

Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition

Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko, eds. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009.

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In the expanding literature on insurgency and counter-insurgency, it is sometimes overlooked that all insurgencies contain an element of civil war. Ending these conflicts in a way that encourages sustainable security, therefore, requires a sophisticated political strategy that aims to move political and communal entities toward accommodation. Ultimately, armed groups must be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated into social, political and economic orders. While many studies of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process examine the political context only superficially, in *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict*, editors Mats Berdal and David Ucko of King's College have pulled together high-quality essays that permit an examination of this critical subject from a comparative perspective.

Not only do the editors meet their primary objective of examining the requirements for effective political reintegration of armed groups at the end of hostilities, they also provide a useful collection of lucid and insightful essays on some of the most vexing and complex armed conflicts of recent history. Well-crafted and well-researched chapters cover the reintegration of illegal armed groups in Colombia; post-conflict reintegration in Tajikistan; disarmament and demobilisation in Afghanistan; political reintegration in Iraq; demobilisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda; the political reintegration of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front; and the reintegration of UNITA in Angola. The combination of the depth of analysis in each of the essays and the breadth of the collection makes this volume particularly valuable. Moreover, the editors remain sensitive to the uniqueness of each of the case studies as they highlight common observations and the fundamental need for effective political reintegration of armed groups to end conflict and establish enduring peace and security.

Alexandra Guaqueta, in her essay on Colombia, defines political reintegration as 'letting ... irregular armies share power through electoral competition or transforming them into law-abiding citizens with social recognition and influence in public opinion and policy-making at the local or national levels' (p. 34). She notes that groups must be accepted by the relevant communities and have the capacity to perform as social and political interlocutors. She also highlights the importance of an international context that sets boundaries for transformation into legitimate social and political organisations as well as a domestic political context that defines new social contracts and shapes the reconstruction process.

In their chapter on Tajikistan, Stina Torjesen and S. Neil MacFarlane argue that the prioritisation of reintegration over demobilisation and disarmament in Tajikistan was actually a critical element of that country's success. The political leadership's tolerance of armed groups' retention of weapons stockpiles and criminal activities, combined with economic benefits and the appointment of former commanders to political positions, built the requisite trust and perceptions of safety. Similarly, Antonio Giustozzi, in his essay on Afghanistan, argues that a 'façade process of disarmament' that left military commanders in control of their local areas led

to stability and legitimisation in the short term. The long-term negative effect on the population due to dashed expectations, however, may far outweigh those short-term gains. Many of the essays expose tensions between the short-term requirement to stop the violence and the long-term objective of achieving a sustainable political order. Zoe Marriage concludes in her essay on the Democratic Republic of the Congo that 'short-term gains and confidence tricks sustain the process, but risk establishing political institutions that are, in the long term, destructive and abusive' (p. 140).

Giustozzi's essay on Afghanistan and Ucko's essay on Iraq highlight the difficulty of post-conflict political transition in the wake of 'regime change'. Ucko identifies the essence of the problem associated with political reintegration in Iraq after the collapse of the Hussein regime: 'Enjoying the most transient of support and legitimacy, the occupier must swiftly locate indigenous authorities to whom power can be transferred, but these national leaders must also be effective and perceived as widely representative and accountable' (p. 109). He highlights the importance of local knowledge and points to the success of local efforts to move communities toward accommodation. Ucko also summarises succinctly one of the central problems in Iraq today that will, in large measure, determine whether the Iraqi people suffer from a return of large-scale communal violence: it is unclear whether key leaders in the government will share power enough to keep critical communities committed to advancing their interests through the political process rather than through violence.

As Anna Borzello observes in her essay on Northern Uganda, 'a DDR programme will only be meaningful if the underlying causes of the conflict are tackled' (p. 161). And, considered together, the essays make it clear that only an approach based on a foundational political strategy, and one that is integrated fully with security and economic efforts, can succeed. For example, Kieran Mitton concludes from his examination of Sierra Leone that conventional political incorporation was infeasible due to the Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) unsuitability for transformation into a political party. It was essential, therefore, that military force be applied against leaders determined to spoil the political process and that economic reintegration aim to shrink the pool of popular discontent from which the RUF drew strength. Berdal, Ucko and the other contributors to this volume have demonstrated convincingly that DDR programmes, if they are to succeed, must be one component of a broad political process. This is an important book that should be at the top of the reading lists of practitioners and policymakers involved in peacekeeping, counter-insurgency, post-conflict stability and DDR efforts.