

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)  
in Offensive Operations  
in the context of Violent Extremism:

**What Space for Human Security in new UN Policy Formulation?**

**Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Conflict**

DDR was initially envisaged as an aspect of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in post-conflict stabilization. Conflict related expenditures were saved in order to address national social and economic needs, while facilitating the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants. As the focus moved from ex-combatant physical and mental demobilization and disengagement from the armed group towards socioeconomic reintegration into the civilian community, the emphasis on a people-centered approach to DDR increased. This approach was considered a core principle for good practice in ‘classic’ DDR. The ‘people-centered’ approach became an imperative as emphasized in the definitive guidelines for UN implemented DDR, the Interagency DDR Standards of 2006.<sup>1</sup>

In the past ten years, practitioners have increasingly found themselves required to implement DDR processes in non-classic, other than post-conflict or non-permissive environments. This author faced considerable challenges adhering to a people-centered approach to DDR in an environment of criminal chaos as Chief of UN DDR programs in Haiti. The dilemma I faced pretty much came to a head in 2006. The resulting catharsis led to a shift from ‘classic’ approaches focused on supporting combatant disengagement to a more *community focused and community empowerment* approach to DDR. These innovations focused on community violence reduction (CVR) and the evolution of what became known as 2nd Generation DDR.

I will reflect briefly on my own to experiences in Haiti in projecting a people centered approach to DDR but also make certain comparative observations on DDR efforts during on-going armed conflicts in Afghanistan and in Somalia. My primary finding from my comparative analysis is that a people centered disengagement of combatants or armed elements (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) *cannot* be implemented effectively in an environment where security considerations take priority over what I term human security considerations.

The DDR specific elements we applied in the Integrated DDR Section of the UN mission in Haiti from 2004 to 2007 clung to people centered principle as embodied in the Human Security Agenda. This agenda was still at that time the official credo of the UN-system. The gist of this this agenda was largely as a qualitative overarching philosophy *bridging development and security* that also translated into the principles that guided every facet of our DDR practice.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Classic’ DDR is when the processes are being implemented in a post-conflict environment facilitated by the existence of a comprehensive peace accord; a cessation of armed violence; political will of the main actors to implement DDR; clearly identifiable armed groups under unitary command and a secure environment in which to implement DDR.

<sup>2</sup> Human Security is a highly contested concept adapted from Roosevelt’s Freedom from Fear and Freedom from Want concept and re-launched on the world in the Human Development Report 1994. In considering humanitarian action, it places responsibility to the individual above the responsibility to the state. The fact that it implies the notion of a move away from the international recognition of the primacy of the state is a major element of the argument against the Human Security Agenda. This poses a threat to states that do not ascribe, generally or occasionally, to Western imposed ‘liberal’ standards in the area of human rights.

The UN Mission's civilian professionals and military and police personnel worked in collaboration. The mission's civilian staffs focused on administration, national governance, institutional capacity building, human rights and humanitarian aspects of the UN mandate. The military and police focused on both security and security sector reform aspects. Military liaison officers were embedded into the civilian DDR Section and were really part of the intelligence resources of the UN mission led by the Joint Mission Assessment Cell (JMAC). This provided for an exchange of relevant information in an attempt to bridge the security, human security divide that no doubt existed within the Mission Mandate. However, the security staff involved in the management of the JMAC deeply distrusted the DDR Section that I headed, for very specific reasons. In prioritizing our human security approach to DDR program implementation, we assumed a confidential client relationship with the gang members. That included the gang leaders who had been drawn into the program. Therefore, we would not share locational or movement information about the gang leaders with whom we were negotiating and that the UN Force was fighting. These real tensions between the 'classic' security approach and the human security approach to addressing the gang violence in Haiti eventually contributed to a suspension of the DDR program in March 2007. So happened after I had, in total exasperation and exhaustion, being unable to reconcile differences, departed from the Mission. After that closure, community violence reduction efforts had limited impact in Haiti's dysfunctional environment. The post-2007 environment remained characterized by weak governance and rule of law capacity and successive governments' resistance to the empowerment of communities. The disastrous impact of the earthquake of January 2010, the subsequent reconstruction efforts and the lop-sided security approach did little to reduce gang armed-violence in Haiti.

Let me shift focus to Afghanistan. There, four distinct DDR programs were implemented between 2003 to 2010 mainly under the auspices of NATO and ISAF. The erstwhile government played a nominal role and UN engagement was rather limited. The security sector reform sought implemented attempting to tackle a raging counterinsurgency, debatably, yielded very limited results. Again, the tensions between human security and security approaches came to a head. Convuluted attempts to merge humanitarian activities with security interests, e.g. the Provincial Reconstruction Teams' (PRT) activities, resulted in severely narrowing the humanitarian space. In Helmand Province, the British focused on making an 'All of Government' or 'Comprehensive' approach in order to draw the benefits of high-profile humanitarian support to communities. The idea was to contribute to '*winning the people.*' From the outset, the objectives of the Military and the Humanitarians were generally at odds. Generally, the military viewed humanitarian support as human intelligence or 'human terrain' opportunities. The humanitarians were, on the other side, driven by human security interests. In a so-called 'securitized' environment, those human security motivated actors found themselves distrusted by the locals and targeted by the rebels - with the humanitarian space progressively narrowing. Outcomes were grim.

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"Human security can be defined as one of the foundational conditions of being human, including both (1) the sustainable protection and provision of the material conditions for meeting the embodied needs of people, and (2) the protection of the variable existential conditions for maintaining a dignified life..."

Paul James, "Human Security as a Left-Over of Military Security, or as an Integral of the Human Condition." In Paul Bacon and Christopher Hobson, *Human Security and Japan's Triple Disaster*, Routledge, London 2014 p87

As a DDR practitioner cum researcher I observe a worrisome and consistent tendency in these cases from conflict-ridden Haiti and Afghanistan. This is a tale about a skewed relationship between the military agenda and the humanitarian agenda. The former views the latter from a highly *instrumentalised* perspective, which whether it is planned or not, contributes to a diminished humanitarian space. Alas, how much should I generalize based on these only two instances from vastly different continents and conflict theaters? Let us consider a comparable instance from Somalia at the Horn of Africa.

In a recent instructive work, Felbab-Brown (2015) focuses on the international communities inability to guarantee basic human rights standards. She argues that once the efforts at disengaging youth either from criminals activities or membership of al Shabaab in Somalia became to be viewed as an intelligence resource by the security forces of the Government of Somalia, the efforts largely failed.<sup>3</sup> When considering of the extraordinary challenges facing both the national actors and the DDR practitioners in Somalia, I cannot but empathize. Indeed, I virtually get flashbacks of the anxiety, stress and ‘panic’ that I experienced as the Chief of DDR Section in Haiti from 2004 to 2007. Having resigned from the UN as previously mentioned, I turned to academia in Japan and Norway. In Japan at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies I pursued a PhD, interspaced by briefer periods as a member of the IRGR team at the Center for Peace Studies in Northern Norway. I have been able to concentrate on analyzing my DDR experience in a major way. Having completed my PhD and recovered from my extremely trying Haiti years, I am able to carry on as a practitioner, by now better equipped with sound theoretical platform in new fields of applied reintegration research and DDR practice.

### **The continuing place of Human Security in DDR**

My conviction about the centrality of the human security agenda in UN interventions *is experience based and persists*. People-centered programming addressing rights in the context of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Needs based on the four freedoms, *is and should remain one of the primary legitimizing factors for UN engagement in any peacekeeping environment*.<sup>4</sup> It can effectively consolidate the perception of the host communities that the UN is present acting in their interests. This approach is an integral aspect of the checks and balances that assist UN decision-making and that can realize basic rights and tangible peace dividends. Such people-centered considerations were first expressed through the Human Security Agenda. The agenda was operationalized as a qualitative aspect of programming and cannot be measured easily through a rigorous empirical methodology.

The Human Security Agenda was operationalized through the partly achieved seven Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000 – 2015). Let me reiterate the seven objectives; universal economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. Human security is currently strikingly inadequately covered within recent UN plans. An illustrative example of this dilution is found in the so-called *Centrality of Protection and Rights Up Front Action Plan*. This plan was designed to accompany the new era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes the insanely optimistic 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) together with 169 targets to be operational from late 2015. These documents, including “Centrality to Protect” and “Rights Up Front”, published concurrently,

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<sup>3</sup> Venda Felbab-Brown (Brookings Institute) “DDR, A Bridge Not too Far: A Field Report from Somalia” in James Cockayne and Siobhan O’Niel (ed) *UNDDR in an Era of Violent Extremism, UNU CPR*, June 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Drawn from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous 1941 speech, The Four Freedoms; Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Fear and Freedom from Want.

offer guidance to UN staff regarding the position of human rights in their work.<sup>5</sup> They emphasize the responsibility of states within their own borders and of the UN system to humanity. However, they both pointedly avoid any implication of responsibility of member states to address breaches of international human rights law or humanitarian law in another state. *They underscore UN acquiescence to the gradual dilution of the universality of established rights and humanitarian values.*

While struggling to decide whether I should risk exposing myself to challenge or ridicule in my perhaps quixotic efforts at promoting the apparently outdated Human Security Agenda... I got my answer recently while having a coffee on Dag Hammarskjold Plaza beside UN HQ in New York. Engraved on the pavement under my table were the words... *"Never, for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience and convictions"* Dag Hammarskjold. I will persevere.

To abandon the Human Security Agenda in the context of DDR in offensive operations exposes the field of DDR in non-permissive environments to the increased threat of its absorption into the portfolio of private sector for-profit operators. Multiple Blackwater reincarnations and their bedfellows operate under various apparently credible initiatives. They are currently salivating at the prospect of applying their shock and awe to this multi-billion dollar sector. In considering the potential for *déjà vue*, these military organizations do not generally meet human security criteria of people-centered programming. They focus on their hard-core security capacities to maximize profit. If we permit their engagement in processes to encourage combatant disengagement it will most likely lead to very poor outcomes.

In an ongoing war, there is little humanitarian space as regards disengagement. And particularly so as it relates to the mental transformation from fighter to civilian. Further, can we expect that a government fighting for survival in a war will release disengaging combatants who comprise major human intelligence assets, to the oversight of any international organization espousing a human rights approach? Is there scope for compatibility and reconciliation between security and human security approaches in such highly turbulent contexts? It is highly unlikely.

Since I started to work on DDR in 2001, the overarching framework for DDR, guiding every decision from program design to implementation and to dynamic adjustment on a daily basis, from Sierra Leone, Haiti, Somalia, CAR and Nepal, has been the Human Security Agenda. In the current debate within the UN on the so-called evolution of DDR, there is an elephant in the room. That is the absence of the Human Security Agenda. This fact is extraordinary and troubling. Human security may be no longer fashionable within the UN Secretariat. Like the Responsibility to Protect Concept (R2P) before it, concerned with issues of Westphalian notions of sovereignty, members of the Permanent Five of the UN and many members the General Assembly might wish it to disappear. Many member states fear the idea of a rights and needs based Human Security concept that might gain legal status as posing a potential threat to their control over national sovereignty.

UNDP launched the human security agenda in 1994 and it gained wide acceptance. The UN no longer owns the concept. Human security has traveled beyond the UN. It has increasingly been adopted by Civil Society and the humanitarian sectors that view Human Security as beyond the concept of state sovereignty, in prioritizing human rights and needs. These may be irreconcilable interpretations of the concept, depending on perspective. The UN Secretariat needs to demonstrate

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations "The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, Endorsed by IASC Principals," and "Rights Up Front Action Plan", both released on 17 Dec 2013

tenacity and skill in preventing the further dilution of the position of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in advocating for a rights/needs based approach to applying the Human Security Agenda, including in the context of DDR. It is time for the UN as a whole, the Secretariat and member states, to reconsider the rumor of the death of human security or it may find itself struggling some distance behind humanitarian progress.

### **Policy considerations for DDR in the contexts of violent extremism.**

The UN is now undergoing a process of introspection in seeking policy guidance for applying aspects of DDR in addressing evolving global conflict, particularly the real, but probably overhyped, phenomenon of violent extremism (VE). In addressing it in a learning-oriented manner, proportionate to its real significance, greater consideration must be given to the need for VE to be addressed from a multi-dimensional perspective. It must be addressed both at its source in the geographic caliphate and as a global network mobilized caliphate - grooming susceptible and marginalized youth. Given the global mandate and approach at the UN, regional engagement has to work in tandem with very carefully crafted, locally designed national engagements. Civil society must be facilitated and empowered to address susceptibility of youth attracted to violent extremism. That means civil society has to develop more attractive normatively driven social and economic environments at a local level. While the source must be neutralized, a process of prevention and conflict transformation must be effectively implemented in the communities at risk, through a combination of intelligence-based rule of law approaches that can include 'soft' elements such as the use of parole and restorative justice options with inclusive community-based and peer support methods.

Further efforts must be made to deconstruct and to disaggregate the threat of network mobilized violent extremism. Threats can be addressed locally through conflict sensitivity that facilitates and encourages local solutions. This will require international actors to butt-out at the lower level while curtailing the migration of violent extremism at an international level through intelligence based operations and advocacy. VE must be addressed from the psychosocial, socio-economic and political perspectives in order to disintegrate the empowering facade for sectarian violent extremism. This facade does often but not always, have a religions dimension such as Christian, Jewish and Hindu fundamentalism, Buddhist extremism (for example in Sri Lanka and Myanmar), and more widely, Islamic extremism. Such approaches will need to foster intra-faith healing in view of the major sectarian divisions and politically motivated tensions within Islam itself.

Light footprint or even invisible support may be required, while recognizing the conflict inducing role that Western arrogance, ignorance and often patronage in the form of psychosocial alienation and the provision of resources to protagonists who were once trained and provided with weapons by Western powers, but are currently considered enemies and proponents of violent extremism, especially Islamic violent extremism. The Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs in London advocates for Islamist-led DDR in unstable Islamic environments like Libya, and in the future, Syria and Iraq. This would permit the application of lessons learned in international experience, addressing armed conflict reduction with local solutions, without the baggage of the perception of the application of reviled Western agency or infiltration by anti-Islamic interests.

While laying the foundations for broad policy parameters for addressing DDR in contexts of violent extremism, the UN and concerned international organizations must allow for pragmatic context specific responses. Whether perceived as a dead concept or not, the Human Security Agenda must be reestablished at a policy level as *the overarching guiding philosophy*, especially in the context of DDR as and aspect of addressing violent extremism.

