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Ownership and right-timing of DDR: Combatants' perspectives on post-war peacebuilding

Introduction

Armed opposition movements have become major stakeholders in political warfare and conflict transformation. These actors, who often play core governance and security functions in areas under their control during armed conflict, have thus the potential to play vital leadership roles in implementing post-war political reforms and the provision of (human) security. However, there is a persistent tendency among states and international peacebuilding agencies to look upon (former) combatants as passive recipients or 'target groups' of DDR programs, or even as 'spoilers' who should disband and disappear once peace has prevailed – rather than peacebuilding partners or agents in the driver's seat of transformation. The timing and 'boundaries' of DDR processes are also problematic, as international peacebuilding agencies tend to view their implementation sequentially (i.e. first DD, then R), and in artificial isolation from other components of peace agreements (i.e. state reform). However, combatants are often very reluctant to undergo decommissioning and demobilisation schemes before they can be convinced that their wartime grievances will be addressed through comprehensive state reforms, that a backlash of force against them or the people whom they stand for can be ruled out, and that they will be allowed to play an active part in the security, political and socio-economic systems of governance.

Given the limitations of mainstream concepts, assumptions and terminology which dominate the field of post-war security governance, the purpose of this paper is to reconsider existing DDR models based on the direct experience of former combatants in Northern Ireland, Aceh and Nepal. In these three recent or ongoing peacebuilding processes, local conflict protagonists have taken real ownership of their post-war transition process, and international assistance has fostered, rather than impeded, their roles as active peacebuilding agents. The paper thus examines the co-production, sequencing and components of DDR mechanisms from the perspective of former rebel fighters, and the conditions under which they generate and maintain the political will to restore state monopoly over the use of force and participate in post-war security governance, socio-economic development and democratic state-building. It starts with a critical review of conventional approaches to post-war DDR, followed by an empirical assessment of alternative approaches to the timing and ownership of post-war security transitions in Northern Ireland, Aceh and Nepal.

Most of the findings are based on an ongoing participatory research project on the dynamics of post-war security transition processes carried out in cooperation with local researchers and leading members from various (former) non-state armed groups

around the world, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the People Liberation Army (PLA), and the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Acheh Merdeka*, GAM).

1. Limits in conventional approach to DDR

This first section offers a critical outlook on conventional policy approaches to DDR supported by the peacebuilding community,[1] based on the author's consultation with members or veterans from various (former or active) non-state armed groups,[2] and correlated by the recent scholarly literature.

1.1. Linear approach: DDR as counter-insurgency by other means

The United Nations Integrated DDR Standards (UNIDDRS) published in 2006 represent the most comprehensive policy tools for defining DDR. They compile knowledge, lessons learned and established best practice on a wide range of issues relating to DDR concepts, policies and strategies, as well as to programme planning, design, management, monitoring and evaluation. The specified objective of DDR is to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments, so that recovery and development can begin (Knight 2011).

However, this conventional approach to DDR is criticised by the very actors for whom these schemes are designed, namely, members of non-state armed groups (often referred to with the encompassing term 'combatants', as will be clarified below). They tend to view the terminology and concepts which underscore DDR with a lot of suspicion, perceiving them as being chiefly concerned with dismantling them and removing their capacity to engage in armed rebellion, whereas statutory forces can get away with minor reforms, if any; in other words, as 'counter-insurgency by other means'.

According to the UNIDDRS definitions, *disarmament* represents the first component of DDR. It is defined as "the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population" (UN 2006a). This definition, however, typically applies to non-statutory troops only, while state security forces undergo mere 'demilitarisation' or 'rationalisation' schemes consisting in partial withdrawals or the reduction of troops, while their apparatus and arsenal remain intact. Rebel troops are likely to take exception to this disparity, as they see the term 'disarmament' as being connoted with defeat or surrender (Liesinen and Lahdensuo 2008: 21). In their view, such vocabulary fails to reflect the realities of negotiated peace settlements, which are typically signed between parties in situations of relative power parity after having reached a "mutually hurting stalemate" (Zartman 1996).

The second element of DDR, *demobilisation*, consists in "the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups" (UN 2006a), combined with the dissolution of the structures of the organisation from which they are released (UN 2006a, 2.1: 4). This process can be achieved either

[1] The term 'peacebuilding community' will be broadly used in this volume in reference to international agencies engaged in post-war DDR or SSR assistance, such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, European Union (EU) or state-based development agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

[2] The views reflected here were gathered during a roundtable meeting in Bangkok (May 2009), attended by researchers close to, or (ex-) members from, ten former or contemporary non-state armed groups.

voluntarily or though military enforcement, in order to "break the hold of armed forces and groups and weaken their structures" (UN 2006a, 2.10: 6). It can be argued, however, that abrupt demobilisation entails the risk of creating a security vacuum in the short-term: it can lead to disorder and disorientation among former combatants when removed from their collective identity and dissociated from their group, or even trigger the disintegration or fragmentation of the movement and the return to violence by unsatisfied splinter groups.

The third and final component of DDR schemes, according to the UNDDRS, entails both short-term reinsertion and longer-term reintegration. *Reinsertion* is "a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families" (UN 2006a), it can last up to a year, and consists in material and/or financial assistance including safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. *Reintegration* "is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often requires long-term external assistance" (UN 2006a, 1.10: 2). This definition places reintegration firmly within the socio-economic development sphere, in isolation from other sectors of post-war professional conversion towards the statutory security sector or the political arena, although these often represent primary sectors of integration of former combatants.[3]

The timing of DDR schemes also fails to reflect the realities of contemporary asymmetric conflicts and peacebuilding processes. Indeed, not only are the components of DDR schemes are usually considered sequentially (first D, then D, then R), but DDR is also seen as preceding the implementation of structural reforms to redress the conflict's root causes, including the transformation of the state's security apparatus. As highlighted by studies on the nexus between DDR and security sector reform (SSR), "both academia and practice generally assume that DDR is a relatively quick process, followed sequentially by SSR, which plays out over time" (McFate 2010: 3). This was also confirmed by a UN Security Council report, stating that "most current missions treat DDR as a separate discipline with DDR completion as a precondition for commencing a future SSR strategy" (UNSC 2007).

A major caveat to such a linear approach is that it fails to take into account the 'security dilemma' encountered by (former) combatants, which will be explored into more detail in the next section. While governments consider the existence of armed non-state actors to be a serious challenge and threat to the security of the state, power contenders view the possession and use of arms to be an indispensable prerequisite for the security of the people they represent. As a result, they will hesitate abandoning their militarised status before they can be convinced that their political status and legitimacy is fully recognised by the government, that their wartime grievances will be addressed through comprehensive reforms and that a backlash of force against them or the people whom they stand for can be ruled out. In post-war situations characterised by extreme inter-party mistrust, mere promises under the auspices of confidence-building talks or even signed peace agreements do not offer sufficient guarantees for combatants to disarm unilaterally (Sriram 2008).

[3] For instance, in Nepal, the vast majority of combatants stationed in Maoist cantonments since the signature of the 2006 peace accord indicate that their "only hope is to work in the national army" (Ogura 2011).

It should be acknowledged that there is an increased understanding of the linkages between DDR and its political environment within international agencies. The UN's Briefing Note for Senior Managers, part of the UNIDDRS, recognised that DDR should be seen essentially a politically-driven process and that many DDR programmes experience delays or are only partially implemented because of the political climate (UN 2006b: 3). For its part, the Stockholm Initiative on DDR launched by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs suggests in its final report that DDR should be viewed primarily as a political undertaking, and hence the structures and processes utilised during implementation should recognise and reflect this reality (Swedish MFA 2006). Consequently, a few authors have recently called for putting politics back at the centre of DDR, e.g. by considering the "transformation of a former armed group into a … political actor resorting to democratic mechanisms to achieve its aims … as an element of evaluation in DDR programs" (Pouligny 2004: 17-18). Based on such observations, the conclusions of an international Congress on DDR (Cartagena, May 2009) attended by over 1,500 national and international policy-makers and peacebuilding professionals called for a more holistic approach to DDR recognising its political and structural elements:

> DDR has expanded far beyond its original stabilization-orientated aims and technical approach. It now frequently encompasses broader socio-economic development, governance, justice and reconciliation, security sector reform, and capacity building. As such, it shifted from a more narrow focus on supporting the transition of former combatants to a normal civilian life, security promotion and demilitarisation to a broader emphasis on improving governance and the rule of law, balancing the social and economic needs and aspirations of the individual with those of the community in particular, and, more generally facilitating peace building and sustainable social and economic development (Colletta 2009).

With regards to the linear approach described above, scholars and practitioners are also starting to recognise the need to invert the sequencing of security arrangements – from DDR to 'RDD', to "begin with socio-economic incentives of reintegration and only end with some form of disarmament or arms control dependent upon the context" (Colletta 2009: 77). In line with this innovative approach, section 2 will demonstrate empirically that beyond the usefulness of early ceasefire declarations, transitory weapons storage and other confidence-building measures that help to convince their opponents to put reciprocal concessions on the negotiation table, rebel troops will usually only agree to formally disarm and demobilise once they are confident that they can ensure the safety of their demobilised combatants, that comprehensive agreements have been reached over the substantive conflict issues and that their political aims will be achieved, or at least that they will be able to pursue them effectively by non-violent means.

1.2. The myth of local ownership: combatants as DDR 'recipients' rather peacebuilding agents

This sub-section turns to the participants of DDR schemes. Although non-state armed groups have become central stakeholders in contemporary political conflicts, their crucial contributions to ending wars and implementing peace are still largely underestimated and misunderstood by the peacebuilding community.

On the one hand, it has become widely recognised that state actors should not be the sole interlocutors or partners for international agencies. The need for 'local ownership' has become a kind of buzzword for international post-war intervention, and is increasingly understood as encompassing non-state actors as well (Panarelli 2010) – including not only civil society organisations, but also former combatants. At the UN level, recent reports have pointed to an appreciation of the significance of armed groups as actors for positive change in post-conflict peacebuilding. For instance, the UN Security Council recognises that "in the aftermath of recent internal conflict, peace agreements may allocate parallel legitimate roles … also to some non-state security actors such as former rebel forces or militias" (UNSC 2007).

On the other hand, a review of peacebuilding missions by regional organisations, such as the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or the African Union (AU) has shown that their mandates made no explicit references to armed non-state actors, even when these were primary signatory parties to the peace accords (Schnabel 2009).[4] At the UN level as well, despite aforementioned recognition of the role played by former combatants in post-war settings, the implementation of UN missions fails to include them as peacebuilding stakeholders. The tendency, instead, is for 'outside experts' to either work with their state-labelled partners without questioning who they represent and what legitimacy they can claim or to "follow technocratic blueprints informed by normative assumptions about what the [new] state should be" without consulting local actors about the dynamics at play in the host country (Mehler 2009: 59). Even when national (state and non-state alike) actors are involved in the implementation of DDR schemes, it is usually international actors who bring in the financial means to carry them out, and thus who defines the parameters of what can be undertaken. There is thus a clear potential for tensions between the priorities and approaches adopted by national actors, and those favoured by international actors (Knight 2011). It can be logically assumed, however, that when reforms or power-sharing provisions are externally imposed or exclude the key local stakeholders in the decision-making process, these actors will not feel genuinely committed to the process.

One factor which impedes the design and implementation of context-specific and participatory DDR schemes is the failure of most international peacebuilding agencies to grasp the reality of DDR recipients' needs and post-war trajectories, partly based on the numerous misunderstandings which surround the terms 'reintegration' and '(ex-)combatants'.

The concept of reintegration often misrepresents the nature of armed group members and their relationship with their surrounding community. The term 're-integration' itself suggests a need for combatants re-enter a society they have supposedly been separated from during the time of their involvement in armed struggle. However, "reintegration may be nebulous to those already living and working in their communities" (Colletta 2009: 76). In many contexts, the specificities of insurgency warfare mean that combatants are not cut off from their social milieu, but are embedded in their community at all times. It might be difficult to clearly distinguish combatants from non-combatants in those social or regional contexts where large parts of the population are involved in the insurgency in various ways, even when they do not carry weapons. As argued by a former rebel leader from Aceh, "the relation between fighters and the people was so close that the border between the

[4] The only exception is the EU Monitoring Mission in Aceh/Indonesia, which does contain references to the implementation of DDR programmes in cooperation with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

two was practically non-existent. Combatants were the sons and daughters of the people; we were fed, sheltered and looked after by the villagers" (Wandi 2011).

The term reintegration also seems to imply a process of reconciliation with the population, obscuring the fact that, upon their return, combatants are often "considered as freedom fighters, and are looked upon like heroes, which are accepted easily into society based on their constituencies" (Colletta 2009: 73). This view stands in sharp contrast with calls for transitional justice on the grounds that "the actual and perceived impunity of ex-combatants who have perpetrated severe acts of violence and other abuses of human rights can significantly impact on tensions and the potential for reintegration at the community level" (Bell and Watson 2006: 27). Such assertions fail to account for contexts where most human rights abuses were committed by state forces or their allies (e.g. paramilitaries), who might, therefore, face more acute problems of social acceptance.[5]

Finally, there is a tendency among peacebuilding agencies to select reintegration beneficiaries according to internationally-agreed definitions and criteria, thereby ignoring local realities. The most common criterion for the identification of combatants is the possession of a weapon, which fails to reflect the diversity of functions performed within armed groups, and might lead to the exclusion of significant parts of a movement's members, especially those who were involved in political rather than military responsibilities or sustained their movement through support functions. This highlight the necessity to take into account the individual needs and challenges of the beneficiaries with regards to their individual attributes (e.g. age or gender), pre-war education and skills, status within the movement and degree of interaction with their community during the struggle. There is in particular a need for gender-sensitive re-skilling programmes. While female combatants represent up to 30% of rebel movements,[6] the majority of them tend to fulfil 'conventional female tasks' such as nursing, communications or cooking. Linking combatant benefits exclusively to combat tasks, and thereby reflecting the gendered division of labour and hierarchy of status, has in many cases led to the marginalisation of female combatants. Moreover, while male ex-combatants are more likely to be recognised as heroes or freedom fighters upon their return, demobilised female fighters often experience stigmatisation based on their presumed 'looseness', their abandonment of the family and their non-compliance with conventional female roles, as their participation in violence is perceived as 'deviant' (Farr 2002: 7).

These observations highlight the need to critically review established perceptions of (former) combatants. Their modalities of participation in armed conflict and their support by local constituencies vary widely and one cannot solely rely on international templates to address distinct local realities. The term 'reintegration' often fails to capture the essence of a conversion process over which combatants themselves have ownership and stewardship, as agents of conflict transformation. These shortcomings highlight the need for participatory approaches to DDR that place combatants and their organisations at the centre of gravity of 'reintegration processes', and thus call for holistic and participatory DDR processes.

2. Right-timing of arms management and demobilisation

[5] For instance, the ratio of killings attributed to the state or its allies (as opposed to the rebel insurgency) during the conflict amounts to 63% in Nepal (ICG 2010).

[6] For example, women represent 20% of the Maoist movement in Nepal. In Aceh, the liberation movement GAM even had a female-only-battalion, the '*Inong Balee*' (Widows Corps).

In acute asymmetric conflicts, the concept of security underlines different interests on the part of the various conflict stakeholders. For state actors, whose contested authority and legitimacy gave rise to conflict in the first place, security tends to be narrowly understood in terms of 'negative peace' (i.e. the absence of direct violence) and stability. By contrast, for armed opposition groups and their constituencies, security entails various human needs ranging from personal safety to socio-economic wellbeing or political freedom, all of which need to be addressed for sustainable peacebuilding to take place. This section examines the sequencing of disarmament and demobilisation schemes with respect to the implementation of structural (i.e. state) reform to address the root causes of violence, in the recent peace processes in Northern Ireland, Aceh and Nepal. All three cases represent successful examples of negotiated transitions from protracted intra-state violence to (ongoing) post-war peacebuilding following the signature of peace agreements (respectively in 1998, 2005 and 2006), where issues of timing and reciprocity represented major stumbling blocks throughout the peace process.

2.1. Timing of decommissioning

In all three peace processes under scrutiny, the removal of weapons as part of the demobilisation process was described through alternative labels in place of the more conventional term 'disarmament' described earlier. In Northern Ireland and Aceh the term 'decommissioning' was purposely chosen in the peace accord in order to underscore a voluntary process of "removing something from operational status" rather than 'surrendering' them (Liesinen and Lahdensuo 2008: 21). In Nepal, the term 'management of arms and armies' was carefully selected in order to highlight the importance of simultaneous, equal processes of arms reduction and/or downsizing on the side of both statutory and non-statutory forces.

These negotiations over the terminology surrounding arms management highlight the importance of this DDR component for all conflict parties. Governments typically assess the effectiveness of peace processes according to the effective restoration of the state's monopoly over the use of force. In turn, for rebel groups, the possession and use of weapons might perform a number of complementary functions: a strategic role in the fight for military supremacy on the battlefield, a safety role in the provision of physical protection for fighters and their surrounding environment, a governance role in community policing, a political role as a 'bargaining chip' to be exchanged for political concessions and, finally, a symbolic or even 'mystical' role through which combatants create their collective identity or are defined and identified by others. For all these reasons, arms management represents an acute security dilemma for them, and premature demands by governments for their rebel challengers to decommission their weapons in the early stages of (or even prior to) political negotiations represents a major preoccupation for combatants.

Since the radicalisation of the nationalist struggle for self-determination in the six Counties of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, the armed front organisation IRA upheld armed struggle as the primary strategy of resistance against British rule, and in the subsequent peace process during the 1990s, the IRA's position throughout negotiations was to emphasise that "decommissioning could only be done on a voluntary basis" and in the context of (rather than as a precondition to) an overall

agreement.[7] In fact, after the first IRA ceasefire in 1994, the insistence by the then Conservative government in Britain that weapons decommissioning should begin before all-party political negotiations was a major contributing factor to the breakdown of that ceasefire in 1996 (English 2004). The 1998 peace accord (the so-called Good Friday Agreement) was voluntarily kept very vague with regards to decommissioning, so that its terms and timing could be interpreted differently by the respective parties. During the implementation stage, Republicans insisted on making progressive concessions on the weapons issues alongside parallel tangible progress in withdrawing UK army troops, setting up a power-sharing government, reforming the police and justice systems and setting up island-wide political institutions (De Brun 2008). The IRA started opening some of its weapons dumps for international inspection as a confidence-building measure in 2000 and disposed of the rest of its arms in several stages, until final statements in 2005 announcing that the process was completed and instructing members to exclusively pursue peaceful means.[8]

In Aceh, the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) put an end to half a century of civil struggle for regional autonomy and thirty years of national-separatist armed conflict. Weapons management was also seen as a delicate issue during the negotiations, as combatants feared that the loss of their weapons after the peace agreement would leave them vulnerable if its provisions failed to be fully implemented (Wandi 2011). They also feared for the fighters' personal safety and lacked trust in the government's good will, in light of their traumatic experience in 2003 when four GAM negotiators were arrested following the collapse of previous peace talks in Geneva. As a result, negotiations over arms management only took place towards the end of the six-month Helsinki talks. The principle 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed' meant that all components of the peace deal were included in a single comprehensive accord, which addressed many of GAM's grievances by democratising the political system (e.g. right for Acehnese parties, including GAM itself, to compete in local and national elections) and introducing extensive power devolution measures. For its part, the implementation of decommissioning was carefully timed, simultaneously with a parallel, jointly-phased process of withdrawal of non-indigenous (i.e. non-Acehnese) army troops from the Province.

Finally, the Nepali case also clearly illustrates the reluctance of opposition groups to disarm and demobilise their troops before receiving tangible indications that their governance claims will be addressed and implemented. Throughout the (ongoing) peace process which preceded and followed the signature of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord that ended a decade-long Maoist insurgency against the Nepali monarchy, the rebel leaders have conditioned the full disarmament and demobilisation of their troops with the simultaneous process of constitution-writing. They have thus "been utilising their armed force as a tool of negotiation until they can get … the constitution they want" (Ogura 2011). The arms management scheme agreed by the parties enabled a fair reciprocal process of collection and registration of a similar number of weapons by the Maoist army (PLA) and state army, and enabled both the Maoist army to maintain full control over its weapons until the post-war trajectory of its combatants is decided upon, while reassuring other parties that these arms would be closely monitored. Indeed, PLA weapons have been stored since the

[7] Provisional IRA statement, available online at www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/latest_news/85905.stm

[8] See www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4283720.stm.

2006 peace accord in containers set up inside Maoist cantonments and the combatants were granted responsibility for keeping the containers' keys, with UN troops exercising 24-hour control.

All three cases thus highlight the interactions and interdependence between the reciprocal processes of restoring or creating a state's legitimate monopoly over the use of force, and addressing the (former) state challengers' claims to comprehensive state reforms.

2.2. Demobilisation, maintenance or transformation of armed groups?

The peace processes in Northern Ireland, Aceh and Nepal also offer a contrasting approach to the DDR model highlighted above when it comes to the timing of demobilisation, i.e. the dismantlement rebel structures. Indeed, all three cases highlight the importance of retaining coordination and communication channels through cohesive structures during post-war transitions, which can be described as a two-staged process: short term maintenance of command structures in order to prevent the creation of security vacuums and supervise the professional reorientation of combatants; and long-term institutionalisation of civilian entities that pursue the 'struggle' through conventional politics or looking after the welfare of their members, such as political parties and veterans' associations.

Internal consultation and debate that precedes, accompanies or follows back-channel and formal negotiations play a major role in influencing the move from militancy to negotiated transitions. This includes horizontal debates between various leaders or factions (Dudouet 2009), but also vertical (top-down) communication across the movement's hierarchy in order to gather support for new strategies, educate members and supporters about the peace accord's provisions and their post-war options, and maintain intra-group discipline and compliance during volatile peace processes. In the three cases at stake, various mechanisms were put in place as promoting a high degree of accountability and unity in the immediate post-agreement phase, such as the temporary cantonment of troops in assembly areas to retain control over combatants (Nepal), the maintenance of command structures throughout the transition (Northern Ireland) and the formation of interim bodies to supervise an orderly civilian or military (re)conversion (Aceh).

Although the cantonment of combatants is seen in DDR manuals as a prelude to demobilisation, in some circumstances it can also be used to keep rebel troops united and disciplined during fragile post-agreement transitions. In Nepal, Maoist troops have been stationed in self-built cantonments since the 2006 peace accord, following their leadership's instructions to patiently wait for a political compromise on their military integration and/or socio-economic rehabilitation. Ogura (2011) conducted extensive interviews with various combatants across the PLA hierarchy in 2008 and 2010, all of whom expressed their readiness to remain cantoned as long as deemed necessary by their party leaders, in spite of the slow progress of the peace process. This high level of trust and commitment might be largely explained by the strong discipline and ideology within the movement, as well as the intensive 'coaching' carried out by commanders down the chain of command.

The Northern Irish case offers an interesting perspective on the dismantling of militant structures and decision-making bodies. Immediately after the IRA's final decommissioning of arms in September 2005, there were demands from the Unionist community for the IRA to disband all paramilitary command structures, including the IRA ruling Army Council, as a necessary precondition to enable full inter-party

confidence in the peacebuilding process (McEvoy 2011). Despite such claims, IRA structures remained more or less intact since the 1994, and even their political opponents have come to accept implicitly the pragmatic logic that maintaining a leadership structure was required to oversee the transition and demobilisation of the organisation. In fact, the organisation has even continued to recruit new members, engage in training and intelligence gathering up until 2006/7, even though the organisation's trajectory towards complete unarmed struggle was by then irreversible. This was justified by the necessity to prevent young people from joining dissenting factions opposed to the peace process, and thus maintain discipline within the broader movement. "At no time however were these actions a threat to the peace process, quite the reverse in fact" (McEvoy 2011). In November 2009 the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) reported that "[The IRA] remained on an exclusively political path; we believed that it would continue to do so and that the organisation would be allowed to wither away; … by conscious decision the Army Council was being allowed to fall into disuse; and the Provisional IRA had in these ways completely relinquished the leadership and other structures appropriate to a time of conflict" (IMC 2009: 10).

A third mechanism helping to maintain cohesion and security during the immediate post-war period is the formation of interim self-run structures to oversee combatants' transition to civilian life or the statutory security sector, in contrast to the conventional approach of state-run or international DDR commissions. In the wake of the 2005 peace accord in Aceh, GAM's military wing was transformed into a civilian Transitional Committee (KPA) in charge of supervising the demobilisation of its combatants, ensuring their economic well-being and maintaining a cohesive structure until the formation of a political party. "The establishment of the KPA created strong suspicions among the government representatives, who saw this structure as a continuation of the military wing of GAM under a new name and identity. ... From GAM's perspective however, the existence of a transitional body is perceived as a crucial means for the movement to assist the transition process internally" (Wandi 2011). Such structures also play a symbolic role by providing elements of continuity in the struggle in the eyes of the movement's constituency.

If the maintenance of cohesive structures through such 'interim stabilisation measures' (Colletta et Muggah 2009) is helpful in the short-term in order to keep combatant cohesiveness intact and prevent the creation of security vacuums in the early stages of post-war transition, in the long-term, the demobilisation of non-statutory security forces is accompanied by the consolidation of inclusive political entities.

One defining feature of politically-motivated non-state armed groups is their organisation around distinct structures that allow for the simultaneity of armed and unarmed forms of struggle. In some instances, political movements predated the formation of a military organisation (e.g. Sinn Fein and IRA in Northern Ireland), and both entities were voluntarily autonomous during the struggle in order to allow the political front to wage non-violent campaigns, pursue electoral politics or conduct negotiations. In other cases, the political leadership controlled and took full responsibility for their military branch, as seen with GAM's government in exile and its field commanders in Aceh, and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the PLA in Nepal. In both cases, the consolidation of their political branches as conventional political parties represents the most direct avenue for the continuation of the struggle through non-violent means. Success in the electoral arena indeed helps to convince former state challengers and their supporters that social change can be

pursued effectively through democratic politics, as illustrated by the unexpected Maoist victory in the 2008 constituent assembly elections in Nepal, and the large success of GAM's political party *Partei Aceh* in provincial, local and national elections since 2006 in Aceh. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein is currently the second party in the Northern Irish assembly and the largest party representing the nationalist community (a position previously held by the moderate Social Democratic Labour Party).

Despite these electoral successes, the institutionalisation of cohesive, democratic and effective post-war political structures represents a major organisational challenge for armed opposition movements that aspire to participate in post-war state-building and democratic transitions, especially after decades of illegal existence, exile or underground operations. In particular, political institutionalisation requires adopting a new political culture, formulating a new programme, installing party organisational structures, recruiting party cadres and building the capacity to govern. As argued in Aceh, "the ability to transform a group from a military organisation into a political organisation requires a serious change in mindset. Intimidation and attempts to sway voters during *Partai Aceh*'s electoral campaign led other local political parties to question the democratic practice of former combatants." Furthermore, "Many of the combatants have no training in the administrative and political skills required to run a government or parliament. The expectations are high for delivery and change while the skill level is low (Wandi 2011)." This example suggest that movements that are not sufficiently experienced in political organisation require internal and external capacity-building support. The lack of adequate training is partly explained by international donors shying away from programmes seen as too political and the inability of local NGOs to negotiate the content of their trainings with international sponsors. Against this backdrop, the training activities conducted by the German political foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Aceh are cited as one rare positive example of political capacity-building enhancement by international agencies.

This links to a last point that must be critically examined, namely, the readiness for change in the leadership structure to adapt to peacetime priorities and agendas. Although rebel movements tend to be hierarchically organised with a clear top-down chain of command, which is effective for military operations, political parties require more horizontal structures, whereby power is less concentrated and more democratically diffused throughout the organisation. Therefore, rebels-turned-political parties should seek a healthy balance between continuity or stability and transformation.

3. Combatants as peacebuilding agents

As seen above, former combatants can potentially play very significant leadership roles in political and security transitions after asymmetric conflicts, but there remains a tendency within international DDR programmes to treat them as passive recipients of donor aid, rather than actors determined to assert their sovereignty over their own destiny and that of their constituency. However, it can be logically assumed if local stakeholders are not given the ownership of their own peacebuilding processes, they will not feel genuinely committed to the process and will fail to comply if they see that the strategy is failing. By contrast, the purpose of this section is to highlight some lessons learnt from three contexts where armed group members as well as governmental actors were centrally involved in the negotiation, implementation and

monitoring of DDR provisions, resulting in sustainable conflict transformation outcomes – none of these countries have (as yet) returned to war.

3.1. Rebels at the negotiation table

The principle of national ownership firstly implies the need for direct political and security negotiations with all relevant and affected stakeholders (i.e. political and military leaders), with (Aceh, Northern Ireland) or without (Nepal) third-party facilitation. Such broad platforms increase the likelihood that the root causes of the conflict will be placed on the peacebuilding agenda and that the parties will generate and maintain the political will to bring about the necessary reforms to demilitarise, democratise, develop and reconcile the country. Inclusive dialogue also helps to preserve organisational cohesion within armed groups during the very delicate shift from armed resistance to conventional politics, and thus to prevent the formation of splinter groups or leaders' loss of effective control over more radical constituencies that feel excluded, or uncommitted to, the negotiated agreements.

In all three cases under scrutiny, armed opposition leaders were centrally involved in peace talks, resulting agreements providing for the restoration of the state's monopoly of force, but also offering guarantees that this monopoly would be exercised in a legitimate manner. In Aceh, the political and security talks in Helsinki leading up to the 2005 peace accord were discussed by a single negotiation team from each side. GAM's team was only comprised of exiled political leaders; no field commanders took part in the negotiations. In Northern Ireland, the negotiations were primarily led by the politicians (i.e. Sinn Fein on the Republican side) on behalf of their respective constituency (De Brun 2008). In Nepal, political negotiations culminating in the CPA were preceded and followed by informal direct talks between the respective military commanders; however, current negotiations on army integration are only being discussed by politicians within a special committee set up by the government. In most cases, however, inclusivity failed to extend to gender representativeness at the negotiation table. While women were actively involved in most struggles (see above), female combatants have been clearly side-lined in the negotiation processes. Female representatives participated to some degree in peace negotiations in Northern Ireland and Aceh, albeit mostly in subordinate support roles, while the peace talks in Nepal did not involve any female negotiators at all.

As a result of the direct participation of the main conflict stakeholders to the bargaining table, all three peace accords included provisions to redress the root causes of violence by transforming state institutions and offering 'governance incentives' (Sriram 2008) to former state challengers. These entailed measures to democratise the security sector (army reform and reduction in Nepal – which are yet to be implemented, policing and justice reform in Northern Ireland, withdrawal of non-indigenous troops in Aceh) and to open up the political system. One major element of peace agreements indeed concerns the restructuring of the political regime to establish or strengthen participatory multi-party democracy. These reforms might include both transitional power-sharing mechanisms opening up the governance sphere to previously excluded political forces, and longer-term constitutional change to democratise state institutions. With regards to the former, the peace accords in Aceh and Nepal provided for the right for armed groups to form political parties and enter the political arena. In Nepal, a transitory power-sharing executive was put in place that included representatives of the former state challengers, in charge of running the country until the organisation of democratic elections. Moreover, more permanent

measures were also enforced to open up the political system to representatives of constituencies that were previously excluded or marginalised, through electoral reform guaranteeing democratic elections, or, more dramatically, by enforcing regime change from a monarchy to a republic in Nepal. In Northern Ireland, inclusive democracy was also institutionalised at the executive level through a permanent power-sharing system: all major parties, including Sinn Fein, are required to be represented in the Northern Irish Executive. Finally, in separatist or irredentist struggles, political reforms are more concerned with redistributing power and resources from the (former) centre to the periphery. Self-determination – or self-rule – was achieved in Aceh and Northern Ireland through the provision of extended autonomy and power devolution within the national framework.

3.2. Self-managed DDR schemes

As already hinted in section 2, armed group leaders have also been centrally involved in implementing and monitoring the DDR process undergone by their troops in the three cases under scrutiny. According to combatants consulted in all three countries, it was felt as particularly important to keep state actors, and especially the army, out of the process of decommissioning and demobilisation. Instead, the process of handing over weapons (Aceh), storing them in self-managed containers (Nepal) or 'put them beyond use' (Northern Ireland) was supervised by international monitors – an EU-led mission in Aceh, the UN in Nepal, and an independent commission led by retired Canadian General in Northern Ireland.

For its part, reintegration (variously called 'socio-economic facilitation in Aceh and 'rehabilitation' in Nepal) was also led and run by the combatants themselves. In several cases, ex-combatants created their own organisational support networks, be it in form of veteran associations, communal projects or private NGOs. In Northern Ireland, for instance, combatants put in place a 'self-help model' of reintegration consisting in projects for counselling or micro-economic schemes staffed and managed by ex-combatants themselves, with initial financing from the European Union.

In Aceh, GAM took in charge the distribution of reintegration benefits sponsored by the international community through its own organ, the KPA (see above). However, it faced the challenge of fairly distributing the compensation schemes among all its supporters. Indeed, the discrepancy between the 'political number' of registered GAM combatants and the 'real' size of the movement meant that the KPA had to distribute the funds allocated to 3,000 official combatants among more than 25,000 ex-members (Marhaban 2011). Besides, female GAM veterans also founded their own organisations to support fellow female ex-combatants, for instance by offering political training to those who wished to pursue a political career. In Nepal finally, it is too premature to assess the reintegration scheme which has only just started (in the case of members who did not meet the qualifications required to be registered as combatants) and will be implemented in the coming few months, in parallel with the process of security sector integration and political institutionalisation.

Conclusion and lessons learnt

This paper has outlined an innovative approach to post-war DDR and peacebuilding building on the perspective of former state challengers turned state-building agents. It

focuses on interactions and interdependence between the reciprocal processes of restoring or creating a state's legitimate monopoly over the use of force, including conflict stakeholders into the various sectors of post-war governance, and addressing their claims to comprehensive state reforms. In particular, the work undertaken by former combatants in Northern Ireland, Aceh and Nepal offers a direct challenge to the assumptions underpinning much of the academic and policy literature on DDR, with regards to the timing and sequencing of peace processes and the alleged passivity of ex-combatants, seen as security problems to be managed rather than leaders of conflict transformation.

Despite their interest in comprehensive peace processes, local stakeholders in post-war contexts might lack the required financial resources, technical expertise or political will to implement the required reforms. Therefore, external actors might have important roles to play in this process, through facilitators promoting a comprehensive reform agenda at the negotiation table, offering expert and financial assistance in the implementation stage, and participating in monitoring and oversight bodies in order to avoid such mechanisms from being jeopardised by likely blockages and hindrances in the political sphere. However, such intervention should be preceded by a revision of many assumptions which underscore existing models and approaches to DDR and other security promotion instruments in post-war contexts, allowing for a more flexible chronology (e.g. parallel planning of DD and R, SSR and democratisation support), and a stronger participation of combatants in programme planning and implementation.

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