

**POLICY PLANNING CASE STUDY
DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND
REINTEGRATION REFLECTIONS: LESSONS
LEARNED FROM AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, AND
SOMALIA**

Prepared by the

**Public International Law & Policy Group
and
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP**

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Introduction

This document has been developed out of a conversation with PILPG Senior Peace Fellow Brigadier General Robert S. Cooley, Jr. 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](#).

Brigadier General Robert S. Cooley, Jr. recently retired from his role as U.S. Army Reserve Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Reserve Headquarters in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a Civil Affairs Officer, Brig. Gen. Cooley acted as the Army Reserve Civil Affairs lead for both Africa and Europe, concurrently, and led teams responsible for addressing infrastructure development, reconstruction, rule of law and economic development in host countries. Army Reserve Soldiers bring their diverse civilian skill sets, experience and background to address very complex and dynamic problem sets. They operate as the nexus between a host government and their military, and U.S. Government agencies including the U.S. Department of State, USAID, Department of Justice, and the U.S. Military.

Brig. Gen. Cooley had teams in Ukraine for a number of years, and was active in other Eastern European countries. In Africa, his teams were present primarily in Eastern Africa, with Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (“DDR”) efforts in Somalia.

Brig. Gen. Cooley also previously served on assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq, he served as the Operations Officer for the 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, Fort Lewis, Washington. He later assumed the role of civil affairs planner in the Multinational Forces – Iraq Civil Military Operations Directorate in Baghdad, Iraq. In Afghanistan, Brig. Gen. Cooley supported Operation Enduring Freedom as the Deputy Commander for the Provincial Reconstruction Team Khost, Afghanistan.

Set out below is a summary of the key points that emerged from a discussion with Brig. Gen. Cooley on his reflections of the DDR process across Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. Brig. Gen. Cooley'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 Brig. Gen. Cooley's experiences to highlight important reflections and lessons learned from the various DDR processes he has engaged in and potential takeaways for Ukraine.

Considering a DDR Process in Ukraine

A DDR process in Ukraine will be unique from other processes (e.g., Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq) for a number of reasons. These include: the need for re-organization and reform of some of Ukraine's internal structures; the long and established presence of organized crime in Ukraine; the availability of sophisticated, long-range, strategic weapons as opposed to small arms weapons and munitions; the use and ongoing threat of 'actions below the level of armed conflict,' such as cyberattacks, and the spread of misinformation/disinformation, which can be equally damaging as the use of weapons; the presence of nuclear power plants, which create additional risk; and the global impact on Ukrainian grain, rare earth and lithium deposits.

These unique features of the Ukrainian context will need to be taken into account in the planning and implementation of any DDR process.

For a DDR process to succeed in Ukraine, certain conditions will need to be met. Firstly, this will require ensuring that there are no vacuums created by the departure of the Russian military that are filled by other bad actors, or "gaps" that emerge between allies that can be exploited by the Russian government to undermine the DDR process. Thus, Western governments that have supported Ukraine, and the Ukrainian government, will need to be fully aligned. Secondly, success metrics and an exit strategy will need to be defined from the outset. Thirdly, through demilitarization and the ongoing provision of security (e.g. through national police), the necessary space must be created to enable organizations and institutions to carry out the implementation of different DDR project streams. And finally, relevant stakeholders and decision makers will require a true awareness of all armed forces operating in the geographic space defined as eventual Ukrainian borders. This will include the military, police, constabulary forces, paramilitary, local militias as well as their root loyalties.

Stakeholders

There are many different stakeholders involved in Russia's war in Ukraine that would be involved in a DDR process.

At the national level, the key players are the government of Ukraine, local leaders connected to the government, and the people on the ground. It will be important to identify the "source of influence," that is, the local leaders who exert the most significant impact. For example, in certain parts of the Middle East, this would be the tribal elders. Therefore, in DDR processes in the Middle East, it was not necessary to speak with every single person but rather to work with the tribal elders who acted as intermediaries and as a source of influence. If

gaps amongst the different leadership levels are created, then organized crime will fill the gaps, rendering effective DDR almost impossible.

Relevant stakeholders outside of Ukraine will also include the Western governments that have provided support to Ukraine.

Militarized Issues, Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The absence of parallels with other DDR processes is what characterizes the approach to be taken in Ukraine. There are some lessons to be learned, which are discussed below.

Resource Management

In 1993, Somalia was embroiled in an ongoing civil war with numerous bad actors. The US army intervened by targeting key players in an attempt to stabilize the struggling democratic national government and ensure the distribution of food. This approach proved ineffective; for every bad actor the army eliminated, another would take its place. The attacks often resulted in additional support for the warring factions and against the national Somali government. Tribal elders fought each other for control of resources, exacerbating the conflict. A similar situation was observed in Afghanistan. Ukraine, in particular Eastern Ukraine, is the source of valuable natural resources and raw materials. A plan needs to be put in place for proper management of these resources very quickly so that they do not fall into the control of the wrong people, for instance organized crime. If organized crime gets a foothold, it will be very hard to get them out.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Security

The DDR process is not a linear sequence of events, nor does it occur in isolation. DDR in Ukraine will be preceded by a ceasefire negotiation and agreement, and the alignment of Ukraine's Western allies will be key to this ceasefire process as well as the planning and implementation of a DDR program following a ceasefire. Thus, it will be important that the right leaders, both in Ukraine and internationally, have a coordinated and harmonized approach to these processes.

Disarmament in post-conflict Ukraine will be more complex due to the source and nature of the weapons in use. Following a Swiss deterrence model, the Ukrainian government and individual citizens may want to keep possession of smaller arms to form a trained and ready militia that provides an incremental deterrence capability. The Ukrainian government would not want to lose the hard fought tactical, operational, and strategic military experience built up

throughout the war. In relation to the more sophisticated weapons, a process to return such weapons to their country of origin will need to be defined.

In terms of demobilization and reintegration, the Russian forces, mercenaries (e.g. Wagner Group fighters, Chechnya forces), and other foreign fighters should be sent home. However, the civilian forces who joined the Ukrainian army do not necessarily have civilian jobs to return to. The population may be focused on rebuilding factories and demining fields that have been mined by the Russians, instead of being focused on reintegration into the civilian economy.

Another important issue to manage will be the return of Ukrainians who fled the country and those who have been internally displaced. As the Russian and their aligned forces withdraw, the Ukrainian government must immediately fill the void for security, influence, and connection from Kyiv to outlying areas.

Ensuring ongoing security in Ukraine is necessary to support the implementation of DDR. A classic failing of DDR is the absence of effective measures to enforce the terms of the peace settlement, leading to a lack of peacekeeping. In Iraq, some activities were not helpful in achieving this aim. For example, there were detrimental consequences to the dismantling of the local police: as a consequence, there was no organization to carry out policing at the local level. The introduction of internationally run police forces and the dismantling of all local police forces risks creating a "western [security] environment" which the local citizen people can not identify with or relate to, and may therefore unite against. In Ukraine, it will be important to ensure that there is local policing and local military, potentially based on a Swiss model (i.e. deterrence), as well as efforts to keep the peace to allow other activities to take place.

To achieve a successful DDR process, Ukraine must first define the concept of 'success.' This must include a clearly articulated communications plan, with a desired end state in mind, and corresponding metrics along the way. There also needs to be a common vision amongst the western countries that have supported Zelensky as to the process. A coherent and unified strategy among Ukraine's allies can enable the Ukrainian government to have a more robust discussion with President Putin, thus preventing the Kremlin from exploiting any gaps in the collective defense of NATO and the UN. Collaboration between the West and the Ukrainian government is essential for Ukraine to achieve its desired outcomes. Failure to do so would likely result in Russia seeking peace negotiations in which it positions itself as the victor, while minimizing its losses. Such a narrative could impede the long-term success of the DDR process.