Intra-Party Dynamics and the Political Transformation of Non-State Armed Groups

Véronique Dudouet, Berghof Foundation, Berlin, Germany

Vol. 6 (1) 2012

Intra-Party Dynamics and the Political Transformation of Non-State Armed Groups

Véronique Dudouet, Berghof Foundation, Berlin, Germany

Although non-state armed groups are primary stakeholders in contemporary political conflicts, there has been little research into their members' perspectives on internal factors shaping radicalisation and de-radicalisation. State and international actors often assume that bringing rebel leaders to the negotiating table or "converting" them to peaceful politicians means weakening, splitting, or dismantling militant structures. This paper re-evaluates those assumptions in the light of rebel leaders' own accounts of internal organisational dynamics before, during, and after political conflicts and peace settlements. Participatory action research with "insider experts" from armed movements in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Nepal, Aceh, El Salvador, Colombia, and South Africa reveals insiders' analysis of leadership and organisational dynamics during armed conflict and political talks and highlights the rational decision-making process whereby proactive leaders constantly (re)assess and adjust their tactics (from unarmed to armed and vice versa) as the strategic environment evolves. Horizontal and vertical communication between members is critical for enabling collective ownership of transformation processes from violent insurgency to peaceful transition and preventing internal splits and disaffection during peace negotiations. The claim that rebel organisations should be dismantled as quickly as possible during peace processes is found to be dubious, highlighting instead the importance of retaining cohesive coordination and communication structures during volatile post-war transitions.

Although non-state armed groups represent primary stakeholders in contemporary political conflicts, there is still little understanding among policy-makers or scholars of the internal drivers and dynamics which shape their radicalisation and de-radicalisation processes. For instance, one often hears the assertion that bringing rebel leaders and so-called "spoilers" to the negotiation table or converting them into peaceful politicians requires weakening, splintering, or completely dismantling their militant structures. However, such claims are not supported by any empirical evidence. This paper sets out to shed some light on armed group members' own accounts of some of the factors shaping their transition from armed to non-violent politics.

According to existing research on armed insurgencies and conflict transformation, the various drivers of change which influence collective shifts from armed struggle to negotiated settlements can be classified along three levels of analysis: intra-group, group-state, and group-international community. This paper focuses on the first category, assessing the internal dynamics that influence ideological, strategic and tactical shifts within armed organisations.

The findings stem from a participatory action research project, designed and carried out in collaboration with local analysts and members from former armed movements in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Nepal, Aceh, El Salvador, Colombia, and South Africa. Armed opposition groups operating in these seven countries and territories over the past decades shared a number of important features that qualify them as "resistance or liberation movements" (listed in section 1). Moreover, they have all undergone successful transitions from violent insurgency to peaceful political participation, through processes of negotiation, demobilisation, disarmament, and democratic

institutionalisation.[1] In each country, a team comprised of local researchers and former group members was asked to reflect on the main factors which have shaped such transitions. This paper presents some of the outcomes of this research process, offering an insiders' perspective on the shifts and relations in the ends and means of insurgency during (de-)radicalisation (section 1), the intra-party factors (decision-making and organisational dynamics) which influence their readiness to negotiate their transformation into peaceful political actors (section 2), and the impact of such transitions on their organisations (section 3).

1. Shifting Ends and Means: Political Vision and Strategies

The purpose of this first section is to clarify the terminology used in this paper, defining the major features of the actors under scrutiny according to their self-ascribed goals and strategies (1.1.), and describing the applied understanding of (de)radicalisation, with a primary focus on shifts between violent and non-violent politics during extended peace processes (1.2.).

1.1. Resistance/Liberation Movements and Armed Struggle as Last Resort

Non-state armed groups are classically defined, in Weberian fashion, as "violent challengers to the state's monopoly of legitimate coercive force" (Policzer 2005, 8). Among the vast universe of such groups, the scope of enquiry of this paper is reduced to a sub-set of actors who pursue primarily political (as opposed to economic or private) agendas; understand the use of force (often seen as a last resort) to be a legitimate and pragmatic tool of resistance against clearly defined opponents (i.e. as opposed to indiscriminate terror); are formally organised and have hierarchical, accountable structures (and often distinct military and political organs); and exercise some degree of territorial control (where they develop their own parallel governance structure). For the sake of clarity, one could also use the label "rebel opposition groups" (Holmqvist 2005, 45), conventionally defined as being "engaged in a political

struggle … to redefine the political and legal basis of the society through the use of violence" (Bruderlein 2000, 8). Policzer's aforementioned definition presents some serious shortcomings as it fails to capture the specific nature of these actors; by focusing solely on their temporary and adaptable means of action it overlooks their goals and ideology, as well as the unarmed components of their movements. In fact, such movements tend to see disrupting the state monopoly over the use of force as a temporary strategy, while their ultimate goal is precisely to restore monopoly to a legitimised (i.e. transformed or breakaway) state.

The term "non-state armed groups" is strongly rejected by the authors of a series of case studies written by, or in close collaboration with, members from seven former rebel movements (García Durán et al. 2008, Maharaj 2008, Ogura 2008, Aguswandi and Zunzer 2008, De Brún 2008, Bekaj 2010, Álvarez 2010).[2] On the one hand, they argue that the label "non-state" neglects these movements' aspiration to statehood (through state capture, power-sharing, or self-determination) as well as, at times, their quasi-governmental features as a state within a state. The label "armed groups", for its part, fails to account for a complex set of means of political action, armed and unarmed, which are evolving constantly according to circumstances and strategic calculations. In our research and capacity-building engagement with these actors, we thus decided to name them according to their own labels, which tend to reflect their primary objectives, and opted for the inclusive (and admittedly subjective) terminology of "resistance/liberation movements".

These actors do indeed primarily identify their struggles as political endeavours, rooted in a combination of identity-based and/or class-based revolutionary ideology, representing the interests and grievances of an oppressed minority or a disempowered majority, and aiming to replace incumbent governments or gain local self-determination. A direct

---

1 Given the particular methodology of the project (i.e. requiring the selected groups to participate actively in the research process), additional selection criteria included access to the relevant actors, and their willingness to take part in the project.

2 These studies were published as part of the Berghof Series on Resistance/Liberation Movements in Transition (see www.berghof-conflictresearch.org/en/publications/transitions-series).

or hinted reference to their political goals and/or ideological agenda can be found in the names they choose: the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) and its People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM), "We Ourselves" (Sinn Féin) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN), 19th of April Movement (M19),[3] and the African National Congress (ANC).

These movements describe and justify the recourse to violent political activism as a legitimate form of self-defence in the face of acute human rights abuses and denial of democracy. They appeal to international norms such as the right to self-determination[4] or the right to fundamental freedoms[5] to support their "right to revolt" (Maharaj 2008, 12). For instance, official Sinn Féin declarations (e.g. the 1994 Peace Proposal) define armed struggle as "a legitimate part of a people's resistance to foreign oppression" (De Brún 2008, 25). Some movements deliberately emphasised the self-limited nature of their armed activities against "legitimate targets" to garner support both internally and internationally. The ANC even committed itself in 1980 to observe the Geneva Protocol relating to irregular warfare, while the KLA issued an internal directive instructing its members to "commit liberation acts with a just character, and not attack socio-cultural monuments, civilian population and subjects of importance for the life of the people" (cited in Bekaj 2010, 16). Internally, these movements also claim that their armed activities were supported by large segments of society (i.e. within their ethnic or social constituency), who consider them to be legitimate defenders of their interests and grievances. Most case study authors highlight the repression-mobilisation cycle whereby state counter-insurgency operations, by cracking down on un-

armed civil society activists, led to an increased level of popular support for the armed insurgency.

Armed struggle is described as a means of last resort, employed after all other forms of political action have been met with severe state repression. In South Africa, the ANC initially used solely nonviolent means of struggle, only establishing its armed wing *Umkonto we Siswe* (MK) in 1961 following the 1960 Sharpeville massacre and the enforcement of a ban that prevented it from operating peacefully. Maharaj (2008, 12) recalls Mandela's justification of armed struggle as a "legitimate form of self-defence against a morally repugnant system of government which will not allow even peaceful forms of protest". He goes on to argue that "violence would begin whether we initiated it or not. If we did not take the lead now, we would soon be latecomers and followers in a movement we did not control" (Maharaj 2008, 10). Likewise, the CPN-M in Nepal first entered parliamentary politics, only preparing for a "protracted people's war" in 1995 after encountering police repression, "fake trials", and mass arrests (Ogura 2008). The study on the M19 draws a similar picture of the movement's emergence in the aftermath of rigged elections, and also notes its members' conviction that their struggle would only be respected by the oligarchy if backed by the power of arms. In Aceh, the decision by the founders of the GAM to resort to "reactive rebellion" is described as "the only language that Jakarta understood", and as a defensive posture "to counterbalance the language of the enemy" (Aguswandi and Zunzer 2008, 6) after the government retaliated violently and brutally to their declaration of independence. In Northern Ireland, the violent repression of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the introduction of internment without trial in 1971 convinced Sinn Féin members that only armed struggle could accomplish the end of British rule in Ireland. In El Salvador, "a great part of … so-

---

3 The M19 was named after the date of a rigged general election on 19 April 1970 which created part of the impetus for establishing the movement – thereby offering a clear indication of its pro-democracy agenda.

4 "All peoples have the right to self-determination." *United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Part 1, Article 1.1. According to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol 1, Part 1 Article 1.4), such a right applies to cases of colonial domination, alien military occupation, and where a distinct racial group is denied equal access to government (so-called "racist regimes").

5 "It is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law. … Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms." *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Preamble.

ciety viewed armed struggle as the only possible way to face structural violence", amidst the "lack of institutional channels that would resolve the political, economic and social crisis" prevailing in the 1970s (Álvarez 2010, 8). Finally, in Kosovo, the KLA emerged after several years of mass-based nonviolent struggle against Serb domination over the Albanian majority, which was crushed by the regime and largely ignored by the international community. The sidelining of the Kosovo delegation at the 1992 London Peace Conference on Yugoslavia and during the Dayton negotiations merely reinforced the belief among the Albanian population that only warfare could attract international attention to their plight (Bekaj 2010, 22).

1.2. Transitions Between Violent and Non-Violent Politics

Although the shift from conventional political action or peaceful resistance to armed insurgency is described by resistance or liberation movements as an option of last resort, these actors strongly object to the typical depiction in the policy world and scholarly literature of linear and unidirectional transitions "from rebellion to politics" (Söderberg Kovacs 2007). They contend instead that armed rebellion represents one form of political action – rather than its opposite. One study notes that "there was …political armed struggle and there was political non-armed struggle" (De Brún 2008, 6), while another quotes von Clausewitz's definition of war as "a continuation of politics [by other means]" (Maharaj 2008, 11).

As we have seen, the groups profiled in this paper had clearly articulated political visions right from their inception, leading at various times to different political strategies being employed consecutively or simultaneously. In Ireland, the Republican movement has passed through various phases of political struggle over the course of more than eight hundred years, which have included "passive resistance, agrarian unrest, armed uprising, mass movements and political agitation, language and cultural struggles, constitutional and parliamentary engagement" (De Brún 2008, 6). Armed activity came to the fore whenever politi-

cal engagement broke down. Moreover, once militants started resorting to armed activities, it did not mean that they ceased their engagement on the other fronts. For example, from 1961 to 1990 the ANC defined armed activities as one of four "pillars of struggle", alongside nonviolent mass mobilisation, the political underground movement, and the international campaign to isolate the apartheid regime. "The development and combination of these four pillars were seen as the basis for realising the aims of the struggle" (Maharaj 2008, 13). In El Salvador, the FMLN also "emphasised the combination of armed struggle with the political struggle of the masses" throughout the 1980s, and increasingly pursued a strategy of negotiations and conventional political action alongside its military campaigns (Álvarez 2010, 20). "Diplomatic warfare" was also part of its agenda, and one of its six fronts was specifically dedicated to international advocacy. In the Aceh separatist struggle, the exiled political leadership was in charge of conducting peaceful international advocacy to complement their field troops' guerrilla warfare. During armed campaigns by the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, activists also pursued nonviolent resistance (e.g. hunger strikes or "blanket" protests in prison to demand recognition of their status as political prisoners) and electoral activities (i.e. the "armalite and ballot box" strategy). This dual strategy was aimed at "winning the hearts and minds" of the wider nationalist community while putting pressure on the British government to open up negotiations (De Brún 2008).

This paper homes in on the shifts from mixed armed/unarmed political strategies during periods of active conflict and peace process, to the progressive demobilisation of their military structures and the adoption of exclusively unarmed means of political engagement. Although intrastate armed conflicts end in various different manners, the majority of conflicts since the end of the Cold War have been settled through a negotiated transition,[6] and armed groups have thus become central stakeholders in peace processes and post-war peacebuilding. In asymmetric con-

---

6   According to the *Human Security Brief 2007*, fifty-eight armed conflicts were terminated through a negotiated settlement in the period between

1990–2005, as against twenty-eight conflicts which ended with the military victory of one party (Human Security Center 2008, 35).

flicts between state and non-state parties, peace and stability are closely intertwined with demands for justice, human rights, or democracy, which are not produced automatically by the signing of an inter-party agreement. In fact, statistical surveys reveal that more than one third of conflicts settled through peace agreements since 1989 have seen a return to violence within five years (Human Security Center 2008). Therefore, one should envisage conflict transformation as an extended process stretching far beyond the restricted timeline of peace negotiations as such: it encompasses early de-escalation measures (e.g. talks about talks and pre-negotiations), peace processes (official and unofficial inter-party talks, humanitarian accords, and more comprehensive peace agreements), and the implementation of the parties' respective commitments through post-war demobilisation and disarmament, peacebuilding, and democratic consolidation. The remainder of this paper focuses on the dynamics at play during these extended phases of behavioural de-radicalisation, collective demobilisation, and peaceful transformation.

2. Organisational Structure and Dynamics

We now turn to the factors influencing non-state armed groups' shifts from violent insurgency to the negotiating table, with a particular focus on the intra-party level of analysis. The existing literature on the deradicalisation of armed groups through peace processes and inter-party negotiations can be classified into two main categories. A first type of study concentrates on (national or international) environmental factors which condition the behaviour of rebel groups, such as the "political opportunity structure" analysed by social movement theory (e.g. Tarrow 1998), state counter-terrorism policies emphasised by security experts (e.g. Jones and Libicki 2008), or transnational geopolitical dynamics (such as the loss of external "patrons" after the end of the Cold War) favoured by international relations specialists. For their part, conflict resolution scholars highlight inter-party (relational) factors through the concepts of "ripeness" and "mutually-hurting stalemates" (Zartman 1996), which focus on the subjective and objective balance of power between the state and its armed challengers. Although these approaches offer valid elements of explanation for de-radicalisation processes, they fail to account for internal (individual or organisational)

factors of transition. The few analyses that specifically deal with intra-party dynamics tend to focus primarily on idiosyncratic factors of individual disengagement, such as age, maturation, and/or changes in life course, discovery of alternative belief systems, deconstruction of enemy images, etc. (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009). By contrast, we now turn to organisational factors accounting for collective shifts towards negotiations by the movement as a whole, such as decision-making structure and leadership styles (2.1), and horizontal/vertical relations and communication channels between members (2.2).

2.1. Leadership and Decision-making

Many insurgency movements are organised around distinct dual structures which simultaneously allow armed and unarmed forms of struggle. In some instances, political movements predate the formation of a military branch, and both are kept largely autonomous in order to allow the political front to conduct non-violent campaigns, pursue electoral politics, or conduct negotiations. This was the case with the ANC and its armed wing MK in South Africa, the GAM government in exile and AGAM field commanders in Aceh, Sinn Féin and the IRA in Northern Ireland, and to some extent the CPN-M and the PLA in Nepal. For their part, Latin American guerrillas such as the M19 and FMLN defined themselves as "political-military organisations" with a combined command structure. Here, peaceful political action was subordinated to military priorities (Álvarez 2010, 20), and in fact, it was the military leadership that took all political decisions and led the negotiation teams. In Kosovo as well, the KLA was initially established as a military organisation, which in turn created a political directorate (led by Hashim Thaci who is now prime minister) that was in charge of representing the movement during negotiations, but which was subordinate to the military leadership.

Although these organisational variations have important implications for the pace and effectiveness of a movement's turn to mainstream political action after peace agreements (as will be seen in section 3), their influence on strategic shifts from insurgency to dialogue with state agents is more uncertain, as the case studies show that the decision to negotiate a peaceful transition might be made by political as

well as military leaders. The role of the movement's leadership is stressed in all studies, emphasising their proactive sense of initiative and their ability to assess shifting power relationships and react swiftly to arising windows of opportunity, sometimes without any prior consultation within the movement. This was the case, for instance, when imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela took the unilateral decision in 1989 to write a letter to President Botha, in which he set out the principle of majority rule while addressing the fears and concerns of the white minority. Although this bold step was met with heavy scepticism inside his own party, it played a key pre-emptive role for future negotiations by securing a central role for the ANC in the peace process. The M19 study also highlights the quasi-religious nature of hierarchical structures – "the commander is never wrong" (García Durán et al. 2008, 27) – and the decisive role played by the movement's successive leaders. For instance, Commander Pizarro showed his ability to convert from a military to a political leader when he initiated a peace process with the Colombian government in 1989. His audacious offer of disarmament was made without any prior consultation within his own movement or with other guerrillas, but was later internally approved by a democratic vote in favour of ending the armed rebellion.

Political scientists identify three broad categories of leaders: ideologues have a predetermined agenda which conditions all their decisions and their relations with their constituencies; strategists also have a set goal but adapt the means of pursuing it according to the context (political timing) and what constituents will support; pragmatists adapt their goals and agenda to the expectations of constituents and the situation (Hermann and Gerard 2009). Although rebel leaders are often perceived as stubborn and intransigent ideologues, all "insider experts" consulted for this research stressed the rationality of the decision-making process, in which strategic or pragmatic leaders constantly reassess the ends and means of insurgency in the light of an evolving environment.

In line with the strategic style of leadership described above, the studies reveal the adoption of violent means to be an instrumental rather than an ideological choice, and

describe the decision to enter a peace process as proceeding from a rational calculation of the possibilities and limitations inherent in non-violent politics as opposed to continuing the armed conflict. In Colombia, the M19 leadership realised during the 1980s that war had become an obstacle to change, as the oligarchy was seeking to exploit violence for the perpetuation of the status quo. In search of alternatives, they reformulated their strategy of "weapons at the service of politics" to "peace at the service of politics", and from "change for peace" to "peace for change". In other words, they appropriated the notion of peace as a transformative strategy of action in itself, rather than a distant absolute end (García Durán et al. 2008). In South Africa, the ANC also took a proactive decision around 1990 to embrace negotiations as "a new terrain of struggle" and "primary site of contestation" (Maharaj 2008, 23), and unilaterally suspended its armed struggle in order to force the regime into formal peace talks. The CPN-M study also presents the movement's shift from armed activities to peaceful street protest and negotiations in 2006 as an illustration of the motto "firm with principles and flexible with tactics" (Ogura 2008, 45).

The pragmatist style of leadership described above is also consistent with the readiness of some rebel leaders to reassess the original objectives and discursive frame of their struggle. In Colombia, El Salvador, and Nepal, a redefinition of the insurgents' primary goals was a clear precondition for their strategic shift from armed rebellion to negotiation. Around 1979, the M19 leaders shifted their main political objective from socialism to democracy. The FMLN underwent a similar reorientation when it gave up its revolutionary aspirations to advocate for reform within the framework of representative democracy and market economy; from then on, its agenda primarily focused on transparent elections, an independent judiciary, and demilitarisation. In Nepal, the Maoists also underwent a major ideological shift around 2001 from seeking a communist one-party system to embracing competitive multi-party democracy, and reoriented their programme towards introducing a new constitution, electing a constituent assembly, and establishing a republic. This move enabled them to join forces with their former enemies, the legal opposition parties, against the autocratic regime of King

Gyanendra. When it comes to secessionist movements, the elements of flexibility mainly revolve around the definition and content of self-determination. For instance, GAM's decision, voiced in the 2002 Stavanger Declaration, to give up its claim to an independent Islamic state of Aceh and settle for self-government in a decentralised democratic system, resulted from a pragmatic decision that the meaning of independence was more important than the term itself.

2.2. Horizontal and Vertical Communication Channels

Effective social or political movements require decisive and visionary leaders, but also strong and cohesive organisations. Internal consultation and power dynamics within rebel movements, either horizontally (e.g. between "moderates" and "radicals") or vertically (across the hierarchy), play important roles in influencing the move from militancy to negotiated politics. There are claims in the literature on counter-insurgency and negotiation that armed groups are most effectively brought to the negotiation table by weakening them through provoking defection, implosion, and infighting between members (e.g. Alterman 1999; Cronin 2010). By contrast, other studies highlight the importance of intra-group cohesion to ensure a successful peace process and post-war political viability of these movements (Söderberg Kovacs 2007; Al-Ashimi and Goerzig 2010; Dudouet 2010).

The case studies examined here, unsurprisingly, strongly support the latter argument. Internal consultation and debate preceding, accompanying, or following back-channel and formal negotiations are cited as critical factors that ensure a high degree of accountability and unity among members and supporters, thus enabling collective ownership of transformation processes from violent insurgency to peaceful transition, and in turn guaranteeing sustainable conflict settlements. The Maoists in Nepal, for instance, convened several thousand members in inclusive conferences at critical moments in the conflict and the peace process, in order to ensure that decisions would be taken on behalf of the whole movement. In several studies, jails are also described as a space for encounter and debate, where political options are weighed and discussed at length, away from the constant preoccupations and danger which might distract underground leaders at large from engaging in strategic assessments of the situation (e.g. García Durán et al. 2008).

Maintaining internal cohesion is particularly crucial during volatile war-to-peace transitions, as peace processes are held to be particularly vulnerable to "spoiler violence" by splinter groups seeking to derail or prevent peace agreements (e.g. Darby and McGinty 2000). This was particularly the case in Northern Ireland and South Africa, where peace negotiations took place amidst an upsurge in violence generated by former allies or components of the insurgency movement who were opposed to a peace deal or protesting against their alleged marginalisation. In this context, the leadership stood out for their ability to sustain their group's commitment to the negotiation process, and keep the majority of their movement united behind a common position.

Intra-group power struggles are very sensitive issues for insurgency movements, and since most of the case studies were written by, or together with, (former) members, they hardly mention internal disagreements and dispute resolution mechanisms – with the exception of two studies written by outside analysts on the basis of extensive interviews with (former) leaders. The study on the FMLN addresses the numerous disagreements which arose between its five guerrilla fronts over the goals of the revolution and the best strategy for reaching them (i.e. armed struggle until victory or parallel armed struggle and negotiation). The main conflict was ultimately "resolved" after the suicide of the leader from the most radical guerrilla group. The case study on the Nepali Maoists also mentions the occurrence of intra-party confrontation in 2004 over questions of internal democracy and the definition of the movement's primary target enemy (i.e. India or the monarchy). Internal unity was restored after the king's coup d'état in early 2005 helped to resolve the dispute over strategic priorities.

Vertical communication through the movement's hierarchy is also important in order to gather support for new strategies and prepare members or supporters for the changes ahead. In the case of the CPN-M, the lines of communi-

cation were primarily top-down, in the form of political training for Maoist cadres to explain the strategic shifts made during the peace process. The fact that since the signing of the 2006 peace accord most Maoist combatants have remained stationed in cantonments, patiently waiting for a political compromise on their army integration and/or socio-economic rehabilitation, can largely be explained by the high level of discipline and ideology within the movement, as well as the intensive "coaching" carried out down the chain of command by cadres and commanders (Ogura 2008). In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin also engaged in intense negotiation with the Republican activist base which was "kept abreast of developments as they unfolded and as much as possible knew about developments before they heard about them in the media" (De Brún 2008, 15). In South Africa, observers describe the peace negotiations as a "pact" between ANC elites and the elites of the outgoing order, which had the effect of alienating other armed formations (such as the Inkatha Freedom Party) that were excluded from it. However, this theory ignores the substantive role played by the ANC's campaign of rolling mass action and the fact that the ANC regularly reported back to its constituency in mass rallies (Maharaj 2008).

3. Post-War Adaptation

Having shown that strong leadership and cohesive organisations are crucial factors enabling armed groups to come to the negotiation table with the state, we now turn to examine the impact of peaceful transitions on their organisational structures. Focusing on the timing and challenges of transforming armed groups into conventional political entities in the aftermath of negotiated peace agreements, we question the usefulness of early demobilisation and disarmament (3.1.), spell out transitional mechanisms to preserve internal discipline and cohesion during fragile post-war transitions (3.2.), and highlight some factors facilitating an effective transformation of militant structures into democratic political parties (3.3.).

3.1. Challenges of Early Demobilisation

The clearest indication of armed groups' political will to undergo post-war transitions from armed to conventional political activities consists in their participation in so-called demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration

(DDR) programmes, which are usually set up with international assistance immediately after a peace accord. Such schemes build on the assumption that rebel structures should be dismantled, and their members disarmed, as quickly as possible after the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, international DDR programmes (such as the UN DDR Standards) typically recommend "breaking down the command and control structures operating over rebel fighters … thus making it more difficult for them to return to organized rebellion" (Spear 2002, 141), thus reflecting a perception of former combatants as spoilers and a "security threat".

However, according to armed group veterans and analysts alike, such a view is highly problematic. Firstly, it fails to take into account the "security dilemma" encountered by (former) combatants, who regard the possession and use of arms as an indispensable prerequisite for the security of the people they represent. As a result, they will hesitate to abandon their militarised status before they are 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 for whom they stand can be ruled out (Dudouet et al. 2012). In fact, in most cases under scrutiny, decommissioning only took place at the end of a long post-war transition, following – or in parallel with – the implementation of structural reforms to address the root causes of violence through democratisation (South Africa, Colombia), demilitarisation and security sector reform (Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Nepal, Kosovo), or power devolution (Aceh).

Moreover, abrupt demobilisation entails the risk of creating a security vacuum, as it can lead to disorder and disorientation among former combatants, trigger a return to violence by disaffected splinter groups, and make the reintegration process more difficult – for instance by hindering the dissemination of information on reintegration options. Finally, DDR mechanisms tend to rely on a distorted understanding of armed groups as purely military organisations, thereby overlooking the fact that many movements have a long history of non-military political struggle and structures, as reviewed above.

By contrast, the case studies highlight the importance of retaining coordination and communication channels throughout post-war transitions, which can be described as a two-stage process: short-term maintenance of command structures in order to supervise an orderly (re-)conversion process; and long-term institutionalisation of civilian entities that pursue the struggle through conventional political means.

3.2. Transitional Maintenance of Command Structures

The concept of "interim stabilisation measures" has recently appeared in the DDR literature to encompass temporary schemes designed to prevent the occurrence of security vacuums in the early stages of post-war transition, keep combatant cohesiveness intact within a military or civilian structure, and improve real and perceived security during the negotiation or planning of long-term conventional security promotion activities (Colletta and Muggah 2009). They offer not only combatants an opportunity to use their wartime skills and experience for peacekeeping purposes during volatile war-to-peace transitions, but are also useful confidence-building and social cohesion exercises that help prepare members for the socio-psychological transformation of switching their identity from combatant to civilian.

In Northern Ireland, IRA command structures (i.e. the Army Council) have remained more or less intact since the 1994 ceasefire, even after the leadership declared a formal end to its armed campaign in 2005. Even their political opponents accepted the pragmatic logic that maintaining a leadership structure was necessary to oversee the transition and demobilisation of the organisation and prevent frustrated individuals from joining dissenting factions (McEvoy 2012). In Aceh, in the wake of the 2005 peace accord, GAM's military wing was transformed into a civilian Transitional Committee (KPA) to supervise the demobilisation of its combatants and maintain a cohesive structure until a political party could be formed. Establishing 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 move-

ment to assist the transition process internally (Aguswandi and Zunzer 2008). Such structures also play a symbolic role by providing elements of continuity of struggle in the eyes of the movement's constituency. In Kosovo, where a quick post-war dismantling of the victorious liberation movement was bound to stir up opposition and alienate the local population, the KLA chief of staff insisted on the removal of the word "dissolution" from the negotiation agenda; instead, the guerrilla force was transformed into a civilian security entity, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). Aside from providing security (which was mainly taken over by international peacekeepers), it also played a crucial symbolic role. Indeed, establishing the KPC met the aspirations of former combatants to "keep their uniforms on", albeit within an unarmed civil organisation with specific emergency response and civil protection duties, while the political leadership was negotiating the establishment of a new security apparatus for post-independence Kosovo. Once the new Kosovo Security Force was set up in 2008, the KPC was dismantled in an orderly fashion (Bekaj 2010).

3.3. Challenges of Political Institutionalisation

While interim stabilisation measures are essential to provide security in volatile environments and facilitate post-war re-skilling for combatants, the formation of cohesive and effective post-war political structures represents a major challenge for armed opposition movements which aspire to participate in post-war statebuilding and democratic transitions, especially after decades of illegal existence, exile, or underground operations (Soderberg Kovacs 2007).

Most of the movements under scrutiny have achieved remarkable long-term or recent success in their post-war conversion "from bullets to ballots", from the outstanding performance of the ANC in South Africa, which gained 63 percent of the votes in 1994 and has been confirmed in power in all subsequent elections, to the election of the FMLN presidential candidate in 2009 in El Salvador. In fact, with the exception of the M19 in Colombia, all nine movements examined in this paper are presently either in control of the national or autonomous (regional) legislative or executive powers, or are participating in power-sharing governments.

The growing body of literature on the post-war political development of insurgency movements identifies a number of factors which might explain the success or failure of their transitions from the battleground to the electoral arena. It is argued for instance that movements which had a pre-war history as a political party or retained a civilian command structure and a political branch throughout the conflict can more easily build on this experience in the post-war environment (De Zeeuw 2008, 13).

In fact, the only movements found in the case studies to possess a combined political-military command structure faced difficulties in establishing a cohesive party in the wake of the peace process. Despite its successful transition into a major opposition party which went on to win the presidential election in 2009, the FMLN was affected by multiple individual defections and collective splits throughout the 1990s (e.g. by two of its five former constituent guerrilla groups). The KLA did not form its own party, and instead its members went on to establish their own formations, competing for power in the newly-independent state of Kosovo; one of these parties is currently in power. The demobilisation of the M19 guerrilla forces was accompanied by the formation of a coalition party with other leftist activists, Democratic Alliance-M19. But despite this new party's early achievements in the immediate post-agreement phase (constituent assembly, national and local elections in 1990–91), it steadily lost its initial electoral support and has remained a minor political force ever since. This failure can be partly explained by the loss of internal cohesion and political dispersion entailed by the demobilisation process, the new party's inability to consolidate its social base, and its lack of experience in the electoral process and institutional arena (García Durán et al. 2008). At other levels, however, this political force has played an important role in running social projects, departmental and municipal bureaus, women's groups, and work with victims.

Even movements with a long history of political engagement and cohesive civilian structures are not immune to intra-party tensions or rivalries over leadership or programme issues in the aftermath of peace agreements. In Nepal, internal dissension over ideological and strategic

decisions on the path and pace of peace implementation processes particularly increased after the formation of a Maoist-led government in 2008, as those confronted with the realities of power (in particular Prime Minister Prachanda) emphasised a pragmatic stance and discourse while the party ideologues and radicals remain focused on safeguarding their Maoist values and struggle for socialist democracy. In Northern Ireland as well, Sinn Féin's adoption of a strategy of dialogue, and later its decision to join a power-sharing government with former political opponents, led to the formation of dissident Republican groups who have attempted to derail the course of the peacebuilding process. But De Brún argues that although they still exist, "they have no support, no political organisation, and have articulated no alternative to the strategy to which the overwhelming majority of Republican activists and former prisoners subscribe" (2008, 16).

Another factor of internal tension is the return of exiled or imprisoned leadership, creating possible misunderstandings or rivalries with internal underground leaders. This was most obviously the case in Aceh, where the exiled government's return home after the 2005 peace agreement led to a temporary split of the GAM movement into two camps (the Swedish group versus the KPA and field commanders), who presented separate candidates for the provincial elections. In South Africa too, political tensions between the ANC's former internal, external, and prison forces (the "Robben Islanders") still have repercussions today, and the challenges of consolidating a cohesive post-war movement were demonstrated for instance by the 2008 leadership crisis and formation of a breakaway party.

Beyond the challenges of maintaining internal cohesion, the transition from armed resistance to conventional politics also requires adopting a new political culture, formulating a new programme, installing party organisational structures, recruiting party cadres, and building their capacity to govern. The Nepali study mentions the CPN-M's organisational shift ahead of the April 2008 constituent assembly elections "from a war-time to a peace-time system" (Ogura 2008, 41), restructuring its civilian apparatus to conform with the state administrative divisions and training cadres for political action and "peaceful revolutionary

change". In Aceh, GAM was able to expand and strengthen its political wing during the peace process, and also established parallel state structures at all levels of administration. Its biggest challenge, having won the 2006 provincial elections as well as many district-level elections, is to prove that it can run Aceh province better than the Jakarta government did (Aguswandi and Zunzer 2008).

Success in the electoral arena is also conditioned by the ability of the new political formations to broaden their support base beyond their initial constituency, and to recruit new party cadres who were not involved in the armed struggle. For instance, the ANC has been quite successful in pursuing a very inclusive programme which cuts across racial and ideological party lines. For its part, Sinn Féin has now become the largest party representing the nationalist community in Northern Ireland (a position previously held by the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party), but it remains a community-based party focused on the demands of one side of the electorate, and does not really seek to rally support across the sectarian divide. In El Salvador, the FMLN has managed to integrate new civilian members (including the incumbent President Funes), but the vast majority of party leaders are former guerrilla commanders. This points to the importance of adapting wartime leadership structures to new priorities and agendas, seeking a healthy balance between continuity or stability and transformation in order to avoid the phenomenon of "fossilisation" where entrenched party leaders continue to lead the movement in quasi-authoritarian style (see section 1).

These challenges to post-war institutionalisation thus highlight the need for locally-tailored external capacity-building support in democratic party politics by international agencies (such as political foundations or NGOs with electoral expertise), through technical or financial assistance in organisational development, (legal) financing, parliamentary tasks, election campaigning, administrative skills, or good governance.

4. Conclusion

Our examination of the influence of the discourse and self-analysis of (former) members of armed opposition movements on the internal factors shaping the adoption and

adaptation of goals and strategies during the processes of conflict escalation and de-escalation highlights the rational decision-making process whereby strategic and pragmatist military/political leaders constantly (re-)assess and adjust their methods of action (from unarmed to armed tactics and vice versa) according to the evolving strategic environment. The vertical and horizontal relations and communication between members (as well as their constituencies) are found to be critical factors enabling collective ownership of conflict transformation processes and preventing the occurrence of intra-party splits and disaffection during peace negotiations. Finally, the claim that rebel organisations should be broken down as quickly as possible during peace processes is found to be dubious; the findings highlight instead the importance of (at least temporarily) retaining coordination and communication channels through cohesive structures, in parallel with the development and/or consolidation of civilian entities that pursue the "struggle" non-violently through democratic politics.

All of these issues would merit further analysis though complementary methodologies offering a more independent perspective on intra-group dynamics. In particular, the "subjective" findings gathered here call for more in-depth research on the boundaries between different forms of political action (within a wide spectrum from conventional party politics to nonviolent struggle, self-limited armed insurgency, and indiscriminate terror); on the internal dynamics and decision-making involved in shifting goals and strategies; and on their various implications for the processes of radicalisation and de-radicalisation. There also needs to be more interdisciplinary investigation on the linkages between internal cohesion, negotiations, political transitions, and post-war institutionalisation.

Finally, such analysis might offer useful lessons for constructive international engagement to support the conversion of state challengers into active state- and peace-builders, as long as these actors are politically-motivated movements which enjoy strong social legitimacy and aspire to take part in democratic politics. Indeed, our findings call for a rethinking of conventional intervention in intra-state political conflicts, promoting the cohesion

rather than dissolution of combatant structures during negotiations; engaging with the real leaders who have the power to implement a deal or bring their constituency with them (rather than "moderates" or "proxies"); and offering technical assistance to support political transitions into organisations that possess a future role within a peaceful environment, in contrast to criminalisation strategies (e.g. through anti-terrorist measures such as proscription and counter-insurgency) which prevent these groups from expanding their political capacities.

References

Aguswandi and Wolfram Zunzer. 2008. *From Politics to Arms to Politics Again: The Transition of the Gerakan Acheh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement – GAM)*, Berghof Transition Series 5. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Al-Ashimi, Khaled, and Carolin Goerzig. 2010. Baseless Jihad. In *The Control of Violence in Modern Society: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, From School Shootings to Ethnic Violence*, ed. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Stefan Malthaner, and Andrea Kirschner, 467–86. New York: Springer Science.

Alterman, John B. 1999. *How Terrorism Ends*, USIP Special Report. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace. www.usip.org/files/resources/sr990525.pdf.

Álvarez, Alberto Martin. 2010. *From Revolutionary War to Democratic Revolution – The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador*, Berghof Transition Series 9. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Bekaj, Armend. 2010. *The KLA and the Kosovo War: From Intra-State Conflict to Independent Country*, Berghof Transition Series 8. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Bjorgo, Tore, and John Horgan, eds. 2009. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. London: Routledge

Bruderlein, Claude. 2000. *The Role of Non-State Actors in Building Human Security: The Case of Armed Groups in Intra-State Wars*. Geneva: Center for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Colletta, Nat, and Robert Muggah. 2009. Rethinking Post-War Security Promotion. *Journal of Security Sector Management* 7 (1): 1–25.

Cronin, Audrey Kurth. 2010. *When Should We Talk to Terrorists?* USIP Special Report 240. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. www.usip.org/files/resources/SR240Cronin.pdf.

Darby, John, and Roger McGinty, eds. 2000. *The Management of Peace Processes*. Houndmills: Macmillan.

De Zeeuw, Jeroen, ed. 2008. *From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movements after Civil Wars*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

De Brún, Bairbre. 2008. *The Road to Peace in Ireland*, Berghof Transition Series 6. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Dudouet, Véronique. 2010. *Mediating Peace with Proscribed Armed Groups*, USIP Special Report 239. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. www.usip.org/files/resources/SR239Dudouet.pdf.

Dudouet, Véronique, Hans J. Giessmann, and Katrin Planta. 2012. *Post-War Security Transitions: Participatory Peacebuilding After Asymmetric Conflicts*. London: Routledge.

García Durán, Mauricio, Vera Grabe Loewenherz, and Otty Patiño Hormaza. 2008. *M-19's Journey from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics: Striving to Keep the Revolution Connected to the People*, Berghof Transition Series 1. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Hermann, Margaret, and Catherine Gerard. 2009. The Contributions of Leadership to the Movement from Violence to Incorporation. In *Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding: Moving from Violence to Sustainable Peace*, ed. Bruce Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, 30–44. Abingdon: Routledge.

Holmqvist, Caroline. 2005. Engaging Armed Non-State Actors in Post-Conflict Settings. In *Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, ed. Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi, 45–68. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Human Security Center. 2008. *Human Security Brief 2007*. Burnaby, Canada: Simon Fraser University. www.humansecuritybrief.info.

Jones, Seth G., and Martin C. Libicki. 2008. *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al Qaida*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

Maharaj, Mac. 2008. *The ANC and South Africa's Negotiated Transition to Democracy and Peace*, Berghof Transition Series 2. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

McEvoy, Kieran. 2012. Ex-Prisoners, Ex-Combatants and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland. In *Post-war Security Transitions: Participatory Peacebuilding after Asymmetric Conflicts*, ed. Véronique Dudouet, Katrin Planta, and Hans-Joachim Giessmann. London: Routledge.

Ogura, Kiyoko. 2008. *Seeking State Power – The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)*, Berghof Transition Series 3. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research.

Policzer, Pablo. 2005. Neither Terrorists nor Freedom Fighters. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii, 3–5 March.

Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi. 2007. *From Rebellion to Politics: The Transformation of Rebel Groups to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

Spear, Jennifer. 2002. Demobilization and Disarmament. In *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, ed. Stephen Steadman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth Cousens, 141–82. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Tarrow, Sydney. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2d ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zartman, I. William, ed. 1996. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

Véronique Dudouet
v.dudouet@berghof-foundation.org