompetence of the staff for instance...

security costs. [...] Acceptance strategies do not render humanitarian workers immune from targeted attack in Iraq but do contribute to greater adaptability and longevity of humanitarian programs⁴³. Therefore, from the viewpoint of a humanitarian organisation whose preferred approach to security management is the principled or, in some cases, the affective ones, weaponised security companies can only provide the illusion of security. When in doubt, humanitarian organisations thinking of choosing these companies should carefully weight the humanitarian impact they will potentially be able to provide *on the short term* against the harm it might potentially do *on the medium/longer term*.

Conclusion:

The current paper shows that when questioning whether a private security company can provide protection, humanitarian organisations' decision making process is influenced by their ethos and therefore by their respective approach to security. After analysing these approaches (principled, pragmatic, affective), we understand that only a limited number of aid agencies would actually consider the private security offer as an option.

When looking to overcome the dilemma of having to choose between staying in extremely dangerous contexts at their own risk or giving up and leaving behind populations in need, humanitarian organisations choosing the private security option are actually limited in their choice. Guarding companies can be of *any* help, non-lethal security providers can only provide *some* help under *certain* conditions, and weaponised security companies can provide *technical services* but that can eventually prove counter-productive.

Asking if a PSC is the solution to overcome the "leave or stay" dilemma is not only reducing the possibilities of answer to them only, but it is also suggesting that the best answer lies in a technical task, rather than in a political and social involvement.

However, there will always be some humanitarian organisations, and the United Nations agencies in particular, that will "go private". The reason for it is simple: private security companies provide tailor-made solutions, and this is attractive. But managers in the position of deciding whether they should hire a private security company should go beyond a simple technical understanding of security issues. Since both security management and implementation of humanitarian projects are extremely complex activities happening in equally extremely complex environments, private security companies can only provide this technical protection *at the margin*.

Humanitarian organisations that choose to use the services of a private security company (in particular the visible services such as the provision of (un)armed guards) should keep in mind that even if they consider that in a given context having guards is considered as normal and accepted, they contribute to the normalisation of security privatisation and impact the populations' perception of humanitarian actors. Even if local populations do not express it, they would probably be more grateful to aid agencies if they were pushing for a greater functioning and accountability of the local public security sector. A PSC might reduce the humanitarian organisation's vulnerability, or help better defining the threat, but a PSC does not resolve the roots of the existing insecurity. On the opposite, in certain contexts –Iraq in particular-, PSC might even contribute to its deterioration. Their client might feel safer, but their presence, by diffusing the use of violence among thousands of different (and poorly accountable) hands, certainly does not contribute to improving the overall stability.

Furthermore - and despite the fact that in some cases private security companies do help humanitarian organisations to improve management of their security -, when understanding that local staffs are more victims of violence than expatriates, one might wonder whether a foreign managed, business oriented entity can actually bring any *fundamental* change. In many cases, aid workers' security is indissociable of that of the local populations and local staffs.

Some private security contractors do not understand why humanitarian organisations are not implementing projects in certain dangerous areas, despite of the existence of the needs. They believe that they could provide the necessary protection for the aid workers to intervene, including in the remote and most hazardous places. While this position is both understandable and honourable, it reduces aid agencies to services providers and it equally reduces humanitarian action to a purely technical task, merely seeing it as providing goods. Humanitarian action is however far more complex

⁴³ Greg Hansen, "Coming to Terms with the Humanitarian Imperative in Iraq - Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Briefing Paper", Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2007.

than that, and humanitarian projects are full of pitfalls. Indeed, since they take place in complex political, social and economic environments, this is precisely why aid agencies have been struggling since their very origin to operate in some kind of framework. Humanitarian principles and humanitarian codes of conduct serve precisely as this framework.

Relief and assistance are however changing, being increasingly militarised, politicised and 'marketised'. For several reasons, including the actual policies of some governmental donors, aid agencies are indeed increasingly becoming services providers.

In parallel, there are a growing number of organisations pretending to be humanitarian organisations, but that are in reality for profit development companies⁴⁴, often operating in war zones protected by private security companies. These companies are now implementing projects in certain places, such as Iraq or certain regions of Afghanistan for instance, from where humanitarian organisations have fled. Reasons for their departure are precisely linked to the subject of the current paper: caught in the "leave or stay" dilemma, these humanitarian organisations have considered it was safer to leave, including when population in needs remain behind. They indeed believed it was wiser to leave than to stay even if (potentially) protected by a private security company or other military actor.

However, and this is becoming delicate, by doing so, they are also losing the legitimacy they had built throughout the century. Until recently indeed, they were the traditional civilian actors operating in armed conflicts. They were 'there'.

Now, humanitarian organisations are sharing the bulk of their activities with a diversity of actors ranging from for profit development companies to militaries claiming to do humanitarian work. In this context, truly humanitarian organisations *remain the only ones to provide help with no political, religious, financial considerations*, which means they provide help *solely based on the existing needs*. As such, the humanitarian sector believes organisations such as military forces and for-profit companies may deliver assistance to communities affected by disaster, but cannot be considered as humanitarian agencies as they do not meet the core humanitarian principles.

This is the reason why a new kind of security providers has developed in the recent years. Entities such as Armadillo Group, Other Solutions or SaferAccess, offer risk management services limited to humanitarian organisations only. Organised in networks of ex-aid workers with a long experience in armed conflicts (with sometimes also a previous military experience), they provide their services through consultancies. They tend to be more affordable than a private security company and since they target humanitarian organisations only, their services are based on a humanitarian understanding of security management.

But at the end, humanitarian organisations are ultimately the first responsible when coming to managing their security. Humanity and projects' quality are still the best and most legitimate guarantors of aid workers' security.

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⁴⁴ Such as Chemonics International Inc., Development Alternatives Inc., etc