

Understanding a new generation of non-state armed groups



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Acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	Al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb
CAG	Compliant Armed Groups (Mali)
CMFPR	Coordination des Mouvements et Forces Patriotiques de Résistance
CVE	Countering Violence Extremism
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPA	Department of Political Affairs (UN)
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
HCUA	Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawa
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JMNTF	Joint Multinational Task Force (Nigeria)
MAA	Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad
MDSF	Malian Defense and Security Forces
MFDC	Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MNLA	Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad

MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPM	Special Political Mission
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TAG	Terrorist Armed Groups (Mali)
TCCs	Troop Contributing Countries
TCU	Transnational Crime Unit (Guinea-Bissau)
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNIOGBIS	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WACI	West Africa Coast Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCA	United Nations Office for Central Africa
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
ZIF	Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze

Based in Turin, Italy, the **United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)** is the primary provider of interagency training and learning within the UN system. Its main objective is to promote and support UN collaboration and increased operational effectiveness of the system as a whole.

The College conducts a variety of learning and training activities, in Turin as well as at the regional and country level. The main thematic areas are UN Leadership, Human Rights and Development, UN Coherence, Knowledge Management, Peace and Security.

Based in Berlin, the **Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF)**, through its training programme, pursues two objectives: to screen and assess candidates for ZIF's pool of German civilian professionals for deployment to international peace operations, and to provide field-oriented preparation for personnel in such operations.

ZIF offers basic peacekeeping, specialization and election observation courses. All courses focus on the practical preparation for work in a peace operation, based on mission experience and lessons learned.

FOREWORD

Jafar Javan and Almut Wieland-Karimi

In the last decade, maintaining peace and security has become further complicated by increasing violence. Violence is no longer perpetrated exclusively by national armies and armed oppositions but also by an increasingly assertive and brutal range of hybrid actors, such as youth gangs, criminal organizations, pirates and transnational networks. They are operating in countries such as Afghanistan, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Myanmar, Honduras, El Salvador, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Syria, and sometimes even affect entire regions such as the Sahel. The violence resulting from these situations exceeds many ongoing civil wars.

Understanding this new generation of non-state armed groups presents novel analytical and practical challenges for the United Nations, as these groups differ substantially from the traditional ones active in civil conflicts. For instance, there are groups like the gangs in El Salvador and Honduras which are connected to the community, and there are members of drug cartels in Mexico who use submarines and airplanes and are at war with both state institutions and the local communities.

The main problem is that we know little

about the structures, motives and social morphology of these new actors. It is more and more apparent that armed groups' strategic options are often contingent on the internal dynamics and the way power is allocated within them. Unless we understand these dynamics and become equipped to respond accordingly, we cannot make significant steps towards successful strategies to address this new phenomenon.

In many cases, the United Nations' engagement with these new types of non-state armed groups is being developed on an ad hoc basis, or is driven by mandates and operational priorities. For instance, resources have been developed by humanitarian actors, but the focus is still too narrow and is not linked to the wider compact of international responses in crisis areas. Likewise, many other United Nations entities and peace operations have neglected to engage non-state armed actors in a strategic way, or have not developed sufficient institutional capacity to support dialogue efforts.

We believe that the emergence of hybrid armed groups that are different from the ones the international community has been dealing with since the end of the Cold War has enormous policy and

programmatic implications – particularly for peace operations engaging in issues such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of former combatants, protection of civilians, mediation and preventive diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and crime prevention.

In 2014 the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) undertook a scoping exercise to examine existing resources related to the issue of non-state armed groups and make an inventory of the stakeholders working in this field. The report has provided the basis for initiating a broader UN inter-agency learning initiative, led by the UNSSC, which attempts to broaden the analytical capacity of UN personnel in order to cope with such hybrid armed groups. Based on this initiative and on the findings of the scoping report, these topics informed the annual Deputy Special Representatives

of the Secretary General (DSRSG) Dialogue in December 2014 – jointly organized by the UNSSC and the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF). During the seminar, high-level UN peace operations leaders, particularly the DSRSGs, exchanged views and discussed approaches with practitioners and academics on this new generation of non-state armed groups. This publication highlights some cross-cutting themes and issues that warrant further discussion within the international community.

We would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office and the contributors to this volume for sharing their ideas and experiences. We hope that this work may inspire a wide and more fruitful debate on the future of UN peace operations and possibly initiate more consistent efforts to build the capacity of the UN system to deal with these emerging actors.



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PART I

UN response capacity
to emerging threats
in peace operations contexts

CHAPTER 1

New generation armed groups: State of play and new trends

Svenja Korth

Overview

During the 1980s and 1990s, United Nations (UN) agencies and peace operations adapted to a shift in armed violence from wars between states to armed conflict within states, but these trends are ones of the past. Today, shifts in the patterns of violence combine with organized crime to impact state fragility. These are just some of the elements which call for a new approach and enhanced understanding of the unique nature of non-state armed groups.

In addition, over the past 20 years, new issues (e.g. protecting and promoting human rights; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; protecting civilians; mediation and preventive diplomacy; humanitarian assistance, crime prevention, small arms proliferation, addressing youth at risk and providing electoral support) have become integral parts of peace operation mandates. Given that the United Nations is increasingly operating in a rapidly changing environment, its responses can no longer be “business as usual”.

Emerging issues in the peace operations landscape

In recent times, we have seen an expansion of areas in UN engagements and a departure from the “traditional” areas of work towards

new operational directions, such as robust peacekeeping, use of unmanned aerial vehicles, counter-terrorism, stabilization and muscular protection of civilians. This is the result of changes on the ground and diverse challenges faced by the United Nations in the field. While there are not always trade-offs between new and traditional forms of engagement, if strategic intersections are identified, as is the case in Mali, the two approaches can be complementary. Much will be learned from the developments on the ground in Mali about how to move the United Nations towards using a more dynamic approach.

While the new, less conventional approaches signal an evolution in peacekeeping and peacebuilding doctrine, the United Nations faces an entirely new set of dilemmas and trade-offs. Some of these go back to the foundations and core principles on which the UN was founded. For example, there are national governments which impose legislation that restrict “material support” to non-state armed groups, yet it is becoming increasingly evident that engaging with such groups is politically and practically necessary. The dilemma is whether the United Nations has sufficient funds, new tools and the capacity (i.e. qualified personnel and appropriate equipment) to

transform itself on the ground to deal with asymmetric threats (e.g. counter-terrorism) and with non-state armed groups and their interests. Further, do we truly know enough about such groups in order to politically engage with them? Do we fully comprehend what issues drive groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Boko Haram? Do we truly understand the values that make young women and men follow the call to join groups such as these? The range of unanswered questions is endless, yet the emerging trends demand urgent action.

Addressing unconventional armed groups that stretch over the territory of two or more countries provides an additional challenge for many peace operations, which are primarily compounded by mandates defined within national borders. Advocating for regional involvement by engaging and strengthening regional actors and organizations, however, does not automatically result in a viable and preferable regional solution. Current developments in the Central African Republic show the complexity of such issues.

In some cases, the expectations and impact of UN engagement have differed quite dramatically between local, national and international contexts. This gap will likely widen in the future. Ungoverned spaces, transnational crime and disenfranchised Muslim youth are issues that transcend borders, as seen in West and Central Africa and the Middle East.

Another increasingly challenging concern for UN peace operations relates to

understanding the impact of transnational criminal networks and illicit trade syndicates on the stability and survival of states like Guinea-Bissau. Deterring and targeting the spoilers and fighting drug trafficking require new tools and adequate training as well as peacekeeping partnerships, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa.

This publication collects some relevant examples and country cases showing the extent to which the nature of non-state armed groups is beginning to shape the United Nation's operating assumptions and response.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding a new generation of non-state armed groups: A perspective from Headquarters

Kristiana Powell and Michèle Griffin

Introduction

There is a keen awareness in UN Headquarters that our effectiveness in the field is increasingly dependent on our understanding of and ability to deal with new types of non-state armed groups. This chapter provides a preliminary Headquarters perspective on this issue. It begins by offering basic assumptions about changes to the security landscape and the geopolitical climate, including dynamics within the United Nations. It then provides an illustrative, but not comprehensive, overview of how the issue of non-state armed groups is coming up in our work, particularly at Headquarters. It closes with a number of questions for further policy discussion.

Basic assumptions: the security landscape

The nature of conflict is changing faster than the United Nations or the international community as a whole is adapting. Research suggests that conflicts are becoming more intractable and less conducive to traditional political settlements. This may be due to three main reasons:

1. Organized crime is emerging as a major stress factor. Several UN peace operations are mandated to address

this issue, but very few have adequate (if any) capacity.

2. Most civil wars have a proxy element and are transnational in nature (involving, for example, criminal networks, arms flows, ideological narratives and refugee outflows). However, our responses tend to be country-specific.
3. The growing presence of violent extremism complicates our peacemaking efforts. We are not talking only about violent Islamic extremists – although they are, of course, a major concern – but also about gangs and criminal groups whose motives are as likely to be economic or ideological as political.

The presence of these groups and broader dynamics make conflicts much less conducive to political settlement and can pose serious threats to us and the people we are mandated to protect. Indeed, in today's security landscape, our tools and ways of doing business are at risk of being overtaken.

Basic assumptions: the geopolitical climate

The geopolitical climate and its influence on dynamics within the United Nations impact our capacities to respond to these threats. This convergence of crime, cross-border conflict and extremism would test our policy responses at the best of times, but these are more like the worst of times. Three main challenges complicate our work. First, we are arguably facing more crises today that at any time since the end of the Cold War, from seemingly intractable conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Europe to the unprecedented outbreak of Ebola in West Africa, to name but a few. Secondly, divisions within the Security Council have rendered it unable to address a number of pressing situations and have struck at the core of the Council's credibility. Finally, the Council has been willing, at times, to mandate us robustly, arguably without sufficient consideration of basic principles, whether there is a 'peace to keep' or internal inconsistencies in our mandate.

Overview of what is happening at Headquarters

There has been a great deal of thinking at Headquarters and in the field around the UN's response to armed groups. This issue comes up in a number of different spheres of work, such as counter-terrorism, mediation and the future of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

The issue of counter-terrorism has recently

received a great deal of attention from Member States. It was a defining issue during the 69th session of the General Assembly, where many Member States commented that while terrorism itself is not new, today's terrorism is characterized by increased brutality, is regionally networked, is driven by territorial aspirations and is generally not amenable to traditional tools like mediation or good offices. The "new" elements of this old threat call into question the ability of the United Nations to respond appropriately.

The Security Council has also been very engaged on this issue, particularly recently. There were Security Council debates and outcome resolutions or statements in August, September and November 2014. These have focused on international cooperation to address foreign terrorist fighters and financing for terrorism. Another debate in December 2014, under the Chadian presidency, considered the links between terrorism and cross-border crime.

These discussions build on previous resolutions or agreements. However, there are also some innovations. For example, Security Council Resolution 2178, adopted unanimously in September, recognizes that foreign terrorist fighters are a manifestation of violent extremism. It calls on Member States to introduce more Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) measures, which are broad and address the root causes of terrorism. This is the first time the Council has recognized CVE as a Chapter VII obligation. For its part, the United Nations has been requested to provide capacity-

building assistance in this area.

At a time when the Council is divided on so many critical issues, counter-terrorism appears to be generating strong support among Council members. The broader membership is also very engaged in this issue. The General Assembly's 2006 counter-terrorism strategy was renewed for the fourth time in June 2014. During this most recent renewal period, particular emphasis was placed on addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism. Critically, the strategy identifies respect for the rule of law, human rights and good governance as key factors in fighting terror. In response to this growing interest by Member States, the United Nations' counter-terrorism architecture is very focused on this issue.

There is a risk, however, that despite commitments to focus on the root causes of terrorism and the human rights dimensions of counter-terrorism, the "Foreign Terrorist Fighters" (FTF) issue will continue to dominate the agenda of key Member States while the well-being of millions of people living under the control of extremist groups will receive insufficient attention. Moreover, bilaterally, counter-terrorism is still largely a military enterprise, often undermining human rights. The challenge, of course, is to ensure protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

The issue of new non-state armed groups also features prominently in discussions of the future of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. There is recognition that peacekeepers are deploying

to places where there is little or no peace to keep. This is pushing our thinking on how we define the outer limits of UN peacekeeping. Our peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we are conducting offensive operations via the Force Intervention Brigade, and in Mali, which is operating in an asymmetric threat environment alongside an ongoing, parallel counter-terrorism operation, are emblematic in this regard.

For Special Political Missions, our discourse is framed, at least in part, around how we can operate in insecure environments like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Somalia. Our work is becoming increasingly dangerous. The attack in Mogadishu in December was only the most recent reminder. We face the dilemma of trying to do effective political work – which is at the core of our mandates – while hemmed in behind T-walls, razor wire and sandbags.

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, announced by the Secretary-General in June 2014, will grapple with a number of these issues, including how things have changed in the 15 years since the release in 2000 of the "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping" (the "Brahimi report"). The panel will cover both peacekeeping operations and special political missions and will consider if these tools are still fit for purpose in today's environment. Its report will be released in the spring of 2015 and will serve as the basis for a Secretary-General's report to be submitted to Member States during the 70th session of the General Assembly.

Finally, we are doing a great deal of thinking on the dilemmas that a new generation of non-state armed groups pose for our mediation work and how to resolve these. There is a range of new actors entering the mediation sphere. Indeed, there are more actors involved in facilitating a negotiation process, but there is also – in many cases – a proliferation of actors around the table or seeking a place at the table.

The UN “Guidance for Effective Mediation” does not place restrictions on who we can talk to. We classify these actors by their value to the process, not by whether they are listed or indicted. This is by design and allows us to do what is most appropriate for each situation in accordance with relevant legal limitations. This leaves grey areas and requires political dexterity and creativity in approach, but it helps protect the mediation space and gives us the flexibility required to adapt to new challenges.

For example, the mediation landscape is becoming increasingly complicated by the fragmentation of groups. There is not always a clear centre of gravity or leadership structure. In Syria, for example, fighters move from group to group, alliances constantly change and the power balance can be quite fluid. In addition, we do not currently mediate with groups that we label as exclusively “criminal”, including gangs, but we know that we must at least understand how they operate and what leverage or influence they have over other actors – including States – if we want to identify incentives for an agreement or help reach a ripeness point.

We may be asked to play a more direct role. The Organization of American States negotiated a controversial “gang truce” in El Salvador in 2012 and has suggested that the UN Secretariat needs to reflect on the suitability of mediation as an instrument to help overcome unconventional violence (such as that of gangs), provided they are amenable to licit, non-violent opportunities. We will have to do some deep self-reflection on what this means for the United Nations and what we are best positioned to do.

Questions for future policy work

In short, there are a number of initiatives underway to address or help us think through the impact of new non-state armed groups on our work. There is a need to move forward with our policy work, deepen our understanding of these threats and sharpen our tools to ensure an appropriate response. In doing so, the following policy questions could be considered:

1. What are the new, emerging or changing challenges to peace and security facing UN field presences?
2. If these are actors or groups, how amenable are these entities to alternative (i.e. non-violent, licit) opportunities?
3. What more could or should the United Nations be doing to address or respond to these threats? There is an emerging consensus that we need new tools, but what might these look like?

PART II

Political, criminal, terrorist?
Multiple and concurrent
agendas of new non-state
armed groups

CHAPTER 3

Violent mobilization of youth gangs by political parties

Véronique Dudouet¹

Introduction

The peace and conflict research community has finally come to realize the challenges posed by actors of organized violence who lie beyond the traditional scope of direct parties to international or intra-state armed conflicts. Studies such as the Global Burden of Armed Violence (Geneva Declaration 2011) raise awareness about the growing threat posed by interpersonal or criminal violence, estimating that “non-conflict” violence generated eight times as many fatalities as all armed conflicts did between 2004 and 2009. In turn, mediators and peacebuilders – who traditionally focused their attention on non-state armed groups upholding political agendas (i.e. claims to state power) well-suited to negotiation processes – are increasingly acknowledging the pragmatic need to engage with a wider range of violent actors in order to enhance peace process sustainability². Indeed, so-called criminal or ‘hybrid’ actors (from paramilitaries and militias to organized crime networks, vigilante groups, street gangs and pirates) present a mounting challenge to international security and exhibit significant ‘spoiling capacity’ capable of destabilizing political agreements and post-war peacebuilding efforts.

This chapter focuses on one sub-category of non-conventional armed actors: urban

youth gangs involved in social violence. It aims to review the interplay between their economic, social and political dimensions, and especially the complex relations and mutual influence gang members entertain with political actors/parties. Given its target audience, this chapter primarily addresses post-war contexts since these are most relevant to UN peace operation missions. However, considering the scarce empirical evidence on this phenomenon, some policy implications also derive from past and ongoing approaches to urban youth violence in ‘non-conflict scenarios’. The first two sections analyse the urban violence phenomenon and its politicization. The last two sections address the wide range of existing peacebuilding, development and security responses by local, national and international actors, fleshing out some key recommendations for UN peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions.

1. This is based on an extensive review of the existing literature, as well as the author’s previous work on non-state armed groups and political transitions (e.g. Dudouet 2014, Dudouet et al. 2012). Many thanks to Matteo Dressler and Lauren Schorr for their assistance with background research.

2. For instance, the report from the 2013 Oslo Forum High-level Mediation Retreat was entitled “Innovative approaches to mediating conflict” and has a section on “Negotiating with criminal groups”.
www.osloforum.org/sites/default/files/Oslo-Forum-Meeting-Report-2013.pdf

Violent urban youth: An emerging form of armed conflict

Already a decade ago, astute minds documented that “urban violence has reached unprecedented levels in many cities of the South, and is increasingly seen as one of the most portentous threats to development on a local, national and international scale” (Winton 2004: 165). Experts are conceptualizing cities as the primary site of tomorrow’s warfare, noting that violence in urban spaces has begun to “resemble classic armed conflict situations” (Moser and McIlwaine 2014: 333). Urban violence might be classified into several sub-types, including political (e.g. urban guerrilla warfare), institutional (e.g. extrajudicial killings by police), economic (e.g. kidnappings by organized crime networks), interpersonal (e.g. sexual violence) and social (e.g. petty theft or communal riots by gangs) (adapted from Moser and McIlwaine 2014). This paper zeroes in on the last, with ‘gangs’ defined as “voluntary associations of peers, together for common interests, leadership and internal organization that act collectively in order to achieve some goals, even illegal activities and the control of the territory, equipment or business” (Miller 1992: 21). Related phenomena which also involve violent urban youth and which might be of direct relevance for UN peacekeeping and political missions include soccer fan clubs (e.g. Kosovo), youth wings of political parties (e.g. Burundi, Nepal) and, to some extent, youth-led militias (e.g. Nuer ‘white army’ in South Sudan).

The term ‘civic conflict’ has also developed to distinguish urban violence from sovereign (international) and civil (intra-state) violence. Civil conflicts are stimulated by the state’s failure to provide security, welfare, growth and institutionalized methods for nonviolent contestation over civic issues (Beal, Goodfellow and Rodgers 2013). In this sense, civic conflicts are said to be largely reactive, in contrast to proactive strategies mobilized for state takeover. Urban youth violence should also be treated as distinct from criminal networks and organized crime – even though these categories often overlap. The reason for clear delineation is that street gangs partake in trafficking and the brutal violence associated with such activities to a lesser extent. In fact, their mobilization is often the result of (structural or institutional) violence rather than its cause (Winton 2004). Labelling gang structures as criminal enterprises defined by individual pathologies is unhelpful as it tends to invite overly repressive state responses. Instead, this chapter considers urban youth violence as a socio-political phenomenon calling for comprehensive political solutions.

The political dimension of social violence

Socially violent actors (in this case, urban youth gangs) are far from ‘apolitical’. This section examines the political dimension of their origins, motivation, nature, effects and, especially, functions as ‘proxy’ political actors controlled and/or instrumentalized by power contenders.

Impact of macro-political conflicts on gang mobilization

One cannot grasp the urban youth violence phenomenon without adopting a comprehensive approach that analyses its trigger, proximate and root/structural factors. Given this paper's focus on contexts relevant for UN peace operation missions, it is particularly important to consider the characteristics of war-affected or post-war contexts conducive to street gang emergence. Such features include:

1. persisting social exclusion resulting from imperfect peace accords that focus solely on the political inclusion of a 'new elite'. In such contexts, youths are the most vulnerable to gang or militia conscription because they often hail from the most marginalized social groups;
2. combined state fragility and economic under-development caused by the legacy of protracted intra-state conflict. This results in a lack of institutional capacity to offer sustainable livelihoods and a subsequent search for alternative economic opportunities by the young and disenfranchised;
3. destruction of social fabric and family support structures over the course of ethno-political violence, which leads young people to look for substitutive collective identities;
4. higher tolerance for violent conflict behaviour in post-war societies;
5. abrupt urbanization due to dispersion

of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and migration of war victims to cities accelerated by post-war governments failing to implement structural reform in rural areas. This leads to large concentrations of youth who become particularly vulnerable to groups involved in illicit activities or violent behaviour; and

6. formation of informal networks by demobilized child soldiers (e.g. Sierra Leone) or 'disqualified' minor combatants (e.g. Nepal), seeking avenues to recycle their war-time skills as a source of livelihood and/or maintain their links to former armed structures (Kukeler and Peters 2011).

Socio-political functions of youth gangs

Street gangs perform at least three types of roles that might be described as political:

1. Internally, many gangs develop into organized collectives with command and control structures in which leaders enjoy some degree of legitimate authority over their members (Dudouet 2014).
2. Within their social environment, youth gang members tend to acquire de facto power positions and (largely coercive) authority, especially in places where they take on the role of providing services and enforcing rights ordinarily attributed to state actors. In slums or generally deprived areas where the state is perceived to be absent, ineffectual and/or repressive, gangs may provide alternative and legitimate

governance and protection for their neighbourhoods or communities (Rodgers and Muggah 2009).

3. Gang members may also become politicized through their actions, developing a conscious social or ideological agenda as they translate their socio-economic precariousness into political riots, demonstrations, upheavals and other forms of contestation (Philipps 2013).

However, a recurrent phenomenon has been noted across cases as diverse as El Salvador, Haiti, Sierra Leone and South Africa: namely, gangs' progressive depoliticization paralleling the adoption of more brutally violent and profit-oriented activities (such as drug trafficking).

Mutual relations with the formal political arena: Youth as political proxies

Apart from their intrinsic political functions and attributes, many youth gangs also entertain direct relations with political parties (or armed opposition groups) in post-war contexts or acute social conflicts. Existing empirical evidence from Burundi, Guinea Conakry, Haiti, Kenya, Mindanao/Philippines, Nepal, Nigeria, Timor Leste and Zimbabwe reveals that party support, control or instrumentalization of street gangs often serves at least five complementary purposes: (1) self-protection and control over areas of influence; (2) exhibition of party strength; (3) financial gain (e.g. through smuggling, organized crime or forced donations and taxation); (4) covert criminal activity (e.g. to eliminate opponents); and

(5) overt political contention (e.g. protests) as a means of party mobilization or rival party destabilization, typically around elections. Many youth gangs, militias or political parties' youth wings engaging in deviant violent activities emerge in response to the instrumentalization of regular security forces by the party or ethnic group in power, leading opposition parties to develop their own protection, self-defence and law and order mechanisms. Three examples are cited below:

- In **Haiti**, President Aristide, who ruled the country between 1994 and 2004, was known for having formed his own armed gangs (the Chimères) which at times operated in concert with the police and carried out protection rackets. His overthrow by an armed rebellion created a state of lawlessness which was filled by these gangs, who became the de facto leaders in the slums of the capital, Port-au-Prince. They developed an interdependent relationship with members of the political and business elite, who manipulated them while providing them with arms, funding and protection from arrest (Kemp, Shaw and Boutellis 2013).
- **Timor Leste** is also said to be vulnerable to extortion and trafficking involving local gangs organized around kinship ties, martial arts groups or patronage networks and used by political parties for personal security and as agents provocateurs (TLAVA 2009).

- In **Nepal**, several parties have established youth wings/forces which they have used to provide ‘muscle power’ and financial gain to their leaders, including the Maoist party’s Youth Communist League. Following allegations of violent proxyism against these youths and their party backers, relative failures on the part of political actors to rein in their youth forces “provides a sobering example of the difficulties in controlling such a force once it has been created” (Carter Center 2011).

Philipps (2013) notes an interesting paradox: gangs’ perceived mobilization in opposition to the politically powerful “not only coexists with their instrumentalization; it provides the very basis for it”. Besides instigating violence and unrest by appealing directly to disenfranchised youths’ frustration and anger, political parties might employ other means to entice or recruit gangs for personal political gain. Economic rewards are obvious incentives, in addition to political enticements (e.g. promises of future posts in the bureaucratic apparatus, the army or the police), ideological persuasion (e.g. by alluding to common narratives or appealing to simplistic agendas around free education, free medical care, jobs for all, etc.) and kinship ties/appeals to a common past (e.g. remobilization of former child soldiers by rebel movements-turned political parties).

Policy responses: Evolution towards a comprehensive approach to gang violence

How does this analytical shift in understanding contemporary conflict patterns impact violence-related policy and external intervention? A consensus has emerged recognizing the limits to isolated criminal justice and law enforcement approaches. In Central America, ‘mano-dura’ or iron-fist tactics demonstrated how such policies can lead to increased violence and the dispersion of violence to other, less-policed areas (Cockayne 2011). While researchers reflect at length on the pros and cons of various options for engaging with armed actors in conflict settings (including transitional justice; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR); Security Sector Reform (SSR); and political incentives), no real debate has started on what role these tools may play in handling other types of organized armed actors. For its part, the United Nations has progressively mandated peace operations to address organized crime and its associated challenges, but little operational understanding exists regarding the specifics of urban youth gangs.

Addressing the triggers, proximate and root causes behind social conflict requires a comprehensive approach to intervention along multiple dimensions: multi-sector (from security and rule of law to development, governance and peacebuilding), multi-actor (combined efforts by civil society, states and international agencies) and

multi-directional (integrating bottom-up community-led intervention with top-down law enforcement). Time-wise, short-term quick impact interventions require integration with longer-term approaches aimed at improving institutional capacities, developing alternative socio-economic incentives and transforming cultural norms around violence and patronage. Most importantly, policy responses to urban social violence must address multiple stakeholders simultaneously: gang leaders and members; surrounding communities; and local and national institutions, including political actors connected (or complicit) with gang violence. The table below summarizes approaches used to prevent or reduce gang violence by various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), development state agencies (such as USAID, DFID or GIZ), and UN entities (such as UNDP, UN Habitat, UNICEF, ILO and, in some rare cases such as MINUSTAH, UN peace operations).

While the need for a coherent UN agenda on youth and violent conflict has long been acknowledged (e.g. UNDP 2006), a number of political, organizational and practical challenges prevent UN agencies and missions from adopting such a comprehensive approach. These include:

- a lack of expertise and analytical understanding of the multi-level factors conducive to urban violence and of its differentiated manifestations;
- a compartmented approach to peacebuilding, security/rule of law, governance and development which

lacks cooperative learning across these different intervention pillars;

- a lack of an explicit mandate to address urban youth violence within most peace operation missions;
- a reluctance by host countries to allow international interference into internal matters of so-called criminal violence – especially in instances where state agents maintain illicit relations with youth gangs and are therefore part of the problem rather than the solution;
- the difficulty for UN missions to support actor-targeted and/or community-led initiatives, given their state-focused mandates;
- the challenge to draw local support and buy-in from the public and private sector for ‘soft-power’ engagement (e.g. dialogue and incentives) with gang members, as it may be seen as rewarding perpetrators of violence;
- the impact of the ‘war on terror’ on criminalizing contact with armed groups, which has been extended in some instances to non-conventional violent actors (e.g. some El Salvador gangs are on the United States’ terrorist listing system); and
- incompatibilities between short-term mission mandates and the long-term vision required for a comprehensive approach to social/urban violence.

	GANG-FOCUSED INTERVENTION	COMMUNITY-FOCUSED INTERVENTION	STATE/INSTITUTION-FOCUSED INTERVENTION
LAW AND ORDER (SECURITY/JUSTICE)	Violence deterrence and control through arrest and punishment	Crime reduction through community policing Restorative justice Community-led Small Arms and Light weapons ALW control	State authority extension into deprived urban areas Institutional capacity-building for justice /police reform in order to build legitimate, accountable and effective law enforcement institutions Local authority capacity-building geared towards addressing urban insecurity and creating a culture of prevention, e.g. <i>UN-HABITAT Safer Cities Programme</i>
VIOLENCE REDUCTION THROUGH DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION	Dialogue and mediation with/between gang leaders to facilitate truce agreements and behavioural shifts <i>e.g. Gang truce in San Salvador (El Salvador) in 2012; peace agreement by rival leaders in Bel Air (Haiti)</i>	Support to community mediators and local 'bridge-builders' (e.g. social workers, former gang members, church, teachers, etc.) Social capital, trust and cohesion rebuilding through multi-stakeholder community dialogues (involving NGOs, business leaders, religious institutions, academics, etc.)	Support for national (e.g. media) discussion fora to promote a more nuanced understanding of youth gangs as a deep-rooted societal/ structural phenomenon
POLITICAL INCENTIVIZATION AND GOVERNANCE APPROACHES	Constructive engagement with former gang leaders turned politicians to encourage their shift from coercive to consensual authority; Collective transformation of gang structures into positive civil society actors benefiting their communities, e.g. <i>SER PAZ in Ecuador</i>	Capacity-building for youth empowerment and effective participation in local decision-making fora in deprived neighbourhoods	Promotion of robust anti-corruption measures Good governance support through aid conditionality 'Naming and shaming' politicians involved in youth gang patronage practices
SOCIO-ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT	Collective or individual reinsertion support by facilitating re-education and integration into the job market <i>e.g. Viva Rio NGO in Haiti, Pailig Foundation in Mindanao (Philippines)</i> Youth-focused DDR programmes Ex-prisoner rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration <i>e.g. MINUSTAH in Haiti</i>	Community violence reduction programmes: Provide alternatives to street crime (vocational training, psychological support, and economic opportunities) for youth at risk Community infrastructure rehabilitation <i>e.g. MINUSTAH; UNDP El Salvador</i> Community-based approach to DDR Engagement with the private sector to cooperate with gang reinsertion programmes by creating employment opportunities	Support local authorities to ensure that sufficient resources, commitment and supervision are provided to gang reinsertion programmes Support for national policies developing short- and long-term livelihood options for marginalized youth <i>e.g. UNDP Kosovo and Timor Leste</i> Support effective service delivery in deprived neighbourhoods

Policy recommendations

Given its growing role in contemporary conflict-affected and post-war contexts, urban youth violence is becoming increasingly relevant for UN missions. The sustained insecurity caused by ‘civic conflicts’ represents a direct challenge for international peace operations as it hinders their operability and the very development, security and justice that the United Nations seeks to build. These emerging patterns of violence in urban spaces should thus be taken seriously, both in pre-deployment analysis and field intervention.

Analysis

- Urban social violence will become less of an impediment to peace if UN staff acquire a better understanding of the nature and motivations of youth gangs, the environments in which they emerge, the social, economic and political networks they are embedded in, their social roles and legitimacy and the underlying factors which enable them to develop and operate. Prior to any intervention on the ground, it is also important to analyse which internal and societal features of such groups might potentially be utilized for purposes of dialogue and eventual socio-political reintegration, and to detect early signs of violence fatigue or internal discontent which might serve as entry-points for engagement. Mission planners should engage in joint analysis and intelligence sharing across various UN departments in order to combine peacebuilding, development, governance, policing and criminal justice expertise on the subject. This might also include hiring specialists (e.g. anthropologists or political economists) at the Headquarters or mission level in order to fully comprehend the drivers of violence and intervention options. Such comprehensive fact-finding should also include sound analysis of: the specific local context; the community’s capacity to support and accompany external intervention; the complex relationships which non-conventional violent actors maintain with state/government structures; and, in situations of armed conflict, the opportunities for integrating such actors into broader peace accords or national dialogues.
- Sound analysis would also help international actors avoid the imposition of simplistic labels (such as ‘criminal entities’) to qualify highly heterogeneous groups and individuals. Such designations “deny the reality of life on the ground and the extent to which social actors can also form part of the societal fabric” and might ultimately impede conflict-resolution prospects (Cockayne and Lupel 2011). Mission staff should become better aware of the specificities and the similarities between various types of violent actors operating on the ground (e.g. gangs, militias, political party youth wings, vigilante groups, organized crime networks and political or extremist armed groups) and the nature of the boundaries and

operational relations between these distinct social phenomena.

- Assessments of the problem at stake and the factors that seem to be driving it should be accompanied by a clear vision of the desired outcomes (such as a reduction in violence, changes in behaviour or attitudes or structural reform) and the range of appropriate responses.

Intervention

- In contexts where political conflicts or post-war politics are strongly interlinked with acute social violence, UN mission mandates should adapt conventional peacebuilding tools to integrate and address both dimensions. For instance, SSR assistance should encompass capacity-building for community policing or restorative justice approaches in urban areas affected by gang violence. DDR support should also be designed in a comprehensive manner, combining individual, collective and community-based approaches to weapon collection programmes and socio-economic rehabilitation for young offenders. Mediation and dialogue programmes should also be adapted to deal with non-conventional violent actors (such as youth gang leaders and members) because direct engagement might offer valuable insights to DDR teams about the prospects of offering socio-economic incentives for individual and collective disengagement from violence.
- While the reinsertion of gang members and ‘youths at risk’ cannot occur if the environment is too adverse, state-building and societal transformation can also be blocked by gangs’ ‘spoilers’ violence. Therefore, actor-focused initiatives should be linked up with broader efforts to strengthen institutional capacity for security enhancement and good governance. The United Nations should also take advantage of privileged bilateral relations with respective governments to incentivize the criminalization of corruption and patronage practices, in order to prevent or mitigate the instrumentalization of urban gangs for political ends and resource mobilization.
- If the epicentre of contemporary violence takes place in urban spaces and deprived neighbourhoods, local communities should be key intervention targets. Violence reduction programmes are most likely to be effective and sustainable if rooted in the context in which they will be implemented; therefore, they should be designed and carried out in partnership with local authorities and community leaders (especially in areas affected by weak institutions and public service delivery). Missions’ staff should identify civil society bridge-builders such as religious institutions or local NGOs with direct access to gang leaders and marginalized youth, and jointly identify appropriate (‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power) responses to tackle both

illicit activities and their underlying factors. They should also identify and engage with informal or traditional (e.g. kinship) structures that can be harnessed to support reintegration projects. By providing balanced and coordinated assistance to young offenders and youths at risk, civil society organizations, political parties and local authorities, UN missions and their national counterparts will be more likely to strengthen national consensus for comprehensive soft-power engagement on urban violence and enhance public/government trust in the process.

- Inclusive approaches to social violence prevention and reduction call for inter-agency collaboration and partnership efforts in support of effective peacebuilding. This includes working with other UN agencies (such as UNDP or UNICEF) and actors outside of the UN system (e.g. regional organizations, state agencies or International NGOs) which can offer longer-term support and differentiated responses. These include socio-economic projects addressing youth unemployment and interventions aimed at improving civic engagement and political participation. In addition, DDR staff should liaise and coordinate with international agencies in charge of legal, policing or military intervention to eradicate 'crime' in order to harmonize their approaches and the timing of interventions, and to avoid sending contradictory messages
- (e.g. repression vs. incentives). In contexts where there are ongoing conflict resolution efforts, mediation teams should also be advised to support the inclusion of relevant peace accord provisions which might help UN monitoring missions hold parties to account (e.g. relative to the dismantling of youth party wings and paramilitary structures, or the transparent use of political party funds). Finally, UN missions should take advantage of their multi-national composition to hire professionals and peacekeeping troops with the right mix of linguistic and context-sensitive expertise who can adopt a more informed approach to tackling societal phenomena such as urban youth violence.
- The failure to address the problem of urban social violence at an early stage (particularly in post-war contexts) can make it more difficult to transform/rehabilitate actors and patronage networks later on. Moreover, social violence mitigation and transformation should be defined as a long-term, even multi-generational, process. UN peace operation missions need to adapt project-bound timeframes to sustained engagement needs in order to make an effective and sustainable contribution to peace and security in fragile urban spaces.

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CHAPTER 4

Transnational organized crime in Guinea-Bissau: Perspectives, challenges and the way forward

Marco Carmigniani

Introduction

Transnational organized crime, most notably drug trafficking, is not singular to Guinea-Bissau, nor should it be viewed in isolation. Yet, more ink has been spent publicizing the effects of its sprouting in that small West African nation rather than on the circumstances that brought it about. Certainly, criminal activities in any country undermine good governance and security, with negative impacts on socio-economic development, human rights and the rule of law. Still, for Guinea-Bissau, it is the transnational nature and ramifications of criminal activities in and through the country that draw most attention as a security threat to West Africa and to some parts of Europe and North America.

The vulnerability of Guinea-Bissau to organized crime stems first from its location in the geographical route used by traffickers to bring illegal drugs from producers to consumers. Furthermore, the fragile structures of the Bissau-Guinean State, are still unable to fully monitor the country's porous borders at land and sea (there are over 80 islands, of which only a fourth are inhabited)¹ which are seen as a path of lesser resistance by international criminals. That fragility also is apparent in the operational capacity of law enforcement agencies to gather and act on information.

The presence of non-state armed groups in the land border with Senegal adds another factor to this complex situation.

This chapter is structured in four sections, starting with an overview of the known dimensions of transnational organized crime involving Guinea-Bissau, with a particular focus on illicit drug trafficking. The second section presents the challenges faced by the Bissau-Guinean State in its fight against that type of crime. The third section reviews some of the ongoing initiatives undertaken by the national authorities, especially the ones receiving support from the United Nations. The final section presents recommendations and priorities on the way forward.

The status of transnational organized crime in Guinea-Bissau

In the early 2000s, the European market for cocaine gradually expanded while the North American market started to slow down. In this expansion, West Africa became a major transit route for illicit drugs produced in South America and headed to

1. Peter Mendy and Richard Lobban, Jr. (Eds.), *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Prs, 2013

European cities.² In the sub-region, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea (Conakry), Senegal and The Gambia were particularly targeted as a northern transit hub for the illegal drug market of Southern Europe.³ Evidence of drug shipments arriving in non-commercial airstrips in Guinea-Bissau remain anecdotal, along with reported stand-offs between the police, military forces and foreign traffickers. The chain of custody of confiscated drugs became long and blurred, with seized shipments eventually disappearing.⁴

The geographical location of Guinea-Bissau – almost at the midpoint between major ports and airfields in Europe and South America – makes the country highly attractive to traffickers. The largely uninhabited islands of the Bijagós archipelago also offer a propitious stage for undetected illicit activities. Poverty, coupled with the fragility of the State, make some people, including poorly paid public servants (whether or not in uniform), targets of corruptive practices.

In the last five years, according to the records of national law enforcement agencies, police operations in the country seized more than 32kg of cocaine and 67kg of marijuana, most at the Bissau international airport. Cocaine was mostly transported in capsules ingested by individuals who had embarked from South America. To date, national law enforcement agencies have not recorded cases of interception at other land or sea borders, which makes it difficult to assess the amount actually trafficked. Most of the suspects detained were nationals who were thought to attract less scrutiny when returning from abroad to their own country.

Challenges in the fight against transnational organized crime

Guinea-Bissau currently faces two major challenges in the fight against transnational organized crime: (1) the limited ability of national law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence related to organized criminal groups involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion and other related illicit activities; and (2) the lack of operational capacities to act on the information gathered and effectively control entry and exit points along national borders. An additional and interrelated challenge is the presence of non-state armed groups along the northern border with Senegal.

Limited information gathering and exchange

National law enforcement agencies lack accurate information about the operation of organized criminal groups in Guinea-Bissau, as well as how they might be connected across West Africa and elsewhere. Although there are reasonable suspicions that the illicit drug trafficking business is connected to other crimes such as human trafficking, money laundering and extortion, the exact relationships between the groups behind those activities remain unknown.

2. Stephen K. Van Riper, *Tackling Africa's First Narco-State: Guinea-Bissau in West Africa*, PKSOI Paper, September 2014.

3. Markus Schultze-Kraft, *Getting real about an illicit 'external stressor': Transnational cocaine trafficking through West Africa*, Evidence Report 72, Institute of Development Studies, June 2014.

4. UNODC, *Status of the drugs trafficking in West Africa/Guinea Bissau*.

There are four police agencies in Guinea-Bissau with responsibilities for combating organized crime, including illicit drug trafficking: the Public Order Police, the National Guard, the Judiciary Police and Interpol. Although the number of police relative to the national population is above average, the quality of the training, the certification standards and the operational capacity of those agencies do not always meet the requirements for effective enforcement of the rule of law.

The degree to which national law enforcement agencies are capable of coordinating effective responses to the complex operations of the networks involved in organized crime, including drug trafficking, in Guinea-Bissau and West Africa remains very limited. As a result, strategies and operations to counter the expansion of illegal activities in Guinea-Bissau are not as integrated as they could be.

Inadequate operational capacity

Among the four police agencies, the Judiciary Police holds investigative authority for major crimes, including organized crime and drug trafficking. The Judiciary Police has 181 officers who are mostly based in the city of Bissau. Hence, operations related to drug trafficking are mostly concentrated at the Bissau international airport, with hardly any attention paid to the islands and the regions, especially the most remote ones.

The Judiciary Police hosts a specialized group tasked with combating international organized crime, the Transnational Crime Unit (TCU), established under the

framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) and supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in close partnership with the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). Despite benefiting from external technical support and capacity-building initiatives, the TCU faces the same critical limitations as the Judiciary Police. The TCU is equipped with only eight officers, and its Chief reports that in five out of the latest ten of the TCU's cases, suspects were released almost immediately after detention. Moreover, the focus of the TCU is primarily on drug trafficking, which excludes addressing cases of money laundering, illegal arms trafficking or human trafficking.⁵ Since the networks behind those illicit activities are believed to be interrelated,⁶ the focus on a single activity hinders the prospects of a holistic and effective response to the causes and consequences of illicit drug trafficking.

Similarly, the National Guard is largely unable to effectively assert its authority over illegal land crossings or monitor the sea borders of Guinea-Bissau given its limited logistical and technical capacities and infrastructure. For instance, during an assessment carried out by UNIOGBIS in September 2014 in close collaboration with local authorities, seven National Guard officials were found to be monitoring 174 km of borders by foot patrol.⁷

5. Interview with the Chief of the Transnational Crime Unit, Bissau, 27 November 2014.

6. Schultze-Kraft, *Getting real about an illicit 'external stressor'*.

7. UNIOGBIS, with National Guard Command Staff, Assessment Field Mission, 16 June-3 July 2014.

The potential destabilizing role of non-state armed groups

There are reports that members of the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) are illegally operating in the regions of Cacheu and Oio in the northern area that borders with Senegal. The MFDC started in 1982 as a separatist movement in southern Senegal and has since been in dispute with Dakar over territorial issues. Over the years, various cease-fires have been reached between the MFDC and the Senegalese military, only to be repeatedly broken. Guinea-Bissau and Senegal have since jointly planned initiatives to counter the power of the MFDC, which included extrajudicial arrests and the exchange of members of MFDC and the militants of the Liberation Front for the National Independence of Guinea (FLING).⁸

The recent activities of the MFDC within the borders of Guinea-Bissau include cattle rustling from local communities, establishment of illegal check points and attempts to control the movement of Bissau-Guinean citizens in their own country, including an incident involving a convoy of the Minister of Internal Administration on 23 November 2014.

What is being done?

A number of initiatives guide the fight against transnational organized crime in Guinea-Bissau, including the 2008 ECOWAS Political Declaration, the 2008-2011 ECOWAS Regional Action Plan and the 2010 WACI Freetown Commitment,

which calls for “vigorous action from all ECOWAS Member States to combat drug trafficking and organized crime”.⁹ WACI aims at enhancing the capacity of national and regional law enforcement agencies in the areas of drug interdiction, forensics, intelligence, money-laundering, criminal justice and border management.

Within the framework of WACI, on 3 December 2010, the Ministers of Justice, Interior and Finance signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNODC and UNIOGBIS on the establishment of the TCU in the Judiciary Police, which acts as a primary in-country point of contact in the fight against transnational organized crime, drug trafficking and cross-border matters.

UNIOGBIS, UNODC and other international organizations are also providing support to national authorities through vetting and certifying police and military personnel; offering capacity-building initiatives through daily mentoring and advising; delivering specialized trainings and workshops; and developing standard operating procedures and national strategies and action plans.

⁸. Vincent Foucher, *Wade's Senegal and its relations with Guinea-Bissau: Brother, patron or regional hegemon?* Occasional Paper n° 132, South African Foreign Policy and African Drivers Programme, January 2013.

⁹. UNODC, *Status of the drug trafficking in West Africa/ Guinea-Bissau*.

Priorities on the way forward

The newly elected Government of Guinea-Bissau has been proactive in addressing organized crime, despite the limited means currently available. Members of Parliament are beginning to raise their voices more loudly on what was previously treated as a taboo subject. On 27 October 2014, the Popular National Assembly issued a declaration asserting its willingness to adopt and adapt existing legislation (e.g. for the confiscation of illegally obtained assets) to stamp out this illegal activity. A new Prosecutor-General and a new Head of the Judiciary Police were appointed in the first 100 days of the new Government. Those initiatives illustrate the willingness of the Bissau-Guinean institutions to address transnational organized crime .

Still, successfully addressing transnational organized crime in Guinea-Bissau will require the development of a centralized interagency communication system that can gather the necessary information and coordinate responses by law enforcement operatives. Once properly vetted, law enforcement operatives require advanced and specialized training in investigative techniques. They would also require equipment to properly monitor land and sea borders.

Ranked 177 (out of 187 countries surveyed) in the 2014 Human Development Index, Guinea-Bissau cannot do it all alone. To combat transnational organized crime, the Government stresses that it needs partners more than it needs donors. And indeed,

partnership here seems to be in the interest of all concerned stakeholders, within the region and beyond – for each border has two sides, and for each illegal drug transaction, there is a seller and a buyer.

PART III

**Hostile groups
and unconventional
threats: sub-regional
perspectives**

CHAPTER 5

Non-state actors in the most fragile states: South Sudan, Somalia and Central African Republic

Hilde Frafjord Johnson

Introduction

This chapter addresses the non-state armed actors in South Sudan, but also expands the perspectives and includes cases like the Central African Republic (CAR) and Somalia, the most fragile states. This discussion will analyse matters of security and protection of civilians in the absence of the state, as well as the implications for local dynamics and for the United Nations.

The state may exist in name, but in reality these countries do not have what we normally define as “the State” – functional state institutions and structures. Even if the entities exist, they may be largely dysfunctional or extremely weak – or we may be talking about a ‘phantom state’ (which in 2007 was the title of an ICG report on CAR). Despite declaring its independence on 9 July 2011, South Sudan is a country virtually without a functional state in the normal sense of the word. In such countries, as in the case of CAR, the state will not protect the people from violence. In Somalia, the near absence of the state is well-known.

In these countries, the state’s security services and forces will either not be there or will not be able or willing to protect the people and their property. In some cases, in fact, the state security forces may be the ones being used by a particular ethnic or

elite group to attack civilians. This implies that the state has no monopoly on the use of violence. When there is no one to protect communities and individuals, they must fend for themselves.

Security is everyone’s most basic need – at times even more so than water and food. One can manage without food and water for a few days, and most communities in Africa have coping mechanisms to handle such situations. But it is much worse to feel totally vulnerable without being able to defend yourself, your family or your community. If you can be subject to attacks, violence, loss of property, rapes or the abduction or random murder of your wife and children, you have to do something.

Security is often underestimated as the prime driver of the actions of individuals and communities. Those whom we usually regard as non-state actors generally are not people who are deviously pursuing an agenda against the state or their own communities; they are resorting to the means they have to protect themselves and their families.

Basic organizing entity: ethnicity

In the absence of institutions of the state, ethnicity remains the most important

organizing entity in Africa and many other places in the world.

- Ethnicity becomes the only 'institution' you can trust; blood is thicker than everything else. In security situations, this is critical: you are less likely to be killed by your kin.
- Ethnicity – if well organized – is the only guarantee for your protection. Rather than trying to build a neutral entity that cannot be trusted anyway, it is seen as better to improve the organization of ethnically-based security.
- Ethnicity is a sustainable entity over time. While armies and police may be dependent on the whims of leaders and the unpredictability of events, ethnicity remains; it will always be with you and can always be relied upon – in the view of many kin.

This implies that non-state actors that develop security based on ethnicity – armed youth, armed militias or even warlords, as in South Sudan, Somalia and, to some degree, CAR (although in CAR religion has also been used as a mobilizing tool) – are more reliable to many people:

- In CAR, the Séléka and Anti-Balaka forces were organized to defend different communities in order to fill the security vacuum following a virtual collapse of the state. While religion seems to play a role, the rebels also have their separate regional identities.
- In Somalia, clan-based militias and warlords have operated as the primary guarantors of security for decades.

Although some claim to have religious affiliations and ideological motives, in Somalia this is usually opportunistic. Clan identity is the organizing principle of almost everything, including protection. You bet on the horse that is likely to carry the day (or the moment), until things change again. You change positions. But the fundamentals continue to be clan identity.

- In South Sudan, there has been a different type of ethnic mobilization, and community security and militias have been used as more reliable protectors than the state. The next section offers more detail about their characteristics.

The case of South Sudan more specifically

In South Sudan, inter-communal violence is prevalent, and the culture of cattle-raiding among pastoralist cattle herders has permeated into something else. Large-scale armed youth with modern uniforms, weapons and means of communication organize like armies with command structures. This has led to columns of 6-8,000 armed youth perpetrating attacks in cycles of violence.

During the latest crisis and civil war in 2013/2014, they cooperated with more organized forces in numbers of more than 20,000. They are all mobilized on an ethnic basis, primarily through the age class system. This led to the establishment in 1991 of the so-called White Army of the Nuer and the

Galweng – a similar Dinka movement, which no longer functions. These major ethnically mobilized armies of armed youth are often seen as an affront to the state.

In addition, there are a plethora of militias or warlords, also largely ethnically-based and often mobilized on the basis of grievances. Many such groups prevailed after independence, although there have been frequent efforts towards reconciliation and reintegration to reduce the numbers operating outside the structure of the state.

A critical dilemma for both categories of non-state actors, i.e. armed youth mobilized along ethnic lines and militias, is that they protect their own community in a way that inadvertently affects others. This implies that civilians end up suffering, either through direct attacks, displacement or other indirect threats. While this is not a zero sum game, it is often very likely that the protection of one community will lead to the suffering of the other.

It is also for this reason that the state's role as a neutral protector is so important, if indeed it can be made to function in this way. This is also why the United Nations and its forces can be very important if they are provided with the mandate, the resources and the capacity to act to protect civilians.

What are the implications for the United Nations of these major threats among non-state actors?

Pre-crisis (2011-2013):

- *Political:* Peace negotiations were conducted, but were very difficult

because inter-communal violence was based on decades of grievances and an absence of state protection. There was no ideology, no political agenda and not much to negotiate; instead, it was about repairing relations and reparation- and reconciliation processes that were very complex. These processes take a very long time.

- *Protection of civilians:* This was extremely challenging because the resources did not in any way match the needs facing the threats in this kind of hostile environment. The United Nations therefore lost credibility both with the people and the non-state actors. Unless there is a willingness to put many more resources behind a mission, this is likely to happen elsewhere, too.
- *Enabling state protection through mandated support to state security forces:* Police and the rule of law are solutions that are far too complex and long-term to be relied upon for vulnerable civilians. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) did not have the mandate to do defense reform, although it was badly needed. At the same time, the role of the police in the protection of civilians was limited. Basically, the United Nations was not in a position to adequately push for the state security forces and services to significantly improve their own protection of civilians.

During the crisis (after 15 December 2013):

The Government's armed forces cracked and were divided along ethnic lines, with a Dinka-dominated SPLA government force and a non-state armed rebellion (consisting of opposition forces of defected SPLA and White Army of Nuer origin):

- *Political:* The United Nations had no role, but IGAD (The regional organization for the Horn of Africa) negotiates with both state and non-state actors.
- *Posture of the United Nations:* The mission's impartial stance was challenged because the United Nations had been seen as taking sides against the non-state actors in favour of the government in MONUSCO (the Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC), Mali and other countries when there was a crisis.
- *Protection of civilians:* This was impossible through engagement in battle because there was neither a mandate nor resources. As a fall-back solution, the United Nations opened the gates of its bases to more than 100,000 civilians seeking protection from the violence.

Among the implications, the foremost was the hostility towards the United Nations from both sides:

- UN bases were attacked by non-state actors – armed youth aligned with the opposition or with the government. Civilians seeking shelter with the

United Nations were also killed on two occasions.

- UN helicopters were shot at multiple times, and shot down by both sides, one was shot down by accident – by a state actor, the SPLA in 2012, and another in 2014 by intention (after threatening) by the non-state actor.
- UN staff were arrested and taken hostage – although not for long – and later released.

While these are issues specific to South Sudan and UNMISS, there are some broader implications to consider.

Broader implications for the United Nations

Whatever happens in peace talks on South Sudan, the country will remain without a functional state for a long time, as will CAR and Somalia – although the cases are different. What does this imply?

During the UNSSC-ZIF seminar in Berlin there were speakers discussing Nigeria, Mali and the spread of extremist groups across the Sahel. These are very different situations with very dissimilar non-state actors. However, there are many common factors behind the decisions of communities and individuals to resort to violence to protect themselves, their families and their communities in a security vacuum. Breeding grounds for such movements develop when there is the sense that the state is not able to protect its citizens.

- Although there are different cases, the same issues often apply: When there is a weak state, the absence of security and protection permits more extreme movements to operate in local areas. Communities allow them to be there, because it is better to have some security than to have none.
- CAR and South Sudan are less prone to become breeding grounds for the same ideologically-based extremist groups as recruitment is more difficult for a variety of reasons. However, there is always a risk that countries without functional state institutions may be used as hide-outs or launching pads for extremist

operations.

- Since the more extremist Somali elements are operating in Kenya – a neighbouring country to South Sudan – these groups are not far away from South Sudan, Sudan or CAR. CAR is also not that far from Cameroon, the current hide-out for Boko Haram.

In other words, there may be a ‘belt’ of security vacuums across the African continent which can be utilized by extremist forces, and where the Eastern coastal-based extremists may meet the Sahel-based ones.

What does this mean for the United Nations?

Five issues deserve further investigation and deliberation:

1. A regional perspective is critical across countries. A national focus does not work when facing these challenges.
2. At the same time, our focus must be local. We need to keep our ears to the ground, and in particular among youth. People operate locally, are betrayed locally (by their national leaders) and are recruited locally. We need to know what’s going on where things happen – on the ground, in the field.
3. Local people’s main issue – their protection – must be of the highest priority to the army, police, rule of law institutions, the United Nations and the international community, and we are not doing this well. Otherwise, people will resort to non-state actors for

protection, whether they arm their own community youth or ethnicity-based groups or permit extremist groups to operate in their territory. This work has a national basis, but must be done across borders.

4. We need to focus on incentives and disincentives for joining armed non-state actors: What are the drivers? How can the incentives be changed? And in the case of extremist groups, how can disincentives be effectively applied?
5. The United Nations is best positioned as a political actor to talk to all parties in a conflict, whatever their background, position or ideological stand. It is different for countries/Member States who can choose whom to relate to in their bilateral relations. The United Nations, on the other hand, is a global organization, and has a special role to play. If the United Nations is not seen as the interlocutor that can relate to all, then the world community and all unprotected people around the world will be the losers.

CHAPTER 6

The Case of Boko Haram in Nigeria

Ahmed Rufai Abubakar

Introduction

On the night of 14–15 April 2014, about 270 female students were abducted from a government secondary school in Chibok town in Borno State, Nigeria. The Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Struggle), popularly known as "Boko Haram", claimed responsibility. The international community expressed outrage, which quickly developed into a sense of urgency to take coordinated and effective action to stop the terrorist group. A summit of the Heads of State of the Governments of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria was quickly convened in Paris on 17 May, where a number of regional initiatives against the terrorist groups were agreed upon. Many countries and organizations undertook to support Nigeria's efforts to address the insurgency. The UN Secretary-General designated his Special Representative for West Africa to serve as his High-Level Representative for Nigeria. In Nigeria, the abduction led to calls for a more drastic response by the Government, not only to secure the safe release of the abducted school girls, but to generally address the scourge in a more comprehensive way. Consequently, the Nigerian Government intensified its response, in addition to the state of emergency that had been imposed on the three states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe since May 2013.

Boko Haram had actually been carrying out terrorist activities since 2010, first against police and military formations and personnel mainly in the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. These activities gradually grew in scope and intensity, and were eventually carried out against soft targets as well (e.g. schools, churches, mosques, markets/shopping centres, motor parks, petrol stations). Thousands of civilians have been killed, while thousands others have suffered injuries, displacement and loss of businesses and property as victims of direct Boko Haram attacks or of Government responses against the insurgents. It is pertinent to note that Boko Haram had carried out a suicide bomb attack against the UN building in Abuja on 26 August 2011, killing 21 and wounding 60. This came less than two months after the group carried out an attack inside the police headquarters in Abuja, targeting the Inspector-General of Police.

Five years into its insurgency, far from being defeated or weakened, Boko Haram seems to have grown stronger and become better organized, resourced and supplied. Eight months after the mass abduction of 15 April, the Chibok girls are still in Boko Haram's custody and more girls and women have been abducted by the group, which now controls territories in the three most-affected states.

Who are Boko Haram insurgents? What is their social background and what are their objectives? Do they have an organizational structure? How do they recruit and conduct their operations? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions within its limited scope.

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-jihad (Boko Haram)

In the early 2000s, a group of radical youths in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, denounced the clerical leadership of the Islamic establishment for being morally and politically corrupt. Inspired by the hijra (Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina), they left the city to set up a "true" Islamic society based on a strict interpretation of sharia law in Kanama, a small village in Yobe State near the border with Niger. In December 2003, the group, which by then had been given the attention-grabbing name "Nigerian Taliban" by the press, clashed with the police following a dispute with local fishermen. A heavy-handed crackdown by security forces ensued, during which most of the group members (estimated to be around 60 at the time) were killed.¹

Sometime in 2004, a handful of remnants of the "Nigerian Taliban" reemerged in Maiduguri, now under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic young man. A mosque named after the influential Wahhabi scholar Ibn *Taimiyyah*² served as the headquarters of the group. Spurred by donations from local and foreign donors –

some of whom were unsuspecting – and an increasing number of disciples from disenfranchised youths, including from neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger, the group quickly grew in size and spread into Yobe, Bauchi and even far away Niger states. Authorities generally left the group alone until its rebellious character began to manifest, leading to sporadic clashes with law enforcement agents.

Guiding principles

The group's known guiding principles include:

- All power is for Allah, and democratic governance conflicts with Islam.
- The group is a saved sect and is carrying out the duty of reviving the spirit of struggle (jihad) in Nigeria.
- Western education schools were established to serve missionary and colonial ideals and interests: Girls and boys are mixed in classes, and concepts and theories such as Darwin's theory of biological evolution conflict with the tenets of Islam. Because of this, Western schools should be forbidden and not attended. Hence the attribute of "Boko Haram".³

1. Thorough background on this phase of the insurgency, known among observers as the Kanama period, can be found in Perouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (2014). *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*. African Studies Centre. Leiden

2. Walker, Andrew (2012). *What is Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace.

3. The name means "Western" or "non-Islamic" education is a sin.

- Government employment (civil or military service) is forbidden under current dispensation.

Meanwhile, a number of sources spoke of an association between the group and a democratically elected Governor in Borno State, obviously for mutual benefits: the Governor achieves political aims⁴ in return for financial support he extends to the group. It was reported that Mohamed Yusuf, the group's founder, enjoyed political protection and largess from the Government due to this relationship.

Objectives

Other than the above-mentioned guiding principles, the only known founding objective of the group is the establishment of an Islamic state headed by an "Imam". How this was going to be achieved was not described in their writing and preaching. However, Mohamed Yusuf was regarded as the Imam and received allegiance from young disciples. Moreover, members of the group were also increasingly disregarding state laws, while also taking the law into their own hands.

In April 2007, Sheik Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam, a popular cleric who had criticized the group's interpretation of the Qur'an, was killed by gunmen in his mosque in Kano, and all fingers pointed to Boko Haram. The late Adam, a graduate of Madinah University in Saudi Arabia and a Wahhabi reformist, was at some point a teacher of Mohamed Yusuf and had commended Yusuf for his brilliance. Also both of them preached in

the same mosque in Maiduguri. Every year during the month of Ramadan, Sheikh Adam travelled from Kano all the way to Maiduguri where he interpreted Qur'an in a mosque owned by a well-known businessman and philanthropist to avid Hausa-speaking disciples. Mohamed Yusuf, who resided in the capital city, preached in both Kanuri and Hausa languages. The two split, reportedly around 2002-2004, over issues related to the guiding principles and objectives of the group. The assassination of Sheikh Adam was, in retrospect, seen as the first act of religious/political violence by the group.

The group continued its confrontation with authorities while expanding its base. Yusuf released several videos where he condemned Western education and lambasted the political class in Nigeria. In July 2009, the lid on the simmering tensions blew off as Boko Haram members clashed with local police in Maiduguri for refusing to wear helmets as they drove their motorbikes to a funeral of one of their comrades. A number of Boko Haram members were injured in the fracas, and about six consequently died.

Mohamed Yusuf wrote an open letter to the federal Government, giving it an ultimatum of 40 days to resolve the crisis or threatening that the country would face "jihad operations". If there was any response to this letter, or any form of dialogue between

4. Harnischfeger, Johannes (2014). Boko Haram and its Muslim critics: Observations from Yobe State. African Studies Centre. Leiden.

the group and the local authorities, the records were not readily available and, in any case, because of the restrictive scope of this paper, we are unable to present a detailed study of what happened, including efforts made by authorities. However, what followed were attacks against police stations and personnel in Maiduguri and a number of towns and villages in northeastern Nigeria. Security forces deployed to the Borno State capital subsequently retaliated and reportedly embarked on a bloody campaign, rounding up and executing hundreds of suspected Boko Haram members. On 28 July, Government troops attacked Yusuf's home where his disciples barricaded themselves, and on 30 July he was captured and subsequently killed in what has since been understood to be an extrajudicial execution carried out in a police station.

Fifty or so disciples, including Abubakar Shekau, the Vice-Chairman, reportedly escaped and fled Nigeria, only to regroup over the next year in AQIM-administered training camps in Mauritania and other parts of the Sahel. The group reemerged in June 2010, announcing its link with Al-Qaeda and a new set of objectives, including:

- revenge for the extrajudicial killing of their spiritual leader in particular, and for what was believed to be a heavy and indiscriminate reprisal against the group. Their targets include defense and security personnel and Christians as well as Muslims who refuse to adhere to their principles;

- freeing their detained comrades from detention centres; and
- making Nigeria ungovernable.

As with many non-state armed groups, it is clear that Boko Haram had multiple agendas and objectives that evolved according to circumstances. It is pertinent to note that the movement found inspiration not only in ideology, but also in the social rebellion against what they rightly or wrongly saw as injustice and oppression. This is a founding narrative seen in many other Islamist terrorist organizations. For instance, in the frequent videos the movement releases, Shekau is filmed against a backdrop of the same "Rayat al-uqab" black banner flag with the Arabic inscription used by ISIL.

Social background and context

The advent of Islam in northern Nigeria dates back to the ninth century (1000 AD), hundreds of years before colonialism reached the region in the nineteenth century. The religious landscape was calm and quiet for almost 800 years until the emergence of two reformers in the eighteenth century: Sheik Usman dan Fodio, in the areas that today are referred to as the northwest, north central and part of the northeast of the country; and Mohamed Amin El Kanemi, in the remaining parts of the northeast and the territories beyond the present-day borders into Chad. The practice, then, of mixing Islamic rites and paganism on the one hand and the repressive culture of the local

authorities on the other hand inspired dan Fodio in particular to start social and political reform based on the Sunni Maliki School of Islam. However, way into the colonial period and shortly after independence, the religious landscape became one of continuous mutation, characterized by a multiplicity of tendencies, two of which were invariably predominant:

1. The “Boko Haram” syndrome: Western education was not only seen as synonymous with colonialism and Christianity, but also as supplanting Islamic/Arabic schools and creating a new elite. Those who went to western schools became the new set of leaders, while those who refused to go or to send their wards saw themselves increasingly marginalized and impoverished. While the Islamic school system continued, those who emerged from those schools were not admitted into Nigerian universities, no matter how brilliant they were, because they did not have the two main requirements: credit in English and mathematics. In the mid-1970s, some universities in the north made provisions for admitting such students for specially designed courses of studies – mainly Arabic and Hausa languages, as well as Islamic studies and sharia law. Many of these students ended up getting scholarships to study in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan where reformist ideas and activities (e.g. Salafism/Wahhabism) had already taken root.

2. Salafism/Wahhabism: Many African scholars – including Bakary Sambe, a researcher at the Center of the Study of Religions, University Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis and coordinator of the Observatory of Radicalisms and Religious Conflicts in Africa – have argued that Salafists and Wahhabis believe that they are the only correct interpreters of the Qur’an and consider moderate Muslims to be infidels. They therefore seek to convert all Muslims and to ensure that their own fundamentalist version of Islam prevails. In any case, Nigerian students in the middle-eastern countries were exposed to this reality and to the growing sectarian divides in the Middle East and beyond among Sunni, Sufi, Shi’a, etc. Related events were broadcast live so that everyone could see them and become inspired. The 1979 Iranian revolution completed the picture.

Again, it is pertinent to quickly mention that it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a detailed study of how the combination of religious and colonial history and practices in northern Nigeria and the reformist tendencies and sectarian divides in the Islamic world helped to shape the social background of Boko Haram’s leaders. However, this simplistic exposé should provide enough insights to allow an understanding of the historical context and background that define the thinking and indeed the personalities of the Boko Haram insurgents. Mr. Yusuf himself was said to be a school dropout. He went to “Boko”

western school. At one time he joined Ibraheem Yakub El Zakzaky to found the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (a Shia group). He left and joined the Izala group and trained under Sheikh Jaafar Adam before forming his own movement.

Other relevant social factors include: poverty; youth unemployment; environmental degradation; population explosion; lack of government presence; political actors using youth as thugs for self-protection and political gain; political discourse over power rotation between the North and South; and the amnesty programme for the Niger Delta Militant groups (this was added by former President Obasanjo). The northeastern region is the poorest part of Nigeria, where 71.5 percent of the population lives in absolute poverty and more than half are malnourished. This provides the conditions conducive to radicalization of youth and their recruitment for terrorist activities.⁵

Boko Haram, however, is not the first of its kind in northern Nigeria. The region has had an extended history of ethno-religious violence since independence. In the 1980s, a violent Islamist sect called Maitatsine grew out of the slums of Kano. Its leader, Muhammadu Marwa, declared himself a prophet and attracted a huge following by preaching against affluent Muslims and Western materialism and actively recruiting and arming young boys. Anyone seen with a bicycle, watch, radio or excessive amount of money was considered an “infidel”. In December 1980, security forces led an extremely bloody clampdown of the sect in Kano, during which 4,177

people died, including Maitatsine himself. His followers, labeled as “the fanatics” by the press, dispersed and staged other uprisings in Bulunkutu (near Maiduguri), Kabuga in Kano, and Yola in the following years which were all brutally suppressed by security forces with casualties running into the thousands. In Nigeria, violence over religious and sectarian lines, especially in connection with elections, can break out on a regular basis.⁶

Organizational structure

Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Struggle) is the name of the group, which never refers to itself as Boko Haram. Surprisingly little is known about the group’s structure and internal dynamics. Its strategic goals are not very well-defined and seem to be evolving. While the group at times makes references to other hardline groups such as Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda and ISIL, Boko Haram is not believed to have any formal operational cooperation with global Islamic jihad.

It is believed to have a cell-like structure governed by a 30-person Shura Council, where each member is responsible for a geographical area with operatives, under the leadership of Shekau. There are likely four main factions within Boko Haram

⁵. Figures based on UNICEF’s 2014 assessments.

⁶. Further background to the Maitatsine uprising can be found in Isichei, E. (1987). The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A revolt of the disinherited. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. Vol. 17, pp. 194-208.

that operate independently of each other.⁷ This structure might explain the lack of consistency in the group's attacks, which follow no clear tactical logic as could be expected of a group with a centralized decision-making structure/mechanism.

The hierarchy of Boko Haram is dominated by Kanuri people, an ethnic group that straddles across borders in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad. As a diaspora, Kanuris also live in large numbers in CAR, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. There are questions about a possible hidden agenda to redefine borders and re-establish the Kanem Bornu Empire, which at its height encompassed an area covering northeastern Nigeria, eastern Niger, northern Cameroon and much of Chad.

Recruitment and methodology

Since the kidnapping of the Chibok school girls, Boko Haram appears to have embarked on a near systematic campaign of abductions and forcible conscription of teenage boys and girls, taken during raids of villages in the northeast and reportedly indoctrinated in radical Qur'an schools. Some served as child soldiers who are allegedly used to obtain intelligence, conduct reconnaissance and serve as lookouts before being sent to the frontlines during Boko Haram's raids of military infrastructure or civilian settlements, where they often form the "first wave" of the attack. However, there are also indications that Boko Haram is increasingly offering monetary incentives. A recent UNOWA-UNOCA⁸ assessment

mission to Cameroon interviewed locals who claimed that new recruits were lured with the sum of 300,000 Naira (US\$1,600), a motorbike and an AK-47 rifle to join the insurgency.

From its hit-and-runs on police and security forces, financed by bank robberies and occasional kidnappings, Boko Haram has shifted tactics to the deliberate targeting of civilians as well as schools, churches and mosques. After the Chibok kidnappings, they began to seize and hold territory. In July 2014, the group captured its first settlement when it overran and seized the town of Damboa in Borno. The capture of the town of some 20,000 inhabitants, which is home to army and police barracks, marked the start of a blitzing campaign of territorial conquests as Boko Haram took control of a dozen or more local government areas in Borno State during August. This culminated with the capture of Bama, the second-largest city in the state, located only some 100 kilometers from Maiduguri. After a weeklong battle in the city of Konduga, the military pushed Boko Haram back from the state capital. However, as of November, Boko Haram is believed to be in control of at least 18 local government areas, roughly comprising a territory the size of Belgium. In August, Boko Haram leader Shekau announced that the city of Gwoza had been

7. Walker, Andrew (2012). What is Boko Haram? nited States Institute of Peace.

8. The United Nations Office of West Africa (UNOWA) and the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) are Special Political Missions led by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA)

placed under an Islamic caliphate and that sharia law would be enforced. Witness dispositions coming from Mubi, a key city in Adamawa State seized and renamed in late October, describe brutal enforcement of Islamic law, including hand-decapitations, lashings and executions that could suggest that Boko Haram is increasingly instituting governance systems in its captured areas.

The use of suicide bombs and improvised explosive devices began with attacks in Abuja in the summer of 2011. The number of these kinds of attacks, which have almost exclusively been carried out in northern Nigeria, reached a peak in 2012 and again in 2014. Boko Haram has also used young girls as suicide bombers. In the Ramadan month in July 2014, female suicide bombers, all under 16 years old, carried out four successful attacks on universities and fuel stations in Kano. The decision to send young girls to the front lines is believed to have been taken by Hafsat Mako, a widow of a Boko Haram commander, who was arrested in late July 2014.⁹

The regional dimension/response

As the insurgency continues to grow in strength, the spill-over to neighbouring countries is becoming more evident. Since August 2014, Boko Haram has intensified its cross-border raids into Cameroon and has been engaged in fierce firefights and exchanges of rockets and artillery with its army, especially around the Fotokol, which lies strategically at the opening of the vast

Extreme North province in Cameroon. Niger and Chad are also directly affected. The Paris Summit of 17 May 2014 decided on a number of initiatives and measures at a regional level. These include:

- Real-time intelligence-sharing: Intelligence Fusion Units has been established with the support of partners;
- Operationalization of the Joint Multinational Task Force (JMNTF): Almost all Member Countries are deployed;
- Establishment of the headquarters of the JMNTF: this has not yet been done;
- Counter-terrorism strategy: This has been developed but not yet adopted for implementation.

Response by the United Nations

The UN response to the Boko Haram threat has taken different and complementary forms:

1. Following the Chibok kidnapping, the Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Representative to Nigeria: High-Level Consultations; member of the Paris Summit Follow up meetings; UNOWA participated in the development of a CTS;

⁹ Zenn, Jacob; Pearson, Elizabeth (2014). Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram. *Journal of Terrorism Research*. University of St. Andrews.

2. The High Commissioner for Human Rights visited in March 2014 and the Deputy Secretary-General visited in August 2014.
3. An Integrated Support Package was developed by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Abuja, and the Strategic Response Plan and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2014-2017 have been adapted to reflect the conflict and humanitarian context.
4. The Resident Coordinator was appointed to double as the Humanitarian Coordinator, and a Peace and Development Advisor and a Senior Human Rights Officer have been recruited.
5. Several agencies have strengthened their presence, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will establish a full-fledged office in early 2015. The UNCT has a contingency plan on the humanitarian consequences of potential election-related violence.
6. The Government of Nigeria was reluctant to give its consent for UN agencies/other aid organizations to bring needed assistance and support in the northeast.
7. At Headquarters, a Senior Action Group chaired by Deputy Secretary-General meets regularly and gives guidance on the UN response. An Inter-Agency Task Force on Nigeria (co-chaired by the Department of Political Affairs

and the United Nations Development Programme) also meets regularly to assess the situation and provides technical support to the Senior Action group. Furthermore, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force plans to provide support to the Nigerian Government's soft approach strategy and build human rights capacity for the security forces.

8. A Rights Up Front Assessment Mission was deployed to Nigeria from 24-28 November 2014, and a light team will be deployed to support.

Challenges faced by the United Nations

The challenges faced by the United Nations in its response include:

- inadequate capacities on the ground, including staffing and funding. This is being addressed through the deployment of a light team and more funding;
- the absence of effective coordination of humanitarian services in the affected areas. Only a small percentage of people in need of humanitarian assistance have access to support;
- the need to effect a change in the attitude of security forces regarding respect for human rights; and
- a lack of UN presence at all in the areas under the control of Boko Haram, because of insecurity.

Conclusion

Like most armed insurgencies, Boko Haram has not emerged from a vacuum, and neither was it the first insurgent group in Nigeria. The factors that led to the emergence of Boko Haram and other such groups before it are deeply rooted in past and present and need to be deeply understood and addressed comprehensively. Therefore, a multi-dimensional approach is required to permanently resolve the crisis. Nigeria is believed to have the material capacity but requires technical assistance, and this is where the United Nations can make a difference. The Organization has taken the right approach in this regard.

Finally, this contribution will not end without mentioning how women in particular feature in the Boko Haram insurgency and the efforts to address it. It is generally said that in all conflicts, women and children are the most affected and victimized, even though they may have little to do with the root or superficial causes of the conflicts. The Boko Haram conflict is no exception:

1. Women and girls are frequently kidnapped in large numbers, such as in the abduction of the Chibok school girls. Except for the few who were able to escape, none of the abductees had been released at the time of this writing, and more are still being kidnapped. Most worrisome is that except for the disturbing hint given by the leaders of the group about the fate that awaited the abductees, nobody knows where they are, nor can anyone provide the

support and care they may require. Their parents cry their hearts out every day.

2. Young women and girls as young as ten years old are being indoctrinated and used as suicide bombers in public places such as markets and schools. It is believed that many of them have already become victims of the conflict, having lost one or both parents in it.
3. Women activists have joined together and formed the “Bring Back Our Girls Movement”, following the mass abduction of the Chibok school girls. Since April 2014, they came out every day in Abuja to advocate for the safe release of all abductees, but also to organize material and psycho-social support for their families and for the escapees. They contribute substantively in the national debate on the comprehensive approach needed to fight violent extremism and terrorism as well as its consequences. In doing so, these women not only sacrificed the comfort of their home and their professional obligations, but exposed themselves to threats and hazards.

All of these groups of women and girls deserve, in different ways, to be rescued and/or supported.

CHAPTER 7

The Islamic State: Origins, evolution and implications for the United Nations

Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou

Introduction

Over the past year, the group now commonly known as the Islamic State (al Dawla al Islamiya) has taken centre stage in matters of international security. With impressive swiftness, this seemingly-new yet decade-old organization has steadily moved from (1) a domestic concern in Iraq, from where it sprung; to (2) a regional threat in the Levant and, more widely, in the Middle East and North Africa; to (3) a global issue. The group's actions have raised a number of questions related to its nature, its evolution — recent and forecastable — and the consequences of this manifestation.

This chapter provides an overview of the historical background of the Islamic State and highlights the nature of the challenges it is raising, particularly for the United Nations. It argues that this group is at once the embodiment of latter-day transnational non-state armed groups' dynamics and, per se, an innovation by such groups' evolved standards. Accordingly, efforts at re-conceptualizing the nature of the organization and devising strategies towards it are needed. This is all the more so because so far, policy mapping of the Islamic State has been generally pursued along the familiar lines of what was previously done throughout the 2000s to counter Al Qaeda

— a group to which the Islamic State is related but also qualitatively distinct from in important ways.

A complex genealogy

The Islamic State was born five times.

In the late 1990s, 'Arab Afghan' Abu Musab al Zarqawi (Ahmed Fadil Nazzal al Khalayla) returned to his home country of Jordan after having spent most of that decade in Afghanistan. In mid-1999, he established a radical Islamist group named Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad (the Group of Unity and Jihad). The organization remained underground until the United States' invasion of Iraq in March 2003, at which time it became the first group to actively lead insurgency operations against US and UK troops, as well as the United Nations. Al Zarqawi, who had moved to Iraq in May 2002, gained an international profile and became of operational interest to Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda after the attacks he conducted that year on the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad on 7 August and on the United Nations compound on 19 August.

After making contacts with Al Qaeda's number two, Ayman al Dhawahiri, and in the context of the group's mid-2000s

franchising strategy,¹ Al Zarqawi announced on 17 October 2004 that his Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad was folding itself into Bin Laden's Al Qaeda and becoming Tandhim Al Qaeda fi Bilad al Rafidayn (the Organization of Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI). This second incarnation of what would ultimately be the Islamic State was important but short-lived, as AQI was fundamentally associated with al Zarqawi's high-profile and staccato attacks in Iraq in 2004-2005. Featured in a 5 February 2003 United Nations Security Council briefing during which US Secretary of State Colin Powell presented him as a leading emergent threat, al Zarqawi also distinguished himself from Al Qaeda by introducing two key elements which would remain important in this context in the coming years, namely his intra-Islam factionalist attacks on the Shia and his brutality (encapsulated notably by the videotaped beheading of US citizen Nicholas Berg on 7 May 2004).

Al Zarqawi was killed by a US air raid on 7 June 2006, and with his disappearance the link to the global project of Al Qaeda started to decline. Indeed, four months later, on 15 October, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was created, overtaking AQI. (Earlier, on January 15, an umbrella organization to which AQI had adhered – Majliss al Shura al Mujahideen, the Council of the Combatants – had been briefly set up.) Led successively by Abu Hamza al Muhajir (also known as Abu Ayuub al Masri), Abu Omar al Baghdadi (Hamid Daoud Mohammed Khalil al Zawi) and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi

(also known as Abu Du'a), ISI remained the dominant radical Sunni extremist group in Iraq for six and a half years. Then, on 9 April 2013, ISI was expanded under the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (al Dawla al Islamiya fil Iraq wal Shaam, ISIL or ISIS for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). Finally, on 29 June 2014, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who had remained at the helm of the different incarnations of the groups since May 2010, announced the creation of the Islamic State as the Islamic Caliphate with himself as the new Caliph under the name Ibrahim.

Understanding the above complex tapestry is important, as the genealogy of ISIS holds the key to its current multifacetedness and points to different potential policy approaches. Is the Islamic State primarily an Iraqi story? Or an Iraqi story evolved into a Syrian one? Or, as the Zarqawi-Bin Laden original association would indicate, a project which always harboured a global dimension? In point of fact, the Islamic State is all of the above.

In hindsight, what emerges is the picture of an entity passively present in Iraq before the US invasion in 2003 which seized the opportunity to unleash its operations. It

1. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks and in the context of the Global War on Terror, Al Qaeda accelerated its global strategy and spawned six off-shoots: Tandhim al Qaeda fi Bilad al Rafidayn or Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Tandhim al Qaeda fil Jazira al Arabiya or Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Tandhim Al Qaeda fil Maghrib al Islami or Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Qaedat al Jihad fi Oropa or Al Qaeda in Europe, Tandhim al Qaeda fi Misr or Al Qaeda in Egypt and Qaedat al Jihad fil Khorasan or Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Only the first three – AQI, AQAP and AQIM – would become full-fledged independent franchises.

then temporarily folded itself into Al Qaeda, then joined a nationwide Iraqi insurgency platform and then seized the opportunity of the Syria conflict to reactivate its operations and move on to claim a regional and, ultimately, international leadership of radical Islamism.

An ambitious trajectory

Therefore, the evolution of the Islamic State is importantly a combination of (1) an independently-moving battle plan, now focused on Iraq, now centred on Syria; and (2) an adaptation to domestic and regional contingencies. In this inherent duality and flexibility lies one of the strengths of the Islamic State: its forward-looking versatility. This is what allows it to present its struggle continuously under the perception of urgency: the immediate need to resist the US invasion in 2003-2006, the necessity to oppose Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki and his Shiite militias in 2006-2011 and the imperative to go to battle against Syrian President Bashar al Assad and his Alawite troops since 2012.

The ability to stay the course and reinvent itself is what makes the Islamic State potent. Consequently, the Islamic State 'brand' has ensured a certain depth in relation to its social and religious milieu. Most importantly, it has avoided the perception that it was, at any given time, 'finished'. In fact, quite the opposite: in the most recent phase, it has been ambitious enough to decree that its 'mother organization', Bin Laden's Al Qaeda, was, for all intents and purposes, a thing

of the past, and that the future of radical Islam laid in the hands of the Islamic State's 'Caliph' Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and not Bin Laden's successor, Ayman al Dhawahiri.

Post-globalization transnational non-state armed groups feature such competitiveness in their approach, as they have to constantly up the ante to distinguish themselves from other groups. Al Qaeda had introduced this reinvention of the terrorism² matrix, and subsequent groups sought to emulate it. Yet no group has been able to emerge as able to pursue Al Qaeda's plan and indeed potentially transcend it until the Islamic State developed an ambitious new narrative in 2012-2014. The sequence of emancipation is revealing and takes us to where the group stands at this juncture.

By mid-to-late 2010, ISI was at a strategic dead-end. Since January 2007, the United States, with the collaboration of a number of Iraqi tribes from the Al Anbar province, had been pushing against the group in the context of a new military strategy known as 'The Surge', limiting its ability to deploy throughout Iraq. Similarly, rifts had been growing with Al Qaeda, and ISI, led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, was feeling the need to rework its strategy. Three unexpected events allowed it to successfully do precisely that: (1) the Arab Spring which started in January 2011; (2) the death of Bin Laden in May; and (3) the Syrian civil war from June onwards.

2. See Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "Al Qaeda and the Reinvention of Terrorism: Social Sciences and the Challenge of Post-Globalisation Transnational Political Violence", in Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Bernhard Blumenau, eds., *An International History of Terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 230-244.

Seeing the rebirth opportunity offered by this coincidence of events, al Baghdadi, in September 2011, set in motion a plan aimed at positioning his group at the centre of these changes. The first component concerned the revamping of ISI's soldiery in Iraq. Al Baghdadi oversaw a number of prison breaks to free the most ruthless operators whom he appointed, alongside middle-aged former Iraqi army officers (in its heyday up until the early 2000s, the Iraqi Republican Guard was a feared and well-organized corps), as his lieutenants to increase the group's lethality.

Subsequently, in January 2012, al Baghdadi dispatched representatives to Syria to meet with the newly-formed Jabhat al Nosra (the Victory Front) – a Syrian radical Islamist group opposed to Assad – to discuss operational collaboration across the Iraqi-Syrian border. On 9 April 2013, al Baghdadi announced that his group was becoming the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria (al Dawla al Islamiya fil Iraq wal Shaam) with Jabhat al Nosra integrated into it. The move was denied by Jabhat al Nosra whose leader, Abu Mohamed al Jolani (previously close to the Al Qaeda-supporting Lebanese group, Junud al Shaam, the Soldiers of the Levant) declared the next day that Jabhat al Nosra had not joined ISIL/ISIS and that it remained faithful to Al Qaeda. The break with Al Qaeda became formal and public when at two occasions, on 23 May and 7 November, Al Qaeda's current leader, Ayman al Dhawahiri, announced that these moves by ISI had not been authorized and condemned them.

Al Dhawahiri's statements were indicative of Al Qaeda's weakness and ISIS/ISIL's rising power. Again realizing the potential move to make, al Baghdadi chose to ignore the injunctions and moved to accelerate his group's plan. In December 2013/January 2014, he entered the most ambitious phase so far in the group's history. ISIS/ISIL initiated a two-step plan meant to position it within the next six months (before Ramadan of 2014) as the leading insurgency force in both Iraq and Syria. ISIS/ISIL battled a coalition of eight small- and mid-sized Gulf-sponsored Islamist groups in the area around Aleppo, Syria known as Jaysh al Mujahidin (the Army of the Fighters). It managed to defeat it as well as the Supreme Military Command of the Free Syrian Army (Jaish Souriya al Hor, FSA) and established control, albeit in a fragile way, of key sectors in northeastern Syria, in particular the city of Raqqa. Subsequently, most Syrian cities straddling the border with Iraq were captured by ISIS/ISIL: Tal Hamis, Shaddadi, Markada, Suwar, Hraiji, Abu Hammam, Hajjin and Bukkamal.

On the strength of this show of force, ISIS/ISIL turned back to Iraq where it seized control of Iraq's second biggest city, Mosul, on 10 June 2014. Over the next months, and while positioning a force of 3,000 or so men in Raqqa as the centrepiece of its presence in Syria, the group moved on to seize in parallel the Iraqi cities of Siniyah, Sharqat, Saadiya, Anah, Rawah, Habbaniya, Tal Afar, Falluja, Mahmoudiya, Traybil, Tikrit, Abu Ghraib, Sinjar, Yarmouq and Al Qadisiya.

Innovations and responses

To mark the success of his group at the acme of this advance, ISIS/ISIL spokesman Abou Mohammed al Adnani announced on 29 June 2014 that the group was now the Islamic State and that his leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, was the Caliph of the Muslim Umma (community of Muslim believers) around the world as Caliph Ibrahim.

Over the past months, the Islamic State has moved to cement this unprecedented show of force by a non-state armed group. Specifically, the Islamic State has:

- displaced Al Qaeda,³ both within Islamist radical circles and vis-à-vis its state enemies, regionally and internationally;
- secured the formal support of several leading radical Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia: Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya (the Movement for Unification and Jihad in West Africa, MUJAO) on 11 July 2014; Boko Haram in Nigeria on 13 July; Ansar al Sharia (the Partisans of the Sharia) in Derna, Libya on 31 October; Ansar Beit al Maqdis (the Partisans of the Holy House) in Egypt on 10 November; and JundAllah (Soldiers of God) in Pakistan on 17 November;
- generated new groups being set up in its name, such as Junud al Khilafa (the Soldier of the Caliphate) in Algeria in September 2014;
- attracted approximately 15,000

foreign Islamist radicals from some 80 countries around the world who have travelled, at times with their families, to the cities the group controls in Syria and Iraq;

- built up a solid economic basis based on oil sales from fields under its control (notably the oil fields near the Iraqi city of Kirkuk seized on 17 June), providing large-scale financial revenues (estimates are US\$1 million per month) that allow it to provide salaries to thousands of militants; and
- invested in media-savvy electronic communication with state-of-the-art videos regularly released to impress foes and friends alike.

Battling an international coalition on two fronts, displaying a flag, holding vast territory over two countries, fielding close to 30,000 men and planning to release its currency, as announced on 13 November, the Islamic State, in a short period of time, has positioned itself as the most powerful transnational non-state armed group, relegating the global threat of Al Qaeda to second place.

Such actions call today for an updated understanding of what this ambition means for external actors, notably the United Nations. The following dimensions are key in the pursuit of such an exercise:

3. On this issue, see Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *ISIS and the Deceptive Rebooting of Al Qaeda*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy, August 2014.

- The Islamic State is both a territorial group and a transnational one. Accordingly, engagement with it has to simultaneously consider contiguity and evanescence.
- The Islamic State has a dominant leader, but it is also spread over a large territory where local leaders/middle managers hold significant power. This is buttressed by the fact that the group is increasingly welcoming allegiances to it, which means accommodation of a measure of decentralized power.
- Engagement with the Islamic State can be engineered through focus on Iraq or focus on Syria, but not without considering both centres concurrently. This implies calibrating responses to different political situations and different social landscapes.
- The Islamic State has demonstrated a high level of violence and extremist rhetoric, significantly curtailing any realistic options for non-military engagement. Yet, the global use of force did not defeat Al Qaeda over the past decade; it was ultimately overtaken precisely by internal competition and not counter-terrorism measures. This indicates that creative thinking is required in the face of this most unconventional and fast-changing group.

CHAPTER 8

Armed groups in Mali and implications for the UN stabilization mission

Arthur Boutellis

Introduction

On 10 November 2014, the UN Security Council held an informal interactive dialogue session on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The mission has increasingly been the target of asymmetrical terrorist attacks which have left more than 30 peacekeepers dead and 100 wounded since the summer. While this may be, in part, because MINUSMA has become the largest force in northern Mali while Jihadist groups are reorganizing in the broader Sahel, it has raised a number of questions in Mali, the sub-region and New York regarding the relevance and adequacy of MINUSMA's mandate and capabilities in such a context.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous, when briefing the UN Security Council on 8 October, stated that MINUSMA is no longer operating in a peacekeeping environment, and the following day, MINUSMA Force Commander General Jean Bosco Kazura told the Council that “MINUSMA is in a terrorist-fighting situation without an anti-terrorist mandate or adequate training, equipment, logistics or intelligence to deal with such a situation”.¹ African Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) also raised the alarm, with Chad – which lost the most troops overall and is also currently

on the Council – threatening to withdraw its peacekeepers. Niger, which lost nine soldiers in a 2 October ambush,² and the Government of Mali itself are pushing to make MINUSMA's mandate “more robust” and to set up a “force intervention brigade”, along the lines of the brigade of the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to combat terrorist groups and drug-traffickers.³

Both the UN “brainstorming” and the 5 November meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense of MINUSMA TCCs in Niamey, however, concluded that the mission's mandate – which authorizes peacekeepers under Chapter VII to “use all necessary means” to protect civilians and to “deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements” – is sufficiently robust.

However, the broader question of whether the UN peacekeeping tool is appropriate and can be effective in carrying out a

1. See <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2014/10/briefing-and-consultations-on-the-security-situation-and-political-process-in-mali.php>

2. This ambush carried out by assailants on motorbikes marked a change in the terrorist modus operandi, as previous attacks had been rocket and mortar attacks on MINUSMA camps (mostly off target) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against patrols.

3. See <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20141008-mali-onu-minusma-envisage-renforcer-mandat/> and speech of Mali Foreign Minister to the UN Security Council on 6 January 2015 (S/PV.7355)

stabilization mandate in such a context remains unanswered, as the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations started its work and is due to report in April 2015. This chapter provides an analysis of the complex and evolving nature of armed groups in northern Mali as well as the implications for MINUSMA specifically and for UN peace operations more broadly. It looks at the tools which are available (within and outside the United Nations) to allow the Organization to better carry out its mandate in such a high-threat environment, which new military and civilian capacities are still required and how these can be best utilized to design and implement mission-wide stabilization strategies that are not blind to complex terrorist and criminal sub-regional dynamics.

The 2012 Mali crisis and the French military intervention

The 2012 crisis in Mali started with a Tuareg rebellion of the (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad – MNLA)⁴ in January 2012 (the fourth since independence in 1960). This was bolstered by the return of soldiers with heavy weaponry from Qaddafi's legions who occupied a large part of northern Mali and declared the independence of this territory (which it calls Azawad). This, in turn, triggered the March 2012 coup d'état by frustrated army officers in Bamako, consecrating the collapse of a Malian State that had been weakened by corruption, President Amadou Toumani

Touré's policy of "demilitarization", alliances with local elites in northern Mali and the instrumental use of ethnic militias in pursuit of narrow political agendas.

The Tuareg MNLA occupation of northern Mali was, however, short-lived. The militarily and financially superior Al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its offshoot, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), quickly drove MNLA elements out, taking control of Timbuktu and Gao respectively, while another Islamist Tuareg group, Ansar Dine, controlled Kidal. Negotiations that had begun between the interim Malian Government and the MNLA and Ansar Dine came to an end when the Islamist groups started moving south towards the capital Bamako, triggering the January 2013 French military intervention.

The initial international response to the 2012 Mali crisis had been a military one, with the planned African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) overtaken by events on the ground and the decisive French military intervention on 11 January 2013, which killed a few hundred Jihadists in the first days. After some initial confusion about whether the objective of the intervention was simply to prepare for the AFISMA deployment, French forces quickly reconquered the northern towns of Gao, Timbuktu and then Kidal with support from

4. The MNLA is a primarily ethnic Tuareg secular separatist group which originated in October 2011 from the fusion between the (pacifist) *Mouvement National de l'Azawad* (MNA) and the armed *Mouvement Touareg du Nord Mali* (MTNM). Bilal Ag Acherif is its political leader, and Mohamed Ag Najem (a former Colonel in Qaddafi's Libyan legions) is its military chief.

Chadian AFISMA troops.⁵ They faced little resistance as armed groups largely vanished into the rough terrains of northern Mali's "Adrar des Ifoghas" and southern Libya.

With the end of major combat operations, France supported the idea of the deployment of a UN mission in Mali as an exit strategy for its forces and a way to "multilateralize" its intervention. Despite questions over whether there was yet a peace to keep after the end of major French combat operations, key permanent Security Council members supported the idea of a UN mission on the basis that such an arrangement would provide greater oversight than an AMISOM-UNSOA-type partnership the Africa-led peace enforcement mission AFISMA.⁶ This decision to deploy a UN peacekeeping mission to stabilize Mali would soon be called into question by the challenges the mission would face on the ground.

MINUSMA:

Mission impossible?

MINUSMA was authorized in April 2013. It incorporated most of AFISMA's 6,000 African troops⁷ and took over on 1 July, following the signing of the Ouagadougou interim peace agreement of 18 June 2013 between two rebel groups of northern Mali (MNLA and HCUA⁸) and the interim Government in Bamako. Two other groups – MAA⁹ and CMFPR¹⁰ –, which had not taken part in the MNLA-led rebellion and are considered to be closer to the Government, also adhered to the agreement.

This made it possible for Mali to hold

presidential and parliamentary elections on its whole territory in July 2014. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected president with a solid margin, and two former rebel leaders (Mohamed Ag Intalla and Ahmada Ag Bibi of the HCUA) became members of parliament for the Kidal region after Bamako lifted arrest warrants against them.¹¹ But while the Ouagadougou agreement clearly called for the new legitimately-elected

5. For a detailed account, see <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/201-mali-securer-dialoguer-et-reformer-en-profondeur-english.pdf>

6. AMISOM is the African Union Mission In Somalia while UNSOMA is the United Nations Political Office for Somalia. See <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2013/03/malis-peacekeeping-mission-full-fledged-behemoth-or-have-lessons-been-learned/>

7. Which were given a four-month grace period until 31 October 2013 to meet UN standards for equipment and capability, with support from the AFISMA Trust Fund.

8. The *Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad* (HCUA) was created in May 2013 out of a splinter group of *Ansar Dine*, the *Mouvement Islamique de l'Azawad* (MIA) itself created in January 2013. It is primarily composed of *Tuareg Ifoghas* (dominant Tuareg "noblesse") and led by the Amenokal (traditional Tuareg leader) Intallah Ag Attaher, and his sons Alghabass and Mohamed. It is based in the Kidal region and has a strong Islamic agenda.

9. The *Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad* (MAA) started out in April 2012 in Timbuktu from residual elements of an Arab militia (backed by president Amadou Toumani Touré and led by Colonel Ould Meydou) from the first months of the rebellion. It aims to protect Arab – legal and illegal – commercial interests and communities. MAA helped AQIM enter into Timbuktu out of preference over Tuareg MNLA, but later distanced itself from the jihadists. In June 2012, it chose Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed as its leader. In 2013, the MAA split into two branches, one loyal to Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed sometimes called "MAA-Bamako" due to its proximity to the Government, and another MAA branch led by Ould Sidatti sometimes called "MAA-Ouagadougou" due to its alliance with the MNLA and HCUA, whose leadership was based in Ouagadougou for some time.

10. The mainly-Songhai self-defense militia *Coordination des Mouvements et Forces Patriotiques de Resistance* (CMFPR) emerged due to the absence of state authority during the 1990s rebellions in northern Mali as a group called "Ganda Koy" and most recently they were reactivated alongside other smaller self-defense groups of sedentary populations of the Gao and Timbuktu regions.

11. See <http://m.naharnet.com/stories/en/103740-mali-rulers-lift-arrest-warrants-against-tuareg-chiefs>

Government to initiate negotiations towards a comprehensive and final peace agreement no later than 60 days after its installation, such talks never started, and the follow-up mechanisms of the agreement – Comité de Suivi and Comité Technique Mixte de Sécurité, presided over by the MINUSMA head of mission and Force Commander respectively – stopped meeting by October because of a lack of political will on both sides.

This made the implementation of MINUSMA mandated tasks “to support national political dialogue and reconciliation” and “to support the re-establishment of State authority” very difficult – some would argue, paradoxical. The Government of Mali wanted the United Nations to focus its support on the return of the Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) and of State administration to northern Mali. But MINUSMA’s attempts to re-launch the political dialogue by facilitating workshops in February-March 2014 to build on the momentum created by a visit of the Security Council met with little success.

With a lack of progress on the political front, tensions continued to rise and culminated with a 17 May 2014 visit by Prime Minister Moussa Mara to Kidal. This led to some clashes between the MDSF and armed groups and the killing of six civil servants at the Governorate. Both sides blamed each other for having initiated the fighting, and the Government called it a “declaration of war”. Four days later on 21 May, the MDSF launched an assault on Kidal using heavy weapons against MNLA, HCUA and affiliated armed groups. MDSF retreated after a few

hours (and more than 30 casualties on their side), and sought refuge at MINUSMA camps in Kidal and other cities in northern Mali.¹²

Despite the brokering of a ceasefire on 23 May, the assault on Kidal radically changed the situation and rapport de force - on the ground. The armed movements of MNLA, HCUA and ally MAA-Ould Sidatti were now in control of more than half of the Malian territory from which the government MDSF had fled. These groups started setting up a parallel administration in these regions, including local security committees. This led to much questioning within MINUSMA on how to now work in these areas and engage with armed movements – de facto authorities – without legitimizing them. The mission was often caught between communities criticizing the United Nations for doing too little, movements suspecting the mission to be partial to the Government (a government wary of the United Nations legitimizing these groups) and terrorist and criminal groups with little interest in stability that were reorganizing themselves and starting to target UN peacekeepers who were now on the front lines after the departure of MDSF and the progressive downsizing of French forces.¹³

12. Report of the UN Secretary-General on MINUSMA, S/2014/403, 9 June 2014

13. MINUSMA, Serval and MDSF have carried out coordinated patrols in northern Mali. However, the Government of Mali had always refused to set up joint patrols including armed movement elements, despite the fact that these were envisaged in the Ouagadougou Interim Agreement as a confidence-building measure.

Terrorism: A threat to everyone but not everyone's fight

MINUSMA is not mandated to engage in explicit counterterrorism tasks, despite: (1) the initial embedding of small French Liaison and Support Detachments within many MINUSMA units to ensure operational coordination and coherence between the forces; (2) the fact that “French troops [can] intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat”¹⁴; and the occasional French-MSDF-MINUSMA coordinated operations¹⁵. Security Council members understood that *Serval* was essentially a parallel counterterrorism force with its own objectives to deal with other groups who had neither signed nor adhered to the Ouagadougou agreement, namely AQIM¹⁶ and MUJAO/Al Murabitun.¹⁷ It was replaced by *Barkhane* in July 2014, maintaining some 1,000 French troops in Mali out of a total of 3,000 operating in the sub-region.

Another group, *Ansar Dine*,¹⁸ has been largely dormant, as most of its prominent members have since moved over to the more respectable HCUA, with the notable exception of Iyad Ag Ghali. He reappeared in a July 2014 video, threatening both France and MINUSMA¹⁹ and claimed a recent 29 December 2014 rocket attack on a MINUSMA camp in northern Mali.²⁰ Many prominent Tilemsi Arab members and financiers of the MUJAO (put on the Al Qaeda sanctions list in December 2012) have also since joined the more acceptable

MAA-Ahmed Ould Sidi Mohamed²¹ branch, and continue trading and trafficking. This illustrates the blurring of lines between so-called “Compliant Armed Groups” (CAGs), “Terrorist Armed Groups” (TAGs) and criminal groups. There is competition among these groups over influence and control of trade and trafficking routes and fluidity in their leadership and in Malian fighters (versus international jihadists), as many have moved from one group to the other based on opportunities.

14. Resolution 2100 (2012), paragraph 18

15. See http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/10/24/une-operation-militaire-de-grande-ampleur-en-cours-au-mali_3502505_3212.html & <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130916155823/>

16. AQIM was created in January 2007 out of the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) – and its predecessor Armed Islamic Group (GIA) which fought against the secular Algerian government – after it pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda. It is led by Emir Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud (aka: Abdelmalek Droukdel) and organized into several zones and katibas with four katibas in the Sahel. It aims to create an Islamic state across North Africa, has used trafficking, kidnapping-for-ransom and taxing to fund its terrorist activities.

17. MUJAO is a jihadist militant group that broke off from AQIM in October 2011, reportedly due to disagreement over kidnapping revenue distribution and the dominant position of Algerians in the leadership. Unlike AQIM, the majority of MUJAO's members are Malian (Tilemsi Arabs, Fulani and Songhai) active in the Gao region where they have carried out rocket and IED attacks. In August 2013, MUJAO Ahmed al Tilemsi merged with Mokhtar Belmokhtar's al Muwaqif'un bil-Dima group to create “Al Murabitun”, and claimed responsibility for the attacks on the French uranium mine in Arlit, and army barracks in Agadez, Niger.

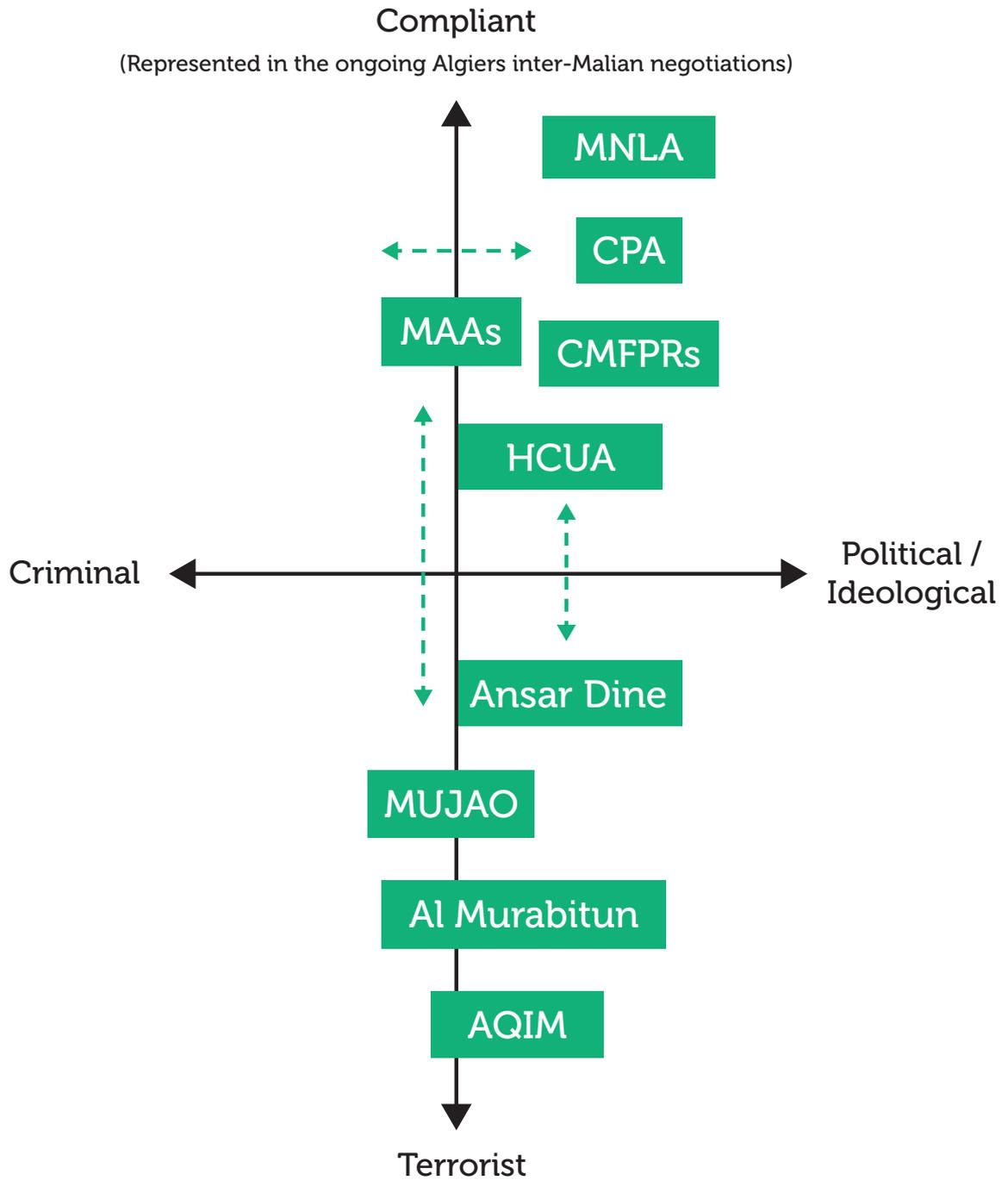
18. Ansar al-Din is a militant Salafi Tuareg group which played a crucial role in the jihadist takeover of northern Mali. Iyad Ag Ghali, a former rebel leader of the 1990s Tuareg rebellions, created the group after he was denied the leadership of the MNLA in the 2012 rebellion. Its alliance with AQIM boosted Ansar Dine with both weaponry and combatants.

19. See <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20140808-iyad-ag-ghali-le-leader-ansar-dine-recherche-soutiens/>

20. See <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/actu/20141229T195415Z20141229T195343Z/>

21. The case of Yoro Ould Daha is emblematic, see <http://depechesdumali.com/1818-yoro-ould-daha-l-armee-francaise-m-a-proposer-de-rejoindre-le-mnla.html>

Figure 1: Simplified typology of Mali armed groups



This reality has sometimes encouraged broad generalizations whereby all these groups are labeled as “bandits” or “terrorists”, which is not helpful either. That said, the November 2013 kidnapping and killing of two journalists of Radio France Internationale in Kidal, regular planting of mines and IEDs and rocket and mortar attacks on MINUSMA camps across northern Mali, suggest some level of complicity between mainstream elements of CAGs and the local population. This, however, could also result from the fear of retaliation by better-equipped jihadists, with no possibility for MINUSMA to protect those who choose to collaborate. Notably, MNLA members who supported the French troops in driving out the jihadist groups have been the target of abductions and assassinations. The MNLA is also the only group that has publicly denounced acts of terrorism against MINUSMA, MSDF and civilian populations.

As a peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA remains acutely vulnerable to such asymmetric threats, and has neither the mandate nor the capabilities to fight back. Troops it inherited from AFISMA lack the specialized training and equipment for adequate force protection, let alone more offensive measures. MINUSMA is now in the process of reviewing its Rules of Engagement and Mission Concept in light of the threats, and created an additional “military sector” for northern Mali in December 2014 in order to improve the mission’s response. It also started building “bunkers” in its camps, deploying force protection units and training and equipping its troops against IEDs, and

it will carry out Quick Impact Projects and Community Violence Reduction projects to improve the acceptance of the mission and prevent further recruitments by CAGs and TAGs.

But collectively these efforts to modernize the mission’s capabilities do not constitute a counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency doctrine. Better protection alone could lead to an escalation, with terrorists using more advanced techniques, carrying out complex attacks on UN facilities and employing larger or more sophisticated explosive devices, including explosively formed projectiles, against UN armored vehicles. Terrorists may also opt for “softer” UN civilian targets. The use of remote-controlled and magnetic IEDs and instances of both vehicle-borne and suicide-bomber suicide attacks, which had not been seen in this region before, also illustrate the growing sophistication of these terrorist groups. The only “high-capability” contribution MINUSMA has for now (from the Netherlands, combining highly mobile Special Forces with Apache and Chinook helicopters as well as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles has a limited range outside of Gao.

MINUSMA also still lacks a good understanding of the evolving threat. On the intelligence front, the NATO-type All Sources Information Fusion Unit brought unprecedented analytical capabilities to the mission. However, with limited intelligence collection capabilities feeding into it (i.e. without placing sensors to conduct remote surveillance or gathering signals intelligence and with few trained military intelligence officers/“human sensors” in the mission

at field level to build human intelligence networks), its contribution has so far too often been similar to that of other parts of the mission (JMAC, UNDSS, U2²²) and too seldom timely and tactical. In order for MINUSMA to get ahead of and disrupt the terrorist planning and operational cycle, a concurrent higher-tempo cycle of intelligence-led operations would have to be created, which would be unprecedented for a peacekeeping operation. Formal information sharing with the French (and the Americans) operating in the Sahel is also challenging in part because of confidentiality issues and a lack of protocols and standard operating procedures.

The Algiers negotiations: Light at the end of the tunnel?

Much hope for an improvement in the security situation in northern Mali lies with the Algerian-led international mediation of the inter-Malian peace talks initiated in the aftermath of the assault on Kidal in May 2014. Algeria, which played a key role in mediating Malian crises since the 1990s, had started “exploratory discussions” in January 2014 in an attempt to bring together the various CAGs in a coherent platform ahead of a negotiation with the Government of Mali. These efforts did not succeed, and the various CAGs entered the negotiations and signed the 24 July 2014 roadmap as two separate CAG platforms: the MNLA, HCUA and MAA-Sidatti signed as the Coordination of Azawad Movements (an alliance which had existed since November 2013), and

the MAA-Ahmed, CMFPR and the Coalition du peuple pour l’Azawad (CPA), created on 18 March as an MNLA dissidence, signed a platform on 14 June.

As negotiations progress, armed groups have fragmented and alliances have shifted as the various groups and their leaders position themselves ahead of the conclusion of a possible agreement. Since the beginning of the Algiers talks, part of the CMFPR allied with the Coordination (as “CMFPR2”); part of the CPA returned to the MNLA; and a new group called GATIA²³ announced its formation in August 2014 and joined the platform following the first clashes between platform groups and Coordination groups in the Gao region. GATIA openly supports the Government and what some have labelled as a proxy militia under the direct orders of Malian General Elhadj Ag Gamou. The Government of Mali denied any links to these groups which it describes as “vigilante groups ... formed by the communities concerned in order to protect their land”.²⁴ While the international mediation²⁵ has so far not recognized any of these “new groups”, the presence of two platforms of armed groups and the Government of Mali

22. JMAC is the Joint Mission Analysis Center; UNDSS is the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, while the U2 is a reconnaissance aircraft.

23. GATIA stands for Groupe d’Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés and is primarily composed of ethnic Tuareg Imghad (considered vassals under the traditional Tuareg hierarchy) from the Gao region.

24. Speech of Mali Foreign Minister to the UN Security Council on 6 January 2015 (S/PV.7355)

25. Algeria serves as lead mediator and the UN, the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, the European Union (EU), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Mauritania, Niger and Chad are co-mediators. This is different than past negotiations in Mali which were carried out by Algeria alone.

as a third party remains a major challenge.

So while the signing of a peace agreement would represent an important step towards the stabilization of the country through a political and security agreement dealing with some of the (governance) root causes of the conflict and allowing the progressive redeployment of the administration on the whole territory, it will not solve all the problems. Indeed, while it would help “draw the line” between CAGs and TAGs and enroll CAGs into the fight against terrorism alongside the MSDF, those not present in Algiers will continue to be spoilers. Further, those represented but who would not be taken into account in a final agreement could also become spoilers.

TAGs could also very well enroll some of the younger more radical (and/or opportunistic) members of the CAGs represented in Algiers, particularly if no attractive alternative is provided to them through military integration and socio-economic reinsertion, or if a final status settlement fails to satisfy the nationalist or religious demands of a young and more ideologically motivated base. This will be all the more challenging in that integration/enrollment into the Malian army is not often seen as an attractive option for many combatants in light of the lucrative criminal economy and trafficking opportunities prevailing in parts of northern Mali. Naturally, a collapse of the negotiation process would also negatively impact security. But if an agreement is signed but not in good faith, and there is no political will on either side to implement such an agreement, this could also lead to

the continued instrumentalization of certain groups and militias against each other in northern Mali. In this context, it seems reasonable for MINUSMA – which will likely continue to be one of the key security actors in northern Mali for some time – to hope for the best but plan for the worst.

Conclusions and recommendations

The terrorist threat in Mali and elsewhere is not about to go away. And while there are strong arguments for not deploying large, static and vulnerable UN peacekeeping missions to such theatres (and instead preferring a lighter footprint, with a parallel non-UN rapid-response force doing the fighting), the United Nations must also adapt its ways of doing business if it is to continue deploying stabilization missions in high-threat environments.

Member States have increasingly recognized that terrorism and transnational organized crime have become both a direct threat to UN peacekeepers and civilian staff and a strategic threat to the successful implementation of the mission’s mandate, particularly in terms of protection of civilians, but also in the reestablishment of state authority and governance in general. However, they have so far given little guidance and means to UN missions for dealing with such threats and implementing stabilization mandates.²⁶

26. See <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/12/united-nations-peacekeeping-peacebuilding-stabilization/>

First of all, peacekeeping missions need to develop a better understanding and accurate profiles of CAGs and TAGs, their political, criminal and ideological interests and motives, and the threats they represent, as well as the dynamics of radicalization, resilience and self-defense strategies applied by different elements within at-risk communities. This takes time and should not be a one-off assessment done by a UN headquarters team (at the onset of the mission and before each mandate renewal) but rather a cross-cutting conflict analysis done by the mission itself on a regular basis. This requires that missions be equipped with better military intelligence collection and analysis capabilities, but also with different kinds of civilian skills (e.g. anthropologists).

MINUSMA must adapt to these new threats (in terms of force protection analysis) in order to carry out its mandate, however, the mission's true added value may lie elsewhere. Multidimensional stabilization missions in such a context should begin formulating and implementing a coherent and comprehensive military and non-military response to this menace, much like missions are now required to develop mission-wide strategies for the protection of civilians. Such mission-wide strategies could combine the above-mentioned need for self-protection with the strategic use of traditional peacekeeping tools such as mediation, DDR and CVR programmes, but in innovative ways.²⁷

Peacekeeping in the future could also include non-traditional tools such as deradicalization, disengagement

and rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for (national) terrorists and early peacebuilding approaches aimed at addressing the root causes of terrorism and transnational organized crime through non-military/law enforcement approaches.²⁸ Also, while peacekeeping may not be able to address the long-term sources of disillusionment and frustration caused by underdevelopment, poor governance and the political economy that have allowed terrorism and organized crime to flourish, it cannot ignore the problem altogether either. It should develop new early peacebuilding tools to help “nip the problem in the bud” as part of a defined and time-bound mission-wide strategy, because it is often difficult to mobilize and sustain the economic transformation required to counter criminal agendas.

Mission planning should also be adapted as a result of these considerations. A phased approach might start by first deploying a light footprint and more mobile high-capacity military contingents (able to take civilian staff who are social science experts along with them) to get a better understanding of the context, before “tailoring” a larger peacekeeping mission.

27. See for instance http://www.hdcentre.org/41577F16-C5DD-4EE7-A405-6DE96C68942E/FinalDownload/DownloadId-4A8E4E090C6C63908FE5763AA7CAE4B9/41577F16-C5DD-4EE7-A405-6DE96C68942E/uploads/tx_news/Strengthening-mediation-to-deal-with-criminal-agendas.pdf

28. See <http://www.ipinst.org/publication/policy-papers/detail/401-the-elephant-in-the-room-how-can-peace-operations-deal-with-organized-crime.html>

29. See http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi_e_pub_driving_the_system_apart.pdf

A system-wide planning standing capacity could help the United Nations rise above sterile departmental turfs battles and come up with more creative solutions.²⁹ More generally, the United Nations needs to finally move away from the current numbers-based approach to a capability-driven force generation approach used by NATO or the European Union, for instance.³⁰ Similarly, the current trend of building “super-camps” and adopting a “bunkerized” response to threats risks being counterproductive in the long run.

Another major obstacle to UN peacekeeping is the fact that it is geographically limited to the borders of a country, such as MINUSMA in Mali, while terrorism and organized crime are transnational and CAGs and TAGs operate across borders in the Sahel region. MINUSMA has been sharing information with UNOWA (Sahel Strategy), UNODC and UNDSS offices in neighbouring countries, but this has been done on an ad hoc basis. The development of regional and cross-border programming is critical to any longer-term success; otherwise we are always ‘leaving the back door open’. The United Nations should instead explore ways to more systematically share information and collaborate with a UN Panel of Experts (on Libya particularly)³¹ and with non-UN forces (France and the United States) operating in the sub-region, EUCAP Sahel³² and, whenever feasible, with national counterparts within the framework of the HRDDP,³³ who will ultimately be in charge once the peacekeeping mission withdraws.

Deploying a peacekeeping operation such

as MINUSMA in this type of environment creates a historic and time-bound opportunity to alter some, but not all, of the negative dynamics that are at the root causes of the crisis in the first place. Adopting the correct balance of capabilities and postures, both political and military, vis-à-vis this shifting spectrum of armed actors is challenging. However, the aim should be to create a new, improved status quo through a deliberate and nuanced mission concept by the time the mission departs.

30. See http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi_rpt_rethinking_force-Gen.pdf

31. UNSC Resolution 2117 (2013) for example, required Peace Operations, Sanctions Committees, Panels of Experts and Member States to share information on illicit arms and ammunition trafficking networks, which fuels many of the conflicts across the southern belt of the Sahel, from Somalia to Mali. However, even within the UN system, no mechanism or platforms exist to systematically share such information.

32. EUCAP Sahel is a European Union civilian capacity building mission.

33. UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN support to non-UN security forces (HRDDP).

PART IV

Conclusions and areas for future work

CHAPTER 9

Fit for purpose: Equipping the United Nations to better understand non-state armed groups

Fabio Oliva¹

Falling walls

Another wall has come down.

Back in 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall exposed political scientists to a new type of armed conflict, one that was no longer fought between states but was being waged within states. In 2001, Al-Qaeda's terrorist campaign on US territory signalled the dissolution of another analytical barrier, with the terrorist aggression presenting the *casus belli* for the War on Terror, a direct confrontation between legitimate states and a non-state armed organization. Now, 25 years after the end of the Cold War, a new dimension has resulted in the war scenarios that analysts, military strategists, politicians and journalists need to consider, i.e. a hybrid armed conflict waged at multiple levels, between states and within states, *simultaneously*.

To tell the truth, this third wall had already fallen in 2006 when Hezbollah, a US-designated terrorist organization with a commanding state-like presence in southern Lebanon (Abdul-Hussain 2009), confronted – and nearly overcame – Israel during 34 days of intense conflict. However, it took the advent of ISIL, with its rapid territorial gains, a superseding propaganda apparatus and

an unprecedented global threat to peace and security, to make this new equation manifest. The current *jihad* waged by ISIL has, in fact, elements of both intrastate and interstate armed conflict. While ISIL is leading a brutal sectarian civil war within Iraq and Syria, its leader, the self-declared caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, defines the radical movement as a full-fledged “state”.

Central America has also made its comeback into the United Nations Security Council agenda. In one of its most recent resolutions, the Security Council mandated the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to support the Haitian Government in its efforts to tackle gang violence and organized crime (United Nations 2014a). The case of Haiti reflects a recent shift in the patterns of violence which indicates that in the last five years, 90 percent of violent deaths in the world took place outside situations conventionally understood as armed conflict or terrorism (Geneva Declaration 2011:5). For instance, in 2011 the death toll in Somalia was 3,131, nearly half of the violent deaths recorded in Tanzania – 6,071 (UNODC 2013).

1. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the views of the United Nations, in general, and the United Nations System Staff College, in particular.

Until 2012, El Salvador had experienced the highest homicide rate in the world. Although a shaky truce between the two largest gangs initially reduced homicide rates by half, the negative impact on human security posed by these non-conventional armed groups is reaching unprecedented proportions, while the legitimacy of the central state is collapsing due to the fact that such organizations create their own parallel systems of power. The situation in Mali is also quite revealing of the dilemma that the international community and individual governments are facing. The resurgence of the long-standing Tuareg rebellion and the proliferation of Al-Qaeda-linked insurgents following the 2012 coup d'état have produced a crowded conflict landscape, one that is characterized by armed groups that possess multiple and interrelated agendas.

Overall, there is a broad consensus among scholars that a new generation of non-state armed groups has seized momentum and, in an increasing number of places, small, tactical, dispersed and interconnected violent outfits often have an edge on regular armies (Mohamedou 2005; Blin 2011; Briscoe 2013; et al.). As we have argued elsewhere, the “evolving hybridity of these organizations blurs simple distinctions between politically oriented insurgents and organized crime or gangs” (McQuinn and Oliva 2014:1), with the consequence of making sound policy decisions much harder than before.

What we know so far

Before suggesting how to address this emerging phenomenon, let us first explore how these unconventional insurgents managed to become the prevailing challenge to global peace and security. New generation non-state armed groups have demonstrated an extraordinary ability to learn from the strengths, weaknesses, achievements and failures of their predecessors and from the past interventions and responses of the international community. A discussion is presented below of some general considerations highlighting elements of discontinuity between traditional armed groups and unconventional armed organizations.

- **Peace talks? No, thanks.** Unconventional armed groups do not conceive of peace as a possible end-state. A settlement can only go to the detriment of their reputation as hardliners. The moment they are open to negotiations, another group is likely to outbid them politically and militarily. In addition, a settlement will by no means achieve their goals, which are best pursued outside the realm of constitutional politics and rule of law. Not only is a soft landing into politics unappealing, but it is not even considered as an ultimate option. These groups do not seek to become political forces that can compete in the electoral arena as their interests are political but not in the Westminsterian sense.

- **No quarter.** Traditional armed groups operated in a context where international humanitarian law and international criminal law demarcated the boundaries of military engagement. Despite some armed groups only erratically abiding by those legal frameworks, many of their leaders were eventually brought to justice. The new generation of armed groups is ruthless. Their use of force is indiscriminate and, in some cases, it has been brought to unprecedented levels of brutality. Some of the most radical organizations have been outshined by new extremist organizations for the extent of violence they employ. For instance, Al-Qaeda is increasingly being regarded as a “moderate” terrorist organization in comparison with ISIL. The disregard of legal obligations in the conduct of war goes hand in hand with the spectacularization of violence. The broadcasting of graphic images and explicit videos of hostage executions feeds into the high-tech propaganda machinery that is employed to shock international public opinion, acquiesce local populations and recruit new combatants from Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike.
- **Urban attire.** There was a time when cities represented governmental safe havens, the bulwark of state authority and, consequently, the ultimate objective of armed rebellions. This impacted substantially on military strategies and the actual conduct of military operations, which were concentrated in the most remote regions of a country, mainly the rural areas, where the government’s presence was more dispersed and the local population was more porous to rebels’ propaganda. The recent thread of complex insurgences that have stirred the Middle East as well as the growing phenomenon of youth gangs in Central America point to a partial departure from this dynamic. Military encounters, governance deliberations and economic transactions happen more frequently in urban settings than in the periphery of a country or in so-called “ungoverned spaces”. In El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, the *maras* rule over large swaths of the capitals and other major towns. ISIL’s insurgency has strategically targeted towns and cities of Iraq and Syria, while the revolutionary brigades that toppled Gaddafi, and are now the main factor of insecurity in Libya, have been a primarily urban product.
- **Shadow states.** While formally representing “non-state entities”, these new armed organizations have a symbiotic connection with the state structures. They thrive in situations of state fragility or collapse, and their members have strong ties with the state apparatus, as they may have been even part of it in the past. As argued in some recent research, the provision of goods and services by non-state armed groups can be regarded as

“complementary governance”, which in some instances occurs with the implicit consent of governments (Idler and Forest 2015).

- **Multiple identities, concurrent agendas.**

The most striking novelty of contemporary armed groups is the hybridity and fluidity that characterize their origins and mutations as opposed to the overall linearity of traditional armed groups’ evolution. Typically, the genesis of a traditional guerrilla organization would follow a standard pattern (i.e. underground preparation, violent propaganda, organizational growth, guerrilla offensive, mobilization of masses and – if successful – takeover). Embedded in this established sequence would also be the supremacy of the political agenda over the military and economic dimensions of the armed struggle. Such a linear progression clashes with the volatility that characterizes the trajectories of unconventional armed groups. In the case of the Sahel region, for instance, non-state armed groups present a highly ideological (jihadist) political agenda, adopt guerrilla tactics in their military operations and sustain themselves by managing cross-border illicit trades. The rise of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has been attributed to the convergence of diverse streams of affiliations and networks, among which are university confraternities, street gangs, drug traffickers and illegal

oil bunkers (Asuni 2009). Central America’s youth gangs are the by-product of three main factors: the failure to fully reintegrate former combatants of the 1980s guerrilla movements; the expulsion and repatriation of Central American citizens involved in criminal activities in the United States, who imported the cult of street gangs from cities like Los Angeles and started to live on the profits generated from drug trafficking; and the disenfranchisement of large parts of the population who failed to secure any peace dividends. The so-called ‘first law’ of systems thinking reads that “today’s problems come from yesterday’s solutions” (Senge 1990). The emergence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda has been often explained as the unintended consequence of US military and financial support to anti-Soviet resistance groups in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Similarly, as eloquently explained in this volume by Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, ISIL “was born five times”. The group is an amalgam of different Islamist streams (locally-grown jihadists and Al-Qaeda franchises) and former army officers of Saddam Hussein. The latter have found in the radical movement an opportunity to put an end to the decade-long political exile they had been forced into by the “De-Baathification of Iraqi Society”, a policy initiated in 2003 by the US-led Administration of the Coalition Provisional Authority and then continued by the successor Shia-dominated Iraqi governments.

These condensed considerations are instructive of the radical departure of contemporary non-state armed groups from their predecessors. As explained in the next section, the complexity of this new phenomenon has not been fully realized, and responses being put forward are only attempting to tackle its symptoms. This shortcoming is indicative of the fact that the international community, including the United Nations, is not yet duly equipped to understand and catch up with the rapid pace of mutations these groups undergo in the field.

What does not work

The multiplicity of organizational facets and identities that coexist within the new generation of non-state armed groups has completely overturned the boundaries of engagement and redesigned the operating scenarios of UN field operations. The patterns of armed violence and the organizational structure of its perpetrators have evolved much faster than the capacity to understand and react to these new challenges.

The response by the UN system has been inward-looking and reactive, mainly focused on insulating its own assets and maintaining a 'business as usual' stance. The 'bunkerization' of the UN presence in field locations may have been effective in limiting casualties and violent attacks against its own staff and premises. However, it has negatively affected the capacity to reach out to the affected population,

gather accurate information to produce strategic analysis and, in numerous cases, has reinforced divisions, stereotypes and negative perceptions.

Physical barricades, barbed wire and compounds have gone hand in hand with other legal barriers. Following the War on Terror, several armed groups have been labelled as 'terrorist organizations' by Member States, thereby curbing all sorts of official contacts with those groups and hampering potential mediation efforts. Dealing with illegal or proscribed groups has become nearly impossible, and attempts at drawing clear defining lines for engagement with such actors have shown their limitations since, as mentioned before, several non-state armed organizations have multiple agendas that only a nuanced analysis could help explore and understand. As a result, peacemaking efforts that are being pursued in places like Mali are forced to navigate very narrow corridors of frail and short-lived legitimacy that is granted to certain armed groups based on their ostensible compliance with superseded legal benchmarks. Traditional mediation tools also risk missing important undercurrents, such as transnational crime and radicalization, that permeate the dynamics of contemporary armed groups.

When more assertive solutions have been pursued, the United Nations and the international community have perpetuated a silo mentality. Robust responses have typically leaned on counter-insurgency strategies, rule of law interventions and DDR programmes, which have been put in

place in isolation one from another, while often targeting the same audience. Current approaches are also tainted by preconceived ideas and narratives about armed groups and the conviction in predetermined linear cause-effect patterns concerning the motivations of non-state armed actors for pursuing their goals through violent means. Attempting to explain otherwise incomprehensible decisions and actions by ISIL, a reporter of *The New Yorker* recently wrote that the radical movement “doesn’t behave according to recognizable cost-benefit analyses” (Packer 2015).

Instead, there is a great need to redefine and upgrade our understanding and tools for diagnosis. Current responses suffer from an inherent difficulty to overcome traditional classifications that present more limitations than opportunities for positive engagement. Fresh thinking is required to come up with new solutions while adapting available mediation tools to contexts such as Central America. In El Salvador in 2012, a truce between the two largest rival gangs abruptly reduced homicide rates by 40 percent. By the end of 2013, the truce started to collapse and in 2014, El Salvador returned to pre-2012 murder rates, *de facto* closing the window of opportunity created by the gangs’ agreement. It is worth remembering here that the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation states that any effective mediator should be able “talk with all actors relevant to resolving the conflict” (United Nations 2012:§26). As recently argued, new approaches and processes for starting dialogue with proscribed groups need to

be explored to counter-balance military and intelligence strategies (The Guardian 2014).

Developing fit-for-purpose UN personnel

The comprehensive discussion on the post-2015 agenda has put great emphasis on the need to reconfigure the UN system to make it “fit for purpose” and capable of responding to emerging global challenges. Goal 16 of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – which have been formulated to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – calls on UN Member States to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development” (United Nations 2014b). Among the declared targets, there are explicit references to reducing “all forms of violence and related death rates” (target 16.1) and strengthening “relevant national institutions (...) for preventing violence and combating terrorism and crime” (target 16.11). Although perfectible and not yet ratified, these targets call for improved results and more effective strategies in tackling unconventional armed groups, which – as mentioned earlier – are responsible for the vast majority of violent fatalities worldwide.

As Ina Lepel nicely put it, we should start by “understanding the phenomenon rather than trying to fix it”.² To do so, efforts should be made to strengthen the analytical

2. Inaugural session, 2015 Dialogue Series, December 2014, Berlin. Ina Lepel is the Deputy Director-General for the United Nations and Global Issues at the German Federal Foreign Office

capacity of the UN system so that field staff in particular can learn how to track and understand the convergence of multiple historical and socio-political legacies and their impact on the genealogy and performance of armed groups.

In an attempt to offer some elements for reflection, we have mapped out existing analytical resources and capacities that are worth exploring and possibly expanding in order to create a cadre of UN staff that is fit for purpose.

Leverage points and existing resources

A stronger United Nations can be built around variable but integrated knowledge networks. Although significant progress has been made in the area of knowledge management (KM), the United Nations is still far from being a well-versed learning organization. Several UN departments, agencies, funds and programmes have equipped themselves with strategies to manage knowledge more effectively,³ but the actual exchange of knowledge is fairly limited compared with the huge amount of information being produced across the system, which remains scattered and disorganized. There are several reasons behind the modest volume of knowledge being shared, and in-house research on the subject suggests that institutional, bureaucratic and cultural factors have prevented the Organization from reaching its learning potential (United Nations 2006 and 2007).

Tackling those issues is part of an ongoing effort to reform the United Nations and goes beyond the scope of this contribution. Nonetheless, in the past years, those UN entities that have the largest presence in field duty stations – and are therefore more exposed to the threat of unconventional non-state armed groups – have made some interesting headway towards better understanding the local context in which they operate. DPKO has conducted a study aiming at “Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-Dimensional UN Peacekeeping” which provides a solid starting point for increasing and deepening the interaction and engagement with local stakeholders (UN DPKO 2013). The study maintains that taking into account local views and opinions noticeably reinforces inclusivity and public confidence in the UN role. Another key finding of the inquiry reveals that integrating local perceptions adds value in terms of improved situational awareness and more accurate analysis of the context. UNDP has gone further in incorporating local dynamics in its work by facilitating the establishment of so-called “peace infrastructures” and, in some cases, strengthening existing ones. In a 2013 brief, peace infrastructures are

3. In the past years all major UN entities, including the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), have formally adopted KM in the form of a strategy, a learning system or a portal or have made explicit reference to KM in their strategic plans.

defined as a “network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict; and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society” (UNDP 2013:1).

A similar and complementary approach could be taken to isolating “violence infrastructures”, those aggregative processes and institutions that exist in every society and can channel structural violence. We have, in fact, very limited knowledge on the nature of networks and local alliances that facilitate involvement in organized armed resistance activities. We also ignore the importance of religious practices and local rituals in forging group cohesion and allegiance within armed movements. As seen earlier when looking at the genesis of contemporary armed groups, there are often undercurrents and storylines which remain latent or run below the radar for some time, but then suddenly meet the enabling conditions to unfold and produce lethal organizations. Those dynamics are often shrouded – and therefore difficult to capture – but they reveal a great deal of information that can help sharpen our knowledge on armed groups.

Humanitarian agencies are also critical to advancing our analytical capacity on the subject because of their proximity to the frontlines and their operational mandates. Humanitarian staff deal with armed outfits on a daily basis, having to secure access to populations in need during emergencies. Their full involvement should be secured

in identifying leverage points to better capture the nature of armed groups, while preserving their physical safety and respect for the legal and ethical standards to which humanitarian workers adhere.

Integrating different analytical systems

Every year the UN system conducts hundreds of assessments, surveys, investigations, studies and reviews. A comprehensive study on the United Nations argues that the changes that have resulted from such a wide compendium of research, statistical data and inquiries have been one of the most underrated achievements of the United Nations since its creation (Jolly 2009). Naturally, each discipline has its own methodology which is tailored to the purpose of the analysis and the process for performing it. As we operate in a globalized and interconnected world, understandably some of these analyses cover similar topics, perhaps from a different perspective, but do not necessarily “talk to each other”. Again, this has to do with the *modus operandi* of the UN system and is the result of the complex organigram and governance structures that define each UN entity, its scope of work and mandate. Evidently, the catchword of any organizational reform – integration – would also be quite appropriate here, but we are not suggesting the collapse of all approaches to produce a sort of “One UN” methodology.

Nonetheless, the method of analysis we select should be a derivative of the very issue we plan to investigate and its

fundamental nature. The challenge posed by unconventional armed groups is multi-faceted: It is a military phenomenon with evident political connotations. But clearly these groups appeal to other important rubrics to entice their prospective constituencies, such as status, camaraderie, vengeance and redemption among others.

In order to navigate the complexity presented by the organizations that are under scrutiny, we suggest here a possible redefinition of the investigation processes and some concrete ideas about the integration of different analytical systems. We first showcase existing analytical frameworks that are worth incorporating to better understand armed groups; we then present two valuable approaches – or mindsets – that could be used to integrate the different models.

Analytical frameworks

The first change of paradigm that is required to recognize issues characterized by high complexity and frequent fluidity is to urge UN staff to go beyond a *descriptive understanding* of the context in which they operate and develop an *analytical understanding* of it. In this regard, the traditional conflict analysis framework offers a safe starting point for “asking the right questions”. Basic conflict analysis conveys a general overview of the context, with useful insights into existing problems and the role of main stakeholders, including their concerns and interests. This segment can, however, be considered only a partial or ‘static’ assessment as it does not account for the evolution of the conflict, its actors and issues at stake. A full analytical understanding

should therefore incorporate the dynamics of a conflict – its transformation, recurrent trends and relevant discontinuities and its regional and transnational dimensions – basically connecting the dots and capturing sometimes small but significant changes in the conflict equation. The appraisal of conflict dynamics also looks horizontally at the mutual influences and spill-overs among different crises. For instance, there is a fine line that connects ongoing insurgencies led by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger, ISIL in Syria and Iraq, Al-Qaeda franchises in Mali and parts of the Sahel region,⁴ the Islamist militias in Libya, the Séléka rebel coalition in Central African Republic, and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Similarly, one cannot fully understand the street gang problem in El Salvador without connecting it with the broader regional dynamics unfolding in other Central American countries.

Political economy analysis has also developed into a fundamental resource to discretely observe conflict situations that we normally examine predominantly through political lenses. Tracking money flows and illicit traffic routes and understanding informal rewards and incentive structures in specific contexts can reveal fresh streams of information and push our analysis to consider alternative and additional enablers of violence. Initially developed by the World Bank to monitor the patterns of economic distribution in developing countries in order to understand the conditions necessary

4. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) also known as Al-Qaeda in the Sahel (AQIS)

for successful aid policy, political economy analysis has been progressively adopted in other disciplines (e.g. conflict resolution) to assess the economic dimensions of armed insurgencies and, more recently, situations of unconventional violence like ones perpetrated by street bands or prison gangs (Glaister 2010 and Skarbek 2014). Political economy analysis provides an opportunity to advance the common knowledge and understanding of the hybrid armed groups that operate in so called ‘ungoverned spaces’, those areas characterized by a flimsy state authority and persistent insurgencies. At the same time, understanding the value of economic assets leads to that ‘mirror analysis’ that is capable of explaining the symbiotic relationship sometimes emerging between non-state armed organizations and state institutions and representatives.

As we argued elsewhere (McQuinn and Oliva 2014), until recently most studies on causes of civil war focused on the role and performance of the state to explain the outbreak of armed resistance and did not factor in elements pertaining to the armed groups themselves. With contributions from disciplines like anthropology and psychology, a new line of research was then introduced, which investigates the so-called “micro-foundations of civil war”. This new perspective was driven by the recognition that “rebel groups are sophisticated, self-sustaining multinational entities that survive under extreme pressure and in countries where organizations of comparable size and organizational capacity are rare” (McQuinn and Oliva 2014:10). Micro-level analysis

started therefore to look at recruitment strategies, rebel governance, economic incentives underlying group formation, the role of rituals and memory in forging group cohesion and a whole range of new inquiries looking at the micro-elements of armed organizations. This analytical framework presents a great opportunity for increasing the understanding of unconventional armed groups by providing useful insights into their social morphology.

Analytical approaches (mindsets)

In terms of analytical approaches, systems thinking provides perhaps the most useful mindset to tackle such a complex and fluid phenomenon. Systems thinking is a holistic analytical method that looks at the interaction among the different parts of a complex system – unconventional armed groups in our case. It attempts to trace the evolution of systems over time and their performance within the context of larger systems. This approach differs from traditional analysis, which isolates the individual parts of a system in order to study them separately. Systems thinking appears successful in addressing problems that involve complex issues, which depend on past occurrences and on the actions of forces theoretically external to the system under scrutiny. This approach is particularly helpful in solving problems that are recurring, “those who have been made worse by past attempts to fix them”, issues where “an action affects or is affected by the surrounding environment” and “whose solutions are not obvious” (Aronson 2008:1).

A complementary approach that shows potential for addressing systemic issues is what biologist Edward O. Wilson referred to as “consilience”, the confluence and synthesis of knowledge from different specialized fields (Wilson 1998). The assortment of knowledge is, in fact, likely to produce unexpected and innovative solutions through sudden change of paradigms.

A light at the end of the tunnel?

To build peace one has to understand war. Current conflicts are radically different and more complex than ever before. Non-war violence exceeds by far the violence taking place in situations of armed struggle. Yet, the bulk of current analytical, political and military capacities is still geared towards confronting traditional conflicts. This chapter has suggested a radical redistribution of capacities and a recalibration of approaches to better understand and deal with contemporary armed groups.

The United Nations, along with the international community, is lagging behind in many regards and should be working systematically to upgrade existing knowledge management practices and learning processes. Nonetheless, concurrent efforts should be made to preserve successful practices (while encouraging innovations) and existing leverage points that UN staff have at their disposal, such as knowledge of local perceptions, presence of peace infrastructures and trusted interactions with some armed outfits. Mapping and landscaping are two key skills that analysts in the UN system especially need to have. The

paper suggested that these competencies be complemented with systemic approaches and cross-fertilization of different knowledge in order to find the right solutions.

The advent of the new forms of structural violence presented in this chapter sanctions the demise of traditional conflict resolution, and with it, the end of the supremacy of political settlements as an instrument to solve armed conflicts. This does not necessarily mean that politics is superseded or should be given less emphasis. But analytical efforts should be bolstered in order to equip UN cadres and field personnel to recognize the importance of other elements of contemporary armed insurgencies, such as their political economy, the role of rituals in group cohesion, the dynamic evolution they endure and the potential alterations they produce. These are all fundamental assets of contemporary armed groups, but, as explained earlier, the United Nations and its personnel can tap into a broad spectrum of analytical methods and learning resources to face complex issues that involve seeing the “big picture” and not just the single parts of it.

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