

## Cross Border Journal

Borders frequented by trade seldom need soldiers...

### Interview on Crisis Logistics

Due to disasters and conflicts coming under intensifying focus and scrutiny in this era of expanding and accelerating information access, the make-up of post-disaster/post-conflict response efforts is becoming increasingly transparent. At the same time, the comprehension and understanding of logistics challenges throughout disaster/conflict-related events could be said to lag what is necessary in order to provide quality reporting and analysis.

Since I personally do not have experience in the management of logistics in such situations, it is always good to find first-hand accounts of experience and perspective from the front lines. Recently, I found one such account via [Inbound Logistics](#) titled "[Crisis Logistics: Risky Business](#)" and reported on by Amy Roach Partridge in the [Global Logistics section](#).

Ms. Partridge interviews a Mr. Ron Cruse, president and CEO of Alexandria, Virginia-based [Logenix International](#), a logistics firm described as follows at its website:

Logenix International is a multifaceted logistics company that specializes in the global planning, implementation, and forwarding services for the US Government, its contractors and the worlds most admired Humanitarian Organizations.

Be sure to check out the additional news articles at the website--some are quite interesting in regards to [the flow of goods to and from](#), and [around Iraq](#). In terms of Cruse, Inbound writes that "whether delivering pharmaceuticals to radiation exposure patients affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, helping run supplies to the Afghan mujahideen in the Afghan-Soviet War, or more recently, assisting with tsunami relief in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Cruse has navigated the globe in the name of logistics."

In the interview with Inbound, Cruse touches on "the challenges of efficient supply chain management under the most extreme conditions." I have posted the entire interview here for the value of future reference in case the Inbound site cannot be accessed. One of things to take note of is where Mr. Cruse uses terms that recall both Tom Barnett's four flows--economic, political, security and people--and the five architectures of high performance supply chains--physical, financial, informational, relational and innovational. I have italicized in bold type portions for emphasis.

#### On Lebanon:

**IL:** The fighting in Lebanon caused significant damage since you were there. What challenges do organizations face delivering relief supplies to the area?

**RC: Infrastructure** is an important issue for Lebanon -- the ports are excellent, and the airport is good. But there are no real highways, mostly rural roads running between villages, which is challenging for moving heavy equipment. Checking incoming cargo is another issue. There are two road routes into Lebanon -- through Israel and Syria. If the Israelis don't allow relief goods in, the road from Syria is the only option.

If convoys are coming into Lebanon from Syria, however, it is hard to know how much humanitarian aid they are carrying, or if they are carrying missiles. The Israelis are saying right now that any truck is a bad truck.

However, I don't expect the humanitarian relief for Lebanon to be as encompassing as, say, Banda Aceh. Lebanon is not isolated; agencies bringing supplies don't have to cover huge distances to get there. Much of the aid will likely come in to Lebanon through Jordan. The roads through Syria are better, but that route poses bombing threats. Cypress is also close to Lebanon; organizations can stage operations there and bring supplies across by ferry.

The main factor is **stopping the violence** so organizations can get into Lebanon. The **political issues** may have the largest effect on supply delivery.

#### On the Nature of Humanitarian Logistics:

**IL:** The corporate sector tends to lump 'humanitarian logistics' into one category. How do logistical challenges vary from crisis to crisis?

**RC:** Everything from weather to **infrastructure** to geographic positioning makes a difference to humanitarian logistics and projects in developing countries.

Take the Darfur region in Africa, for example. Darfur is the most challenging situation right now -- logistics there is as hard as it gets. The **government is against outside help, there is a huge refugee population, the infrastructure has been damaged** by years of war, mines are everywhere, and the area is extremely remote.

In Banda Aceh, we dealt with a different set of circumstances. When I worked throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States in the early days after the breakup of the Soviet Union, it had a strong rail system -- that was the key to getting assistance there. Iraq has good roads and is close to central delivery areas including Dubai and Kuwait, but it is incredibly dangerous.

For each situation, **you have to evaluate the violence levels, infrastructure quality, and how far the area is from other stable regions.**

#### On the Reputation of Humanitarian Logistics:

**IL:** The humanitarian logistics industry sometimes gets a bad rap for being disorganized and inefficient. What's your take on the industry's effectiveness?

**RC:** Humanitarian relief agencies on the whole are savvy -- they buy the right supplies, and they know how to get them to affected regions.

In Banda Aceh, for example, malaria was a big problem. Because these agencies have experience in the area, they knew they had to bring spraying equipment and insecticide into the region.

There are about 40 great dedicated humanitarian groups such as Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders, an international organization that delivers emergency medical aid to people affected by conflicts, epidemics, and disasters).

However, they can't go into an affected region and run an airport or a distribution/supply line; they need help in that area. **The United Nations has the infrastructure** to enter these areas and quickly deliver relief to a lot of people. **Their infrastructure usually provides the base for all other agencies involved.**

Usually disorganization occurs when the location in question is isolated. Waste and inefficiency can also be factors when an agency tries to apply the formula it used in, say, Darfur somewhere else in the world. The issues and the type of goods needed are different for each project.

Also, **overcoming bureaucratic hurdles is tough** -- problems can pop up if the local government is not 'massaged' the right way. As well-intentioned and needy as a local government may be, dealing with them can be perplexing. It is hard for organizations to do this if they don't understand the area -- that also applies to corporate entities that want to help.

#### **On Key Success Factors:**

**IL:** What is the most important element for logistics success in the developing world?

**RC:** The key is understanding culture -- this is what Westerners struggle with most in the developing world. Being successful in this type of logistics has to do with how well you can navigate and understand local issues.

When I was running relief to the mujahideen in the 1980s, for example, we tried to deliver food, but they wouldn't eat the type of food we brought them. The intent to help is insufficient by itself; it is a good idea to hire local people to guide you.

The effective private volunteer agencies excel in this respect -- **they have ongoing relationships** where they deal with local cultural issues, and they know what it takes to succeed in a particular area.

#### **On Lessons for the Private Sector:**

**IL:** How can companies learn from these efforts? What can they do to prepare if they have facilities in areas that are affected by war or disaster?

**RC:** Companies need to have a good evacuation procedure in place for their employees. And they need to know that at the first sign of a problem, it's time to leave the area.

I got caught in Sri Lanka in 1993 when President Ranasinghe Premadasa was assassinated. Riots never erupted, but I didn't get out of there as fast as I should have.

Companies located in places that are prone to civil unrest **must have a plan to get people out quickly and efficiently.** That's the only thing that works.