Countering Violent Extremism:
Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration; Social Capital; and the "Women, Peace and Security" Agenda

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FORWARD

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In the time since this paper was originally published, there have been substantial advances in advocacy around and support for women's and girls' disengagement and reintegration. Therefore, the re-release of this paper is timely.

While the paper appeared in print in 2018, I began thinking about the topic two years earlier while I was evaluating the National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants and Youth at Risk in Somalia. While examining case files of women who had been disengaged from Al-Shabaab, a designated terrorist organization, and reintegrated into society, I noticed a striking similarity in their experiences to those of previously reintegrated fighters in groups not designated as terrorist organizations. Their means of recruitment, modes for disengagement and the stigmatization they face was like that of former fighters from non-listed, non-state armed groups (NSAGs) who had been disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated in previous DDR efforts.

At the same time, the phenomenon of denationalization was emerging. Persons categorized as foreign fighters and affiliates were being refused repatriation following disengagement from designated terrorist organizations, rendering them stateless. It struck me that denying rehabilitation and reintegration support to women and girls of Al-Shabaab and ISIS and no pathways for disengagement based on legal grounds, i.e. that Al-Shabaab and ISIS were designated terrorist organizations, may violate international norms. This paper examines this premise.

A further impetus for the republication of this paper was expanding support in demobilization, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation (DDRR) efforts for youth of both sexes, women, girls, men and boys, into northern Nigeria. In effect this set a precedent by providing a pathway for disengagement and reintegration through DDR-type efforts in settings of violent extremism. By the end of 2016, mechanisms were created whereby certain activity sets could be considered for former designated terrorist organization members, including women and girls affiliated with Boko Haram. Since then over 240 former affiliates graduated from DDRR.

I was also motivated to release this paper again given recent defections work being championed by the U.S. in Niger. In February 2019, the government of Niger issued a legal decree leading to the creation of a center for the reception of the persons associated with Boko Haram who surrendered voluntarily and renounced violence. The center aimed to aid them in social reintegration and rehabilitation (The Republic of Niger DECREE NO. 00112/MISP/D/ACR). This bears a striking resemblance to the 2010 Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program call for non-listed anti-government elements to renounce violence in exchange for disengagement and reintegration.

Today, the statelessness issue is now exigent. In northeastern Syria, the soon to be infamous Al-Hawl camp, which houses the wives and children of ISIS fighters, has swollen from 9,000 to 70,000 people following the uprooting of ISIS from this region of the country. Current estimates count 15 percent of camp residents as foreigners, and there are no rehabilitation programs in the camp (CNN, 2019). Without rehabilitation support and countries to receive them, many of these people will remain stateless.

Finally, Creative's decision to release this publication again in no small measure is derived from the importance it attaches to getting this work socialized into the public domain in consideration of the paper's forecasting as well as advances in the disengagement and reintegration space. Notably, in Niger, women are primary beneficiaries of rehabilitation and reintegration, recognizing the fact that they suffer more from conflicts and have a key role in solving them as well as facilitating social cohesion (National Program of taking charge of the surrender of Boko Haram Elements, 2018). This policy alignment is symmetrical to the proceeding paper's findings and assertions.

Recent UN Security Council Resolutions reinforce these findings; notably, in the urging of countries from the Lake Chad Basin that "encourages Governments in the Region, in collaboration with regional and sub-regional organisations, relevant United Nations entities and other relevant stakeholders, and, in the context of this resolution, to develop and implement a regional and coordinated strategy that encompasses transparent, inclusive, human rights-compliant disarmament, demobilisation, de-radicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, in line with strategies for prosecution, where appropriate, for persons associated with Boko Haram and ISIL" (S/RES/2349. 2017).

As evidenced in this paper and in advances since its inception and publication, DDR is re-emergent – a growth area.

INTRODUCTION

Countering violent extremism (CVE) has taken on increased salience since the meteoric rise of violent extremist (VE) groups operating in asymmetric settings where DDR is being considered in ongoing conflict. The environment in which CVE is taking place is somewhat of a moving target. This paper postulates that trauma, stigmatization, and the needs of people exiting violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and NSAGs have not fundamentally changed over the past fifteen years. Armed groups like the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have applied their own unique tactics; however, all share common strategic methods that include forced recruitment, volunteerism, and coercion to expand their ranks, as well as predatory violence to forward their agendas. This paper addresses the importance of social reintegra

tion of persons coming out of VEOs through DDR programs and how legal prohibitions on proscribed armed groups inhibit support to women and girls.

Countering violent extremism settings characterized by "extreme violence" and ongoing conflict with VEOs provide a window of opportunity to advance well-established best practices and social investments such as community-based resilience and social reintegration efforts. In the recent past, these have been de-emphasized in post-conflict peacebuilding settings in favor of socioeconomic reintegration in the form of jobs and livelihoods, including for DDR. In part this is a function in CVE of evidence pointing toward marginalization, lacking a sense of belonging and an identity crisis as "push" and "pull" factors driving VE. Poverty, unemployment, and a lack of socioeconomic opportunities are latent, or enabling, conditions, rather than primary drivers of CVE.

A FRAMEWORK FOR DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former fighters in the aftermath of conflict is as old as war itself, dating from the 3rd century BC, and has featured in some form in virtually every conflict (Muggah 2014). In fact, a multitude of DDR initiatives have taken place globally since the UN and major bilateral engagement in the late 1980s, as evidenced by the sheer number of programs and types of groups slated for DDR (Munive and Stepputat 2015). While most were launched in the wake of international or civil wars as part of an internationally mandated peace support operation, over the past decade, shifting conflict dynamics and emergent caseloads continue to alter the landscape in which DDR operations are mandated and implemented. Whether occurring in a humanitarian crisis or as an outcome of a peace accord, DDR represented a voluntary civilian-led nonviolent policy option for peacebuilding, and national reconstruction and reconciliation efforts, for the international community and state in which it was implemented (Piedmont 2015). Arguably, all of these elements that have been considered prerequisites for undertaking DDR may be absent in contemporary CVE settings.

Typically, DDR targets persons in combatant and noncombatant roles from statutory armies and NSAGs. The codification of these practices is enshrined in the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS). It is not uncommon for DDR to serve as tool for security-sector reform (SSR) and transformation efforts aimed at downsizing, rightsizing, and legitimizing armed forces under civilian control (OECD 2008, 105; United Nations 2015). The integration of DDR under an SSR rubric explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of the state and the call for peace at a national level. In this regard, DDR is a unique policy tool that enhances the resilience of local,

national, and regional actors by addressing various peace consolidation issues spanning the civilian and security sectors.

The first generation of DDR occurred in the wake of the Cold War. Typified by verifiable caseloads under unified command and control, these occurred regionally in Latin America and Southern Africa. In the mid-2000s a second-generation approach was developed, which was, in part, a response to the international community's perceptions that DDR, and reintegration specifically, was not achieving intended development aims. This led to a broad range of initiatives targeting communities and promoting social cohesion as a means to facilitate enabling conditions for DDR (UNDPKO 2010). This created a shift in DDR from supporting a state-building policy agenda largely focused on security-centric efforts, toward a security governance lens where peacebuilding and development were inextricably linked to national and human security issues.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration is undergoing a third generational shift. The monetization of DDR is creating a cottage industry for former fighters traveling across international borders to rejoin armed groups as mercenaries. At the same time, peace operations are receiving DDR mandates in areas where conflict is ongoing, and insurgent groups slated for DDR are associated with "terrorist" organizations, complicating the legal and political environment (Piedmont 2015, 4). This shift has been one of state building, to treating the failed state, to addressing environments with VEOs that contest the legitimacy of the Westphalian model writ large. VE is perme-

ating borders to the point that the state is severely restricted from effectively countering (addressing) them using the practices in first-and second-generation DDR, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the state itself. Originally intended as a civilian-led post-conflict and peacebuilding tool, today, both DDR and CVE are being mandated in settings where VE takes place in ongoing conflict. This is the environment of concern for us—the CVE setting. Social reintegration, capital investment, and community-based reintegration (CBR), the aforementioned best practices for maximizing social impact and human security yet are finding increasing space within CVE settings.

ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT—A CASE FOR GENDER ANALYSIS IN CVE SETTINGS

For decades, reintegration often took place following a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) with NSAGs. These groups were often terroristic in their methods, tactics, and recruitment patterns and were perpetrators of human rights abuses, inclusive of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They committed war crimes and crimes against humanity though were not often categorized as "terrorist organizations" in a formal way. The impact of predatory elements on women and girls' reintegration is detailed without a mention of "ter-

rorist organizations" in foundational policies, including the IDDRS (United Nations 2015), the secretary-general's 2011 report on DDR (UN Security Council 2011), the Brahimi Report (United Nations 2000), and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325 2000). What has changed is the enactment of prohibitions on the provision of material support for these groups including, though not limited to, people "disengaging" from sanctioned terrorist organizations. Many so-called terrorist organizations comingle in operating environments, operations, policies, and program approaches that broadly govern responses to violence.

When violent NSAGs become sanctioned terrorist organizations, the international community is constrained from providing support to its members, including those seeking to "disengage," as stipulated in the governing counterterrorism normative frameworks that are populated by international modalities like the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (United Nations 2006) and national laws such as the USA PATRIOT Act (2001). Therefore, former fighters and associated members exiting VEOs may not receive the support they would have otherwise received upon leaving unsanctioned NSAGs, as there are no appropriate "off-ramps" in place to support their unique reintegration needs upon "disengagement."

Taken from this perspective there is an artificial distinction between NSAGs sanctioned as terrorist organizations and those not classified as such in at least two regards: first, for persons attempting reintegration, their trauma, stigmatization, patterns of recruitment, and rejection by communities of return have not fundamentally been altered, and second, communities being asked to accept back former, or "disengaged" fighters has not, in a fundamental way, made any discernible distinctions between

predatory NSAGs that have or have not been sanctioned as terrorist organizations. The distinction is made primarily at the international policy level, hindering the provision of programmatic support by civil society NGOs with a negative impact on vulnerable persons in need of reintegration, particularly women and girls.

Prohibitions on the provision of material support to terrorist organizations are pronounced when we examine its impact on women seeking to "disengage" and women-led NGOs supporting that process. This represents a constraint to the implementation of the "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) agenda, which is the global framework that "recognizes that conflict has gendered impacts, that it affects women and men differently, and that women have critical roles to play in peace and security processes and institutions" (United Nations 2000).

Additionally, it is a direct contradiction to other UN instruments, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum's Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, specifically Good Practice #10: "Develop gender-sensitive disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs that address the specific needs of women and girls on a path to terrorist radicalization or involved in violent extremism" (GCTF 2015, 6), and the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (UN Security Council 2015), which states that "more attention needs to be paid to devising efficient gender- and human rights-compliant reintegration strategies and programmes for those who have been convicted of terrorism-related offences as well as returning foreign terrorist fighters," further calling for enhanced disengagement and reintegration efforts.

Reintegration is mandated in all WPS resolutions predating yet not including the

most recent UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (United Nations 2005), while "violent extremism" and "terrorism" are discussed only in UNSCR 2242, demonstrating that in spite of numerable policy-oriented actions and responses, corollaries between women and NSAGs and VEOs on the ground persist and only the language has changed. This is particularly salient as patterns of recruitment, trauma, stigmatization, and related experiences point to women and girls being the victims of both sanctioned and unsanctioned NSAGs and terrorist organizations. Without appropriate "off-ramps" or other support for the women seeking to reintegrate upon leaving a VEO on terrorist watch lists, the international community can expect a reversal of the advancements espoused by the WPS agenda.

A NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT

What changes can be realistically instituted and implemented to affect reintegration of "disengaging" persons in DDR and similar security-governance initiatives? On one level, recommendations should reflect a new policy paradigm that translates into programmatic approaches and responses. These should be premised on the change in conflict dynamics as underpinned previously. Second, since many constraints relate to promulgations from engaging with proscribed armed groups, the international community, including the U.S. government (USG) and United Nations, should take advantage of legal instruments and norms in international customary law that are permissive.

This chapter in affect is a call to increase coor-

dination among a set of actors as a preferred condition to advance policy for CVE and reintegration in this area. Efforts at enhanced coordination in terms of engaging VEOs in DDR efforts must take into consideration the operating environment—its risks and constraints, as well as the principles of impartiality and "do no harm" as paramount. Further, it is incumbent upon DDR stakeholders in CVE settings where VEOs are operative, to codify and transmit emerging practices that can serve as cutting-edge policy doctrine and program staples. Specifically, there is a need for a triad of actors to act on concert or through dedicated fora and consortiums. These include (i) the USG and United Nations; (ii) local NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs); and (iii) think tanks and academia.

Each has comparative advantages lending themselves to a synergetic relationship. In the case of the USG and United Nations, these entities can drive, and fund, significant policy shifts. They are well positioned to leverage their political clout and good offices to create foundational shifts in the issuance and structure of DDR mandates for VEOs, as well as how these are affected in large-scale and complex peace-support operations. These can be buttressed with major bilateral support from such entities as the World Bank, European Union, and African Unions where germane. Policies and programs that seek to merely replicate tried and tested peacebuilding approaches in the CVE setting may do more harm than good. Policy and programming decisions must be based on a combination of innovation and evidence if they are to be supported and gain traction, let alone be effective. Think tanks and academia are best placed to do so and can add rigor to evidentiary approaches. Lastly, though of critical importance, NGOs and CSOs have access on the ground where social capital and community resilience modeling takes place.

They are the engines of programmatic innovation. In the current CVE setting, it is often the case that international NGOs, the USG, and UN staff have limited access in the field due to security concerns where VEOs are operating. By necessity, local NGOs and CSOs are developing and implementing innovative programmatic approaches that will serve as baselines for policy development, lessons learned, and best practices as the DDR and VEO environment further evolves. Coordination is required to capture and transmit these to further testing and research as a means to inform policy.

Taken together, these entities should operate under a new set of evidentiary assumptions that informs a working theory of change (ToC), namely:

i. Reintegration for DDR is a conflict prevention, not a post-conflict tool, when preconditions for "classic" DDR do not exist.

ii. A military solution alone will not create the necessary preconditions to undertake "classic" DDR programming.

iii. Social reintegration is a necessary precondition for socioeconomic reintegration. Socioeconomic factors alone cannot affect successful DDR.

iv. Prohibitions to provide DDR reintegration support to (former) VE members are not sacrosanct; there are conditions where service provision can take place.

First, treating reintegration for DDR candidates as a tool for conflict prevention, rather than post-conflict tool, explicitly acknowledging that certain preconditions for traditional approaches do not exist in CVE settings. These preconditions for engagement include a minimum guarantee of security, that is, an environment not characterized by active VEOs or NSAGs, and a CPA codifying the

legal framework for peacebuilding and state building. Currently most cases in DDR do not have these preconditions, including Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Libya, South Sudan, and Mali. If these preconditions were in place, a programmatic response would encompass a national response, such as a military solution or a state-centric process. That not being the case in contemporary VE settings, in order to be more effective and integrate best practices, reintegration should be processed as a preventative measure through providing DDR in areas that are accessible to peacebuilders and peacekeepers, rather than attempting to design and implement programmatic responses at national levels. Aims should include community resilience on CVE; "countering recruitment"; and "prevention of reoccurrence," remobilization, and recidivism.

Second, operating within a conflict context, CVE and reintegration practitioners, especially those supporting women and girls, must further acknowledge that an outright military solution is not a durable outcome. This means despite predatory behavior and tactics that persons and groups adopting VE employ, they either have a legitimate root grievance or exploit a geographic and political space where one exists (Piedmont 2015, 2). This is instrumental as countries like Nigeria come to terms with the fact that a military solution to Boko Haram alone is not a tenable option. This discourse is taking place within the framework of DDR and implies that approaches accompanying community-based reintegration must tackle "structural" issues commonly associated with "push" factors for CVE, as well as "pull" factors relating to individual motivations and identity as in the case of Sudan. This brings home another issue of DDR practitioners becoming inadvertent parties to protracted conflict in cases like Somalia where both "push" and "pull" factors are not receiving adequate

attention. The result, in part, is prolonged detention of suspected al-Shabaab members who are ensnared in the DDR process.

Third, knowing that causes for VE are, in many cases, identity based, job creation and livelihood development should be viewed as enabling conditions that serve as both "push" and "pull" factors away from and toward VE. This is well demonstrated in Sudan, which has experienced three DDR efforts over the past decade. While the results of these DDRs are mixed at best, ranging from successful to abject failures, each had livelihoods and job creation as centerpieces of a programmatic response. This is juxtaposed with the current planning for CVE in Sudan where a recent study undertaken shows that in the urban areas of Khartoum state a majority of people joining VE groups are well educated, enjoy secure livelihoods, and are employed (UNDP 2017). This provides another CVE opportunity to displace economic reinsertion with social cohesion and community-based reintegration as a CVE centerpiece. Specific to girls, in Somalia, an evaluation of DDR in 2016 showed gender mainstreaming, without gender sensitivity. This dichotomy existed as girls were considered in livelihood training for socioeconomic reintegration, though registration occurred at fixed dates limiting girls' capacity to attend. A rolling registration model would have accommodated the needs of boys and girls, however; assessments taking into account social issues and community expectations, as a reintegration precursor, would have been needed.

Lastly, regarding legal dispositions, the focus on "girls" implies person under the age of eighteen. In these cases, the law is clear and calls for the immediate release of children that includes their safe return home and the provision of reintegration support. For DDR this is inclusive and does not necessitate a child be in possession of a weapon or serve a particular role. Promulgated in international humanitari-

an law (IHL) and raised to the level of customary law, there are no exceptions or provisos exclusive to children that have been affiliated with VE groups or "terrorist" organizations. Leveraging the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) for Children Associated with Armed Conflict (CAAC), and calling attention to the UNGA (2015), which pays specific attention to "child soldiers" as victims, provides inroads for boys and girls under eighteen for immediate release and differential treatment for those under eighteen who are deemed "terrorists." While reluctance by the United States to adhere to such standards may include not being a signatory to the CRC, increasing political will to exercise these options is demonstrated in the May 2016 U.S. CVE Strategy, which calls for "strengthen[ing] the capabilities of government and non-governmental actors to isolate, intervene with, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals caught in the cycle of radicalization to violence" (USAID 2016, 7).

Promise for effective change is represented by a combination of this legal "low hanging fruit" for women and children and adoption of innovative models where caseloads of nonviolent offenders to engage with are identified by communities. Somalia provides a good example. Beset by the VE group AS, government institutions, including those rooted in the criminal justice system, are too weak to detain, rehabilitate, and/or prosecute all members or affiliates. As a remedial measure, nonviolent offenders that have not committed "terrorist" acts are released to the custodianship of their clan and community. Should former AS affiliates remobilize or become a recidivist; the state retakes custody of the offender. Government sanctions, clan resilience, and decreasing vulnerability toward VEO and NSAG recruitment, at its essence, are preventing and countering VE.

CONCLUSION

Countering violent extremism, like DDR, is a practice, policy tool, and programmatic approach, though mostly a process. Opportunities to engage can also be pitfalls to do harm—analysis is needed! When treated and applied as if in a classic post-conflict setting, policy makers and practitioners, especially those from the international community espousing best practices, run a risk of being perceived as a party to conflict at best and costing lives at worst. Risk assessments require periodic undertaking to inform conflict assessments in what will be a changing environment. There are practices that work and conditions where the international community needs to be bold in acknowledging that there are non-permissive settings where program implementation may not contravene efforts aimed at affecting women and girls' protection and reintegration.

While most people would not advocate for providing reintegration support to persons formerly associated with terrorist organizations, few would deny such support to the Chibouk girls in Nigeria. In Somalia, the government is willing to contest IHL under the premise, or pretext, that some children and girls are a credible national security threat— this may or may not be true. The point is that this is of particular importance due to the myriad of dichotomies in play; civilian, military, and intelligence actors severely constricting and complicating CVE settings while also offering solutions.

For persons "off-ramping" or otherwise "disengaging" from VEOs, lessons learned from DDR programs can prove useful for CVE. To this end, having dedicated experts equipped to provide cutting-edge services, not captive to some antiquated notions of the IDDRS, should include an understanding that social investment in CVE is a precondition for gender-based reintegration. Expertise should be multidisciplinary, including those with practical field

experience that are proven "thought leaders" and "advocates." As a first order, a paradigm shift must include a move from a purely national security agenda toward a human security agenda. Doing so places the community and civil society at the center of CVE initiatives. Displacing socioeconomic reintegration as a prime mover, with social investment strategies, is recommended. This not only increases community resilience but also mandates increased partnership between the USG, the United Nations, academia, and local civil society.

Legal expertise in DDR and CVE is needed as a means to identify and institute "off-ramping" opportunities. This means using the tools enshrined in international humanitarian, human rights, and customary law as enablers to engage, rather than inhibitors to act. A first step can be the explicit recognition that women and girls are often targets and victims of VEOs while not denying their roles as agents and perpetrators. Patterns of recruitment, trauma, and stigmatization should be combined with legal statutes and principles to compel engagement and services for women and girls. Isolation and limited access, as well as interventions in VE settings, carry risks. Among these are violations of the "do no harm" principle. Ironically, failure to act based solely on the legal prohibitions to engage proscribed armed groups, and their members also risk violating this principle in the form of an abrogation of UNSCR 1325, a central tenant in the WPS agenda. By not engaging, women and girls will continue to be disproportionally negatively affected not only by VE and conflict dynamics themselves but also by the very legal and policy frameworks designed to enhance their protection and participation in preventing conflict and building peace in the first case. Arguably this is starting to occur by virtue of denying women and girl's access to post-disengagement support services.

Even so, the reasons for concern can be tempered with emerging political will to engage. The call issued by the United States in its CVE Strategy in May 2016 citing the importance of reintegration while recognizing persons as victims of "radicalization" provides an avenue for agency and places communities at the center of CVE efforts that include women and girls. An example of political will realized for DDR is the recent case peace agreement in Colombia with former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), characterized as a terrorist organization for decades. Women and girls will be part of the caseload, both directly as members of FARC and indirectly through victims' (and survivor) assistance and reparation efforts. Afghanistan shares the same promise with more need for caution. Through the most recent DDR effort, the government offers Taliban and other insurgent groups peaceful reintegration in return for the renunciation of violence. If the DDR caseload has girls and women that may benefit, the reintegration of the Taliban into Afghanistan's polity through a DDR possesses the potential to reverse gains made in the WPS agenda over the past fifteen years. Again, this underpins the need for analysis, caution, and coordination when addressing DDR and CVE for women and girls.

Updated Conclusions by Dean Piedmont

Advances over the last three years are impressive, but still more needs to be done. Afghanistan is now on the verge of a peace agreement with the Taliban, and Yemen may not be far behind if the Stockholm Agreement gains trac-

tion. Include Mali, Colombia and Venezuela's 'colectivos' and this expands DDR from South America, to the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and the Middle East and North Africa regions.

Simultaneously, camps like Al-Hawl in Syria are recognized as the perfect breeding ground for a new and re-emergent ISIS affiliates. In the camp section dedicated to foreigners, children play together from Europe, Asia and Africa. Their mothers, many now war widows, live in fear of war widows that are ISIS extremists in the camp, hoping their countries will one day take them back. More so than ever before, women and girls remain the vulnerable victims of conflict, demonstrate extraordinary resilience and are also agents for a return to organized violence.

In each of these cases it's hard to envisage scenarios where the disengagement and reintegration of armed groups and affiliates will not be required for both non-state armed groups and designated terrorist organizations. Creative continues to spearhead thought leadership through its 2018 and 2019 publications "Engaging Armed Groups & Former Fighters in Contemporary Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism Settings" and "The Reintegration of Taliban Fighters into a Market-Based Economy in Afghanistan." Salient issues we see on the horizon are those that continue to impact women and girls, legal dispositions around foreign terrorist fighters and statelessness such as that impacting Al-Hawl, and an increasing capacity to map non-state armed groups irrespective of their legal status.

Evidence-based advocacy driven by Creative is yielding results, however; additional evidence is required. Illustratively, compliance with UNSCR 2349 requires a regional approach focusing on women and children's reintegration where associated with Boko Haram with coherent policies encouraging defections. While we take no issue with the former, there is a dearth of evidence to suggest a defections policy is efficacious. First attempted with the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, defections did not measurably depreciate the group's operational capacities, nor correlate to positive reintegration. The UN and Department of State defections policies need testing and will benefit from more evidence. So far, there is no indication this is best practice, let alone one that does not violate the do no harm principle. Importantly, Creative is currently advocating for a study on the efficacy of defection policy in the Lake Chad Basin to test this policy assumption.

The above demonstrates adaptation, though a relevant question remains: Are we learning lessons from DDR from the past decades or even recent examples like Somalia?

Again, evidence points in both directions. An examination of the Niger program shows that the program almost perfectly follows traditional DDR approaches. The rehabilitation is more akin to an in-house reinsertion activity set. Reconciliation precedes reintegration, which is an interesting innovation. Yet, economic reintegration is a cookie-cutter livelihoods approach with social reintegration occurring in silos with respect to communities where reintegration will take place. Other innovations are pointing toward a shift whereby the criminal justice system and human rights are less pe-

ripheral to disengagement and reintegration.

Exemptions from prosecution in Niger for former designated terrorist organization members under prescribed conditions, the government of Cameroon's Presidential Decree for Boko Haram recognizing some defectors caseload as Nigerian nationals - FTFs, the joint paper examining global legal frameworks on DDR and countering violent extremism by the World Bank and Creative and our examination of internally displaced persons reintegration of persons from the Al-Hawl camp are just a few examples. Taken together the international community is in a unique position to advance policy and praxis that is visibly emerging on contemporary conflict and stabilization dynamics.

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Dean Piedmont is a Senior Advisor for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform at Creative Associates International. He supports strategic business development, drives thought leadership around DDR and SSR in violent extremism and insurgency settings and provides technical guidance to programs.

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About Creative

Creative Associates International works with underserved communities by sharing expertise and experience in education, elections, economic growth, citizen security, governance and transitions from conflict to peace.

Based in Washington, D.C., Creative has active projects in nearly 30 countries. Since 1977, it has worked in nearly 90 countries and on almost every continent. Recognized for its ability to work rapidly, flexibly and effectively in conflict-affected environments, Creative is committed to generating long-term sustainable solutions to complex development problems.