Challenges to Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the reasons why the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-belligerents has characteristically been so problematic to achieve in societies emerging from years of armed conflict. Since the end of the Cold War, attempts to apply DDR have typically occurred in intrastate conflicts which together feature a wide variety of combatants, including regular government forces, paramilitaries, armed gangs, and guerrilla forces.[1] DDR is customarily understood in sequential terms; i.e. disarmament characteristically occurs first, demobilisation second and reintegration last, although in practice they often overlap or occur alongside one another.[2] DDR is moreover conceived as occurring in the post-conflict stage (i.e. after the conclusion of an intrastate conflict involving two or more parties), although determining precisely when this stage commences is contentious, since ex-belligerents may persist hostilities even after a formal peace agreement is settled.[3] DDR may be endeavoured in societies emerging from civil war, or in cases which have suffered other forms of pervasive and protracted violence (e.g. Haiti).[4] Furthermore, DDR may be attempted in contexts absent of a formal peace agreement between the principal belligerents, which was a feature of Uganda's DDR programme for ex-LRA fighters in the 1990s, for instance.[5] Finally, DDR commonly occurs in cases featuring considerable international oversight (e.g. the 1991 Paris Agreement regarding Cambodia), but other cases may have more limited international participation (e.g. Eritrea's demobilisation programme in 1993).[6]

In light of this contextual variety, this study draws upon a range of diverse case studies in order to build its thesis. The essential argument of this investigation twofold; firstly, that particular country cases exhibit distinctive impediments to DDR in their respective contexts. Whilst many cases share some common obstacles to DDR, the unique combination of hindrances in each case should caution against giving uniform prescriptions for conducting DDR across all circumstances. Secondly, this analysis contends that sometimes donor/mediator governments and international organisations have worsened/neglected obstacles to DDR in various societies. Furthermore, these mistakes should be remembered by policymakers when DDR is conducted in similar cases in the future.

Section One of this study analyses the impediments to disarmament and demobilisation in post-conflict societies, while Section Two investigates various inhibitions to reintegration.

Section One: Disarmament and Demobilisation

Disarmament may broadly be conceived as the voluntary or forced surrender of weapons, ammunition and military supplies/equipment possessed by belligerents in a given conflict, as well as their subsequent restriction from ex-combatants.[7] Such weaponry in post-Cold War intrastate conflicts has overwhelmingly comprised 'small arms and light weapons' (SALW): e.g. machetes, RPG-launchers, land mines, grenades, mortars, rifles, machine guns, and pistols.[8] Disarmament, however, has repeatedly been difficult to accomplish in over sixty DDR programmes since the end of the Cold War.[9] Afghanistan's population, for instance, remains immersed in weapons despite the fact that 100,000 weapons had been collected by 2009 under the Afghan-Coalition DDR programme.[10] One reason why disarmament is so challenging to implement in post-conflict situations is due to the typically pervasive presence of internal insecurity.[11] In the post-2001 Afghan case, for example, civilian possession of weapons is seen by many Afghans as crucial for individual and communal defence against armed criminal and insurgent groups.[12] The

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Afghan case also demonstrates the limitations of applying uniform DDR approaches; indeed, Bhatia correctly argues that immediate disarmament was impractical in post-2001 Afghanistan, since including armed warlords/local commanders in state institutions and security provision was the only feasible option due to an exceedingly deficient security sector.[13]

Disarming civilian populations can be additionally impeded in cases where gun-ownership is seen as a cultural entitlement (such as Haiti, where 'the firearm holds fierce symbolic and political meaning').[14] The fact that SALW can be effortlessly concealed by non-combatants and combatants alike in remote/hidden sites (e.g. transport cargoes) also makes SALW very hard to trace and secure by government forces and international actors.[15] Moreover, in many cases the disarmament of combatants is impeded by economic enticements to maintain the status quo. For instance, the Colombian conflict presented both the ELN and FARC with numerous opportunities to enrich their members through drugs trading, fraud and abductions; consequently, arms bequeathed these groups greater ability to protect these interests against rivals.[16] Furthermore, disarmament has sometimes been hindered by armed groups who have exploited international buy-back schemes (whereby combatants surrender their weapons in exchange for cash).[17] In Haiti, for instance, the US-led buy-back programme enabled particular FRAPH and FADH to trade-in outdated/broken weapons and equipment; buy-back cash was then used by certain members to buy newer/better weapons, or for personal enrichment through the black market.[18]

Additionally, the fact that intrastate conflicts frequently spill-over into bordering countries can seriously impede a disarmament programme, since neighbouring countries may be unwilling or unable to cooperate in the DDR initiative. In Tajikistan between 1992-1993, for instance, UTO fighters were able to use Northern Afghanistan as a sanctuary against government forces, as well as a means of income (i.e. through opium trading) and weapons procurement through dealings with Tajik-Afghan commanders like Ahmed Shah Massoud.[19] Finally, elements of the international community occasionally bear culpability for the proliferation of SALW in war-torn/violent societies. For example, in Haiti, various Western powers paradoxically sought the disarmament of local armed groups whilst inadvertently hindering these efforts through weapons sales; indeed, between 1993-1998 British, French, Swiss and Dutch governments sold landmines, grenades, pistols and ammunition to Haiti totalling $26,000 – many of which entered the black market (e.g. through corrupt government officials).[20]

Demobilisation may be conceived as the official dispersal and/or reduction of regular and irregular armed organisations (e.g. insurgent organisations, government forces, militias etc.), and the deactivation of fighters from military operations/activity.[21] Moreover, demobilisation includes the declining significance of emblems and norms which substantiate armed force and prestige.[22] Obstacles to demobilisation vary across various country cases, particularly due to the highly differentiated organisational structures of diverse military formations in intrastate conflicts. For instance, in Iraq, the Kurdish *Peshmerga* and Shia *Badr* militias have remained significantly well-trained and hierarchically structured since 2003.[23] By contrast, in Tajikistan the mainly non-hierarchical composition of opposition militaries meant that central leaderships struggled to enforce observance of the peace agreement amongst subordinates.[24] Indeed, some military leaders, such as Makhmud Khudoiberdiev, endeavoured to unsettle the peace agreement for political purposes by working militarily to undermine the government.[25]

The Khudoiberdiev case furthermore highlights how political dynamics and considerations can inhibit demobilisation; i.e. armed groups may be reluctant to demobilise if they believe that their political goals may be unacceptably jeopardised by doing so. In Angola, for instance, the 1991 Bicesse Peace Accords failed to specify provisions for a potential power-sharing arrangement following the 1992 elections; subsequently, MPLA and UNITA candidates came to conceive the elections as a zero-sum game which neither felt they could afford to lose – thus resulting in renewed violence soon after the election victory of President dos Santos.[26] The Angolan case furthermore demonstrates how distrust between warring groups can hamper demobilisation, since both UNITA and the MPLA conserved clandestine forces following the Bicesse Accords (since neither side wanted to risk losing territory to the other if the Accords failed).[27] Various economic interests in different cases can influence the willingness of combatants to demobilise. For instance, in Southern Sudan between 2006-2011, many SPLA soldiers were reluctant to demobilise because military service offered employment and wages, whilst the likelihood of gaining future civilian employment was uncertain.[28] Furthermore, in some cases demobilisation can be undermined by a culture of institutionalised and normalised violence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for instance, decades of

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fighting over economic and political assets has resulted in a climate of vengeance, resentment, distrust and armed competitiveness between armed groups, which have collectively inhibited demobilisation.[29]

Moreover, in particular DDR contexts, demobilisation has been hard to "measure" when ex-combatants have not been registered with the government/international actors. In Uganda, for example, sometimes up to 25% of former LRA members in a given time frame fail to register with the government as ex-combatants, and instead return immediately to their respective communities.[30] Indeed, in some cases the absence of dependable records of combatant numbers can also inhibit the assessment of demobilisation programmes. For instance, in Southern Sudan, SPLA leaders announced their numbers as 300,000 during the 2005 DDR programme.[31] However, this total was discarded by international actors as overestimated, and a demobilisation target of 90,000 was agreed with the SPLA instead (although the UNDP estimated the SPLA's actual military strength as less than half this figure).[32] Indeed, the Sudan case moreover illuminates the limitations of applying a standardised demobilisation approach to all cases of DDR. For instance, the reinsertion of former combatants is often necessary in war-torn societies with significant population displacement (e.g. Uganda), yet in South Sudan such 'reinsertion packages' were generally redundant between 2005-2011 because ex-combatants were already based in their home populations.[33]

Section Two: Reintegration

Reintegration may be conceived as the return of ex-belligerents into the economic, social and political environment of a society which is emerging from prolonged, widespread violence.[34] Reintegration, as such, may include partaking in public discourse, political institutions and organisations (e.g. political parties and NGOs), media outlets, public sector employment, businesses and civil society groups.[35] Furthermore, in the aftermath of a civil war, reintegration typically involves incorporating ex-fighters into the armed forces of the state. The economic reintegration of ex-combatants is often considerably affected by the massive economic devastation commonly witnessed in different DDR contexts; i.e. pervasive unemployment, inequality and insecurity, as well as substantial damage of infrastructure (e.g. health and education).[36] Nonetheless, the scale and nature of economic damage and underdevelopment are differentiated across various DDR contexts, and therefore present different obstacles to economic reintegration in particular cases. For instance, in post-2002 Sierra Leone, the widespread illiteracy of ex-RUF members not only hindered their ability to gain professional employment (e.g. in academia, or medicine), but additionally undermined their capacity to engage in political reintegration (e.g. through public deliberation).[37] Additionally, the economic reintegration ex-combatants may further be undermined when armed groups contain large numbers of poorly educated children/youths with limited experience in civilian employment (e.g. Liberia's LURD, Sierra Leone's RUF, and Angola's FAA and UNITA).[38] Indeed, reintegrating these youths into civilian employment is somewhat a misnomer when they were never integrated into economic life in the first place.

Additionally, in some cases economic reintegration can be hindered by the overly-idealistic expectations of reintegration by ex-belligerents. For example, following Angola's Lusaka Protocol many FAA and UNITA ex-combatants expressed civilian job aspirations which exceeded their qualifications, or which were not widely available (e.g. doctoring or engineering). The notion of farming was widely shunned, despite the realistic availability of employment in agriculture.[39] Moreover, cultural norms can sometimes challenge the full reintegration of ex-belligerents into society. For example, in South Sudan following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), ex-SPLA women members were frequently marginalised by their families when they returned with offspring, but lacked a dowry.[40] In some cases, cultural and/or religious norms have hindered reintegration by providing communities with justification for stigmatising ex-belligerents. In Uganda, s case in point, former LRA fighters were frequently eschewed for bringing *cen* to the local community (i.e. the wicked and unforgiving spirits of LRA victims).[41] The Uganda case also demonstrates how ex-combatant trauma can hamper reintegration into civilian life, particularly in cases where armed groups – e.g. Joseph Kony's LRA – have contained large numbers of child soldiers and abductees who suffer flashbacks and nightmares after they return home.[42] Moreover, the issue of unforgiveness can present formidable challenges to reintegration in many cases. For instance, in Angola following the Lusaka Protocol, approximately 30% of FAA troops reportedly thought that reintegrating with former UNITA members in civilian life would be challenging after fighting one another for decades.[43]

Significant population displacement, as in the Ugandan case, can present enormous logistical problems for

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reintegration, since civilians and former fighters must be "reinserted" into their respective communities, which can be hindered by logistical issues in coordination and cost (e.g. in transportation, registration, and nourishment).[44] Moreover, the issue of political grievances can challenge reintegration efforts in particular contexts. In post-2002 Sierra Leone, for instance, many RUF members (e.g. Corporal Foday Sankoh) were reluctant to be reintegrated into the political system, since they had rejected 'traditional hierarchies' (i.e. the government) which they perceived as exclusivist and disinterested in accommodating their grievances.[45] Moreover, in some cases, reintegrating ex-combatants into the security sector can be inhibited by the political and economic interests of incumbent elites. This was witnessed in the DRC, where President Kabila appointed members of his family and ethnic group to top military/security positions to the detriment of rival ethnic groups.[46] Finally, international financial institutions have sometimes hindered reintegration. In El Salvador, IMF-imposed budget constraints prevented the government from reintegrating former fighters through 'arms-for-land programmes' because they became unaffordable.[47] A lack of commitment/political will on the part of donor governments has also sometimes obstructed reintegration. In Somaliland, for example, cantoned ex-fighters were held in encampments for half a year 'without training opportunities or reintegration schemes', thus resulting in several ex-fighters abandoning the camps.[48]

Conclusion

In conclusion, there appear to be no universal set of hindrances to DDR across all cases – and therefore no universal solutions. Rather, unique combinations of obstacles to DDR have presented themselves throughout a range of diverse case studies. This therefore highlights the importance of considering the demographic, topographical, cultural, historical, economic, social and political context of each specific case when one prescribes how obstacles to DDR should be removed. For instance, in one case disarmament may be stalled greatly by a pervasive gun culture, which may not be a significant feature of another case. Likewise, the non-hierarchical structure of armed groups in one context will present different obstacles to demobilisation from cases featuring highly disciplined/organised armed groups. Similarly, varying degrees of population displacement across different cases will also produce unique challenges to reintegration. However, to highlight such contextual divergence is not to assert that common obstacles to DDR cannot ever be identified across different cases. Indeed, often they can be (e.g. economic incentives of belligerents to oppose disarmament and continue profiting from illicit trading in arms). Moreover, nor is the above conclusion supposed to suggest that the international community cannot/should not learn from past mistakes and successes in DDR operations.[49] Indeed, the second contention of this analysis has been that sometimes the international community has exacerbated or neglected obstacles to DDR in specific cases, particularly through arms sales to war-torn societies (i.e. Haiti), through the imposition of detrimental budgetary constraints (i.e. El Salvador), or through neglect of cantoned ex-combatants (i.e. Somaliland). These are mistakes which certainly can be learned from.

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