



Milbank

**POLICY PLANNING CASE STUDY
DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND
REINTEGRATION REFLECTIONS: LESSONS
LEARNED FROM AFGHANISTAN, LIBYA,
ANGOLA, LIBERIA, AND BOSNIA**

Prepared by the

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and
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December 2022

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Introduction

This document has been developed out of a conversation with PILPG Senior Peace Fellow Robert Perito and is one in a series of expert interviews on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes with military and policy experts. These disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration case studies are part of a range of work products produced by the PILPG Security Sector Reform Policy Planning Ukraine Working Group. The full range of work product and more information about the Working Group is available [here](#).

Robert Perito is a PILPG Senior Peace Fellow who has been involved in post-war integration processes in a number of regions and states, including Angola, Haiti, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Mr. Perito has extensive expertise in security sector reform, having provided policy guidance, program direction for peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict counsel, in numerous countries and settings. Mr. Perito's insight draws from a wide range of positions, including as Senior Program Officer with the United States Institute of Peace, Deputy Director of the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program the United States Department of Justice, and Foreign Service Officer with the United States Department of State. Mr. Perito continues to provide advice and guidance to the United States and other foreign governments on Security Sector Reform as Director of the Perito Group.

Over the past three decades, the experience that the United States and Western Europe possess in regard to Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (“DDR”) processes has been predominantly limited to inter-state conflicts – civil wars, insurgencies, and revolutions. With the exception of the United States' intervention during the invasion of Iraq, which has been regarded by many as an unsuccessful effort, Western actors are somewhat lacking in meaningful experience with DDR in international conflicts between states.

Set out below is a summary of the key points that emerged from a discussion with Bob Perito on his reflections of the DDR process across Afghanistan, Libya, Angola, Liberia, and Bosnia. Mr. Perito's experiences across these contexts prove valuable in identifying areas that will require particular attention as Ukraine moves ahead with rebuilding post-war. The document is not a verbatim account but draws upon the insights of Bob Perito's experiences to highlight important reflections and lessons learned from the various DDR processes he has been engaged in and potential takeaways for Ukraine.

Background

The international community is in a unique position as it turns towards support in the planning of a DDR process for the eastern regions of Ukraine encompassing the Russian-occupied territories of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk. The United Nations' experience in the past 30 years has been primarily focused on the demilitarization and reintegration of conflict-affected areas, whereby an International Intervention Force assumes governance responsibilities in areas with weak political institutions. However, in Ukraine, it is unlikely that this model will be applied, as the country's own governmental institutions are expected to spearhead DDR efforts. Such an approach could present its own set of challenges, as Ukraine's domestic political priorities may not necessarily align with those of the international community. To navigate these challenges, it will be imperative to establish complete transparency between DDR advisors and Ukrainian institutions, and foster collaboration across various sectors, including the DDR, Security Sector Reform ("SSR"), and economic reintegration groups.

Case Study: Afghanistan

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Objectives

When the Taliban was driven out of political power in Afghanistan in 2001, the United States and European powers led the post-war rehabilitation of Afghanistan through the United Nations. In 2003, the United Nations Development Program established the Afghan New Beginnings Program to support the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants. The program aimed to dissolve the chains of command and military structures that remained following Taliban rule, and reintegrate combatants into either civilian life, or the newly created Afghan Army or police force.

Roles in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process

The process led by the United Nations in Afghanistan included DDR and SSR programs created under the "lead nation" concept. The lead nation method involved individual United Nations member states undertaking different aspects of Afghanistan's SSR process and supporting efforts in their domain.

While the United States focused on the Afghan military, the United Kingdom was in charge of narcotics control, and Japan was the lead nation on the DDR project. Other tasks included reform of the justice system, an initiative that was coordinated by the Italian delegation.

Stakeholders

As part of the DDR process, former fighters who chose to return to civilian life were provided training across areas such as farming, carpentry, and mechanics. They were required to pass through specific DDR stages before being formally demobilized and entering civilian life. However, arguments may be made that the training did not prove valuable to demobilized individuals, due to the impact of the war on the economy into which ex-combatants were attempting to enter. Without opportunities for employment, and thus no way to sustain themselves, some individuals returned to their previous commanders for patronage.

Some of these groups then grew into illegal armed organizations that began to terrorize the countryside and cause problems throughout Afghanistan.

In theory, the United Nations had instituted and implemented a DDR program. However, in practice, this DDR initiative proved to be counterproductive and arguably exacerbated the plight of the very groups it sought to aid. Specifically, the DDR process had the unintended effect of demobilizing individuals who might have supported the government's side of the conflict, while also abandoning them to fend for themselves.

Militarized Issues and Outcomes

The DDR process in Afghanistan was funded by Japan, while the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan supported the management and implementation of the program alongside the International Security Assistance Force. The United Nations' leadership facilitated the identification of combatants to participate in the DDR program, resulting in the disarmament of 216 units consisting of 62,000 soldiers, the collection of 100,000 weapons, and the destruction of 50,000 weapons.

The objective of dissolving these forces was achieved, but the broader aim of dismantling chains of command and reintegrating civilians into civilian life remained unfulfilled. This was predominantly due to inadequate coordination among the supporting states that were responsible for implementing the broader United Nations process.

Case Study: Libya

Objectives and Roles in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process

In a more recent experience from the revolutionary war in Libya that ended with the death of Muammar Gaddafi, DDR initiatives coordinated by the Libyan administration resulted in profiteering and opportunism.

In 2012-2013, the Libyan government organized the Commission for Warrior Affairs, which established a registration system for militia groups in order for the government to collect their weapons and assist with their reintegration. Another initiative in Libya, the Commission for War Wounded, sought to facilitate medical treatment for individuals who had sustained injuries during the conflict, by sending these wounded individuals abroad to receive medical care.

Militarized Issues and Outcomes

Amidst the conflict in Libya, warring factions consisted of militias, each formed by individual towns. Following the cessation of hostilities, vacated employment positions were filled by displaced individuals who had been rendered homeless by the war. By the end of the war, the militias had expanded in size, with a greater number of individuals having joined their ranks, many of whom had not directly participated in the conflict.

The Commission for Warrior Affairs' efforts culminated in the registration of 230,000 individuals, surpassing the number of people involved in the conflict. Upon registration, these individuals were asked to identify their preferences on a form, including options such as joining the military or the police. Although these individuals were paid a salary, there was no obligation for them to withdraw from their respective militia groups.

The Commission for Warrior Affairs had the unintended effects of fueling inter-militia conflicts across Libya with militias receiving salaries based on oil revenues. The militias that were intended to be demobilized had in fact grown in number, and their members were profiting from the increase in violence.

As for the Commission for War Wounded, some 55,000 individuals had registered. However, a large number of the registrants were not in need of medical treatment but still took advantage of the government program that was intended to reintegrate those affected by the war.

Case Study: Weapons Buybacks in Angola and Liberia

Objectives and Roles in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process

United Nations-led DDR processes have often used weapons buyback programs to encourage former combatants to turn over their weapons in exchange for a financial reward.

The United States' delegation to the Angola peace talks was led by Mr. Perito, who played a central role in the negotiations of the peace agreement. This agreement included specific provisions related to the DDR program that Angola was obligated to implement. As part of this DDR initiative, a new army was intended to be established.

Mr. Perito was also in attendance at the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission headquarters in Liberia, alongside Jacques Klein, who served as the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Liberia. During this time, Mr. Klein engaged in a phone conversation with Kofi Annan, with the aim of persuading him that 80,000 individuals would participate in the surrender of their weapons and ammunition following the cessation of hostilities in Liberia.

Outcomes

The Liberia weapons buyback program encountered many challenges and resulted in the proliferation of a black market for old and non-functional weaponry. Moreover, the number of weapons surrendered through this initiative was disproportionate to the number of combatants that participated in the overall conflict. It was reported that individuals would travel to Monrovia to turn in their outdated weaponry, only to use the proceeds to purchase newer and more effective firearms.

The weapons buyback initiative was also not a success in Angola. Rather, it demonstrated that weapons buybacks are not always the best course of action and must be carefully executed. In Angola, both the government and participating rebels sent their worst troops and worst weapons to be demobilized, keeping the best troops onside. The program failed to sustain a new army force, and two years later following a contentious election, the conflict resumed.

The experiences in Liberia and Angola provide a warning that weapons buyback programs have the potential to worsen conflict dynamics without careful planning, consideration, and safeguards. Given the nature of the

codification of the Angola DDR process into the peace agreement, this was also another instance where, like in Afghanistan, the DDR process failed to sufficiently translate DDR theory into successful practice.

Case Study: Bosnia

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Objectives

An experience that may be particularly pertinent to Ukraine involves the treatment of militant groups that are discovered to have carried out human rights abuses, as displayed in Bosnia. For a certain group of ethnic Serbians in northern Bosnia, the United Nations peacekeeping force decided those forces should receive training to become police officers with the ultimate goal of productive reintegration into the post-war landscape.

Roles in the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Process

The United States military was providing peacekeeping in Bosnia and the U.S. force commander had tasked the United States Department of Justice with running police training programs. Mr. Perito was involved in the training programs that were being administered by the Department of Justice.

Militarized Issues

A particular challenge occurs when units are discovered to have carried out humanitarian infractions or performed more extreme tasks as part of their military duties during conflicts. One unit in question was composed of athletic but ruthless young men who were described by U.S. peacekeepers as “stone-cold killers,” evidently not well placed to retrain as police officers. The final decision was to disband this unit and remove half of the individuals from government retraining.

Outcomes

Instead of undergoing police training, the other half of the unit was retrained to perform high-risk search and rescue operations that require athletic ability. Over time, it gave the individuals a job, status, prestige, and a sense of purpose – and ultimately, kept them out of trouble that risked the security of the broader state.

Lessons Learned

“[In Ukraine,] hopefully the ceasefire will provide for the withdrawal of military forces on both sides so there is a zone created there, but that zone is full of people and that zone will have to be policed, and that can probably best be done by creating a new civilian security force and civilian border guard.”

DDR has the serious risk of creating more conflict than it resolves. The DDR process cannot be done as a technical exercise directed by foreign experts under tight deadlines. Time must be provided for negotiations among political elites and debate among public groups, which requires patience and time. The guiding principle for these processes must be ‘do no harm.’

DDR planning begins even while a conflict is still in progress, so the process can be informed by how the conflict develops. However, questions remain in Ukraine regarding the sequencing of this DDR process, who will oversee the implementation of a DDR process, and the range of stakeholders that will need to be involved.

Ukraine’s governmental institutions are expected to play an active role. Stakeholders involved from the international community will also need to pay attention to how to approach the DDR efforts in Ukraine, as the public’s sentiment towards the DDR process will significantly influence the approach adopted by Ukraine’s political system in its pursuit of DDR objectives.

Changes to security institutions, through a process of SSR and in the disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating of armed forces into civilian society, is not a process that should be rushed. Approaches should be tested and there is a need for experimentation. Additionally, armed and unarmed actors affected by these processes should have the time to familiarize themselves with changes. These activities all require adequate time, not just in planning but also in their thoughtful implementation.

The Role of a Ceasefire

There is a balance to be achieved between the need for a demilitarized zone, the reality of Ukraine’s military defense objectives, and Russia and Ukraine’s respective military capabilities and weapons stockpiles. Following any ceasefire or end to the conflict, the Russian threat will not immediately vanish. Ukraine will need to maintain a sufficient standing army for at least several years after a ceasefire to ensure a sufficient deterrent for future Russian aggression. Ukraine’s own military forces have been enhanced by the weapons and training programs that its allies have contributed throughout the duration of

the war. A thoughtful plan for demilitarization will be essential to ensure that armed forces do not remain poised for a face-to-face wielding of powerful weapons, which invites a provocation to resume conflict.

As it has been noted from the peace agreement in Angola and the implementation of DDR in Afghanistan, a written agreement carries minimal significance if it is not effectively implemented. The lack of cooperation by Russian-aligned forces with directives from the international community not to move troops into Ukrainian territory prior to the invasion, and later from the International Atomic Energy Agency calling for a ceasefire at Zaporizhzhia, indicate that enforcement and implementation of an agreed-upon ceasefire may pose significant challenges in any eventual demilitarized zone. Furthermore there are various groups of militants who are part of the Russian armed forces, Ukrainian armed forces, and also independent combat groups with no allegiance to a central military authority. The potential for insubordination within this latter class of combatants may prove especially dangerous considering the types and quantity of powerful weapons that have amassed on both sides of the conflict in Ukraine.

Demobilization and Demilitarization

Mr. Perito emphasizes that for DDR to be successful, demilitarization and demobilization must be linked and implemented in coordination with each other. Previous DDR experiences have shown that rapid demobilization may not be the most prudent approach.

The end of the war does not indicate the absolute end of the conflict, as was learned in Bosnia and Kosovo. In these contexts, once active combat concluded, the conflict continued in terms of riots, terrorist bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, and other violent crimes that went on for several years. The militias and international groups fighting on either side of the conflict in Ukraine, which may well be composed of particularly violent units such as those in Bosnia, should likely be the first targets of demobilization efforts rather than the Ukrainian armed forces. There will be efforts to repatriate people on both sides, and the territories along the border will face social issues resulting from reintegration over a long period of time. Some people may have served in the military against their will and will want to return to a regular life after the war only to face the potential of not being accepted back into their communities.

The manner in which units are disarmed is important as well. Many prior DDR programs started with individuals coming to a registration point and turning over their weapons. This process has to be carefully managed. For

example, if more people turn up than expected, it can lead to lags in the process and a discrediting of the program. With the large quantity of advanced weapons in Ukraine and access to chemical weapons, the handling of any disarmament will be a perilous process.

Furthermore, in Ukraine, demobilized individuals will probably be able to return to their hometowns and families. However, there will be a tremendous amount of dislocation as well as the lingering destruction as a legacy of the fighting. There are now diasporas of Ukrainian refugees around the world who have fled the conflict and are facing their own integration challenges in new places. Separately, the stigma perpetuated by Russian propaganda and stereotypes that Russian people encounter will continue even after the end of the conflict. There are businesses and communities whose economic viability has been stunted due to both physical destruction as well as the impact of sanctions and disruptions to trade in the region.

Coordination of a DDR Process with Other Post-War Processes

There is a need for much more than a DDR process in Ukraine. This includes the practical need to rebuild the state's security infrastructure, the political problem of how to negotiate the repatriation of refugees and former militants, the economic issue of rebuilding trade and commerce, and the social issue of whether ex-combatants will be accepted into their communities after the war. All of these considerations will shape the development of a DDR process in Ukraine.

DDR, SSR, and economic reintegration efforts are often composed of different groups of experts who operate independently of each other with very little cross-utilization. This cannot be the case in Ukraine. The simultaneous timing of a DDR process alongside these other efforts is a crucial factor in ensuring that individuals have a suitable place to transition towards once they are removed from their units. There will be a need for one central team with an overlap of experts involved in both processes, or at the very least sufficient coordination established between the groups leading each respective process.

An SSR process in Ukraine will take on a broad mandate, with the complex task of ensuring that the institutions and forces that safeguard the state and its citizens are professional, effective, and legitimate actors that are accountable to people they serve. SSR is a highly political process and must be approached in a holistic manner with the framework of a democratic transformation, and should be linked to broad principles like respect for human rights and the rule of law. This involves professionalizing the ministries that are responsible for managing these forces, and improving the 'back office'

functions of procurement, logistics, personnel, accounting, and planning that ensure that operational units can perform effectively. SSR should incorporate the principle of good governance into the security sector.

Security institutions must also be seen as legitimate, transparent, and accountable to civilian authority established through democratic means. There is always a risk that military forces act in an effort to protect their own economic interests, thereby impeding the effectiveness and credibility of broader security efforts. This can be exacerbated when SSR programs fail to implement systems for public transparency on how funds and resources were expended. Such activity poses a challenge to the creation and legitimacy of new security systems, as well as to building public confidence in the security sector.

The success of both DDR and SSR will thus depend significantly on strong coordination between the two efforts.

Additionally, any economic recovery program put in place to offer assistance to ex-combatants when they return to their homes should be coordinated with DDR and SSR efforts. Given the need that will arise for social reintegration in Ukraine when the war ends, these economic efforts would benefit from the formation of an additional group to look at rehabilitation, recovery, and social issues.

International actors will also play an important role working alongside Ukraine's institutions. International assistance must be sustained, focused, timely, and responsive to the needs on the ground. The EU member states are well-prepared to provide cultural and institutional assistance to Ukraine throughout the DDR process, due to the similarities in their government institutions (e.g., having an interior ministry to address civilian efforts, something which is not seen in other States, like the United States).