

OUR PARAMILITARIES AND THEIR MILITIA PLAY DOCTOR

Jim White has an important observation about the increasing militarization of our aid operations in Afghanistan.

When the medical teams come from the very same organization that disappears innocent people in the middle of the night, the US effort in Afghanistan has become completely detached from sanity.

The medical team described above is affiliated with the provincial reconstruction team and both come from Special Operations. By militarizing these vital functions which could be part of helping the Afghan population, the military is pushing aside neutral groups such as the UN and other non-governmental organizations.

When I read it, I thought it important to place this story about the Pakistani floods alongside it.

As public anger rises over the government's slow and chaotic response to Pakistan's worst flooding in 80 years, hard-line Islamic charities have stepped into the breach with a grass-roots efficiency that is earning them new support among Pakistan's beleaguered masses.

Victims of the floods and political observers say the disaster has provided yet another deeply painful reminder of the anemic health of the civilian government as it teeters between the ineffectual and neglectful.

The floods have opened a fresh opportunity for the Islamic charities to

demonstrate that they can provide what the government cannot, much as the Islamists did during the earthquake in Kashmir in 2005, which helped them lure new recruits to banned militant groups through the charity wings that front for them.

In just two districts in this part of the northwest, three Islamic charities have provided shelter to thousands, collected tens of thousands in donations and served about 25,000 hot meals a day a since last Saturday – six full days before the government delivered cooked food.

20% of Pakistan is underwater right now and experts forecast more monsoons and outbreaks of cholera. In response, thus far, we've sent two (Marine) helicopters, though we're planning to send more, along with tens of millions in aid. Yet as has happened in other countries (most notably Lebanon), groups with ties to Islamic extremists have stepped up to provide the most credible emergency assistance.

We really are in a position—and seem willingly trying to push ourselves further into that position—where we're placing our paramilitaries into a competition with indigenous militias to see who can most credibly provide functions that ought to be governmental. I really don't see how this ends well.