MILITIAS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK[i)]

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ABSTRACT

While the presence of militia in conflicts dates back several centuries, their current nature and importance remains unique and in need of further analysis and understanding. This article attempts to further this understanding by providing an interpretative framework for the analysis of militia groups. It does this by first problematising the definition of militias, particularly with regards to the question of being a non-state actor. A framework is then provided which highlights the need to study the rationality and motivations of militias, their strategies and tactics, their structure, their means of achieving legitimacy and accountability and their relationship with other actors. These themes are crucial with regards to disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration (DDR) and the overall peace process. However, de-militarisation of militias cannot be enforced from the top-down only,

which is why the contextualisation of the historical, political, economic, identity politics, regional, international and civil society situation must also be considered. Thus, the multi-faceted and multi-layered nature of the demilitarisation of militias is discussed here in the hopes to provide a better theoretical understanding to aid in a more efficient implementation of the peace process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Militias have been a strong feature of conflict for centuries. Although sometimes considered an archaic notion, the importance of militias to contemporary war and peace is profound and prevalent throughout the world. While militias are most often associated with Africa and the governments of weak states, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — led by the United States (US) — have also seen militias play definitive roles, as highlighted most prominently by the direct allying of the US military with localised Iraqi militias, the so-called 'Sons of Iraq'. Overall, the diversity of locales, forms, motivations, and relationships has meant that academia and the policy world has struggled to come to a clear understanding of what militias are, the roles that they play and why, and hence how best to respond to them.

Militias occupy an uncertain and deeply controversial position in the changing landscape of conflict. Linked variously to atrocities against civilians or international criminal elements, militias embody a new dimension in warfare that transcends the classic inter-state and intra-state (government/guerrilla movement) disputes of the past. Part of what distinguishes them from more traditional combatants is operational in that they are willing to engage in violent tactics that defy international norms on conflict as well as a proclivity to embrace expediency in alliance-making. Moreover, as these militarised entities are prone to pursue conflict first and foremost in terms of local interests, militias are notoriously difficult to manage in the context of transitions from war to peace. As such, the conventional approaches to conflict management and resolution promulgated by the international community are singularly inadequate in addressing the issue of non-statutory forces as well as the enduring effect that they have on post-conflict situations.

In the first instance, unlike most national armies or opposition guerrilla forces, local conditions can enable militias to resist formal

demobilisation and disarmament processes more readily. In part, this reflects the shifting balance of power within a given conflict, the absence of military command and control or distant territoriality from the central authorities that support these non-statutory forces, and the influence of weak or even non-existent government administration over the conduct of war itself. Concurrently, the loosening of bonds between state instigators and other external supporters, often forged solely for reasons of mutual expediency, as conflicts drag on is another aspect of militias that gives prominence to local factional politics. So too is the pull of commercial activity — sometimes initially embarked upon as a means of supporting military action while at other times nothing more than pure opportunism — which unleashes a dynamic of its own (the 'greed' cycle) which transcends any putative rationale for engaging in war. The result is a highly complex conflict environment, subject to a multiplicity of sources that are as likely to be rooted in parochial concerns as they are in national issues or ethnicity, and one that is particularly immune to the established international templates aimed at inter-state conflict resolution.

Given the prominence of militias to contemporary conflict and the international efforts to usher in peace and stability, there was and continues to be a driving need to further understand them. As such, it is our aim to understand the nature, motivations and conduct of militias — and this understanding will be a crucial step towards devising a strategic approach to demilitarising these entities and, concurrently, creating the conditions for long-term stability. Accordingly, this article presents a theoretical framework, aimed at identifying the motivations, social basis and operational mode of militia groups, as well as understanding their relationship with internal and external actors.

Our intention here is to continue to contribute to the growing body of scholarly literature aimed at critiquing the DDR process (see edited volumes by Berdal and Ucko 2009; and Muggah 2009). In line with the emerging literature on contextualising demilitarisation, our analysis of militias operating in conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, Timor-Leste and Afghanistan has led us to conclude that in order to develop and undertake effective demilitarisation activities and foster long-term peace in a post-conflict environment it is essential to: i) understand the militias that can potentially destabilise (and 'spoil') the peace process; ii) recognise that the local context is paramount to devising effective demilitarisation policies,

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and therefore, must be essential (and constitutive) of any peace initiative.

2. DEFINING MILITIAS

Defining non-state actors chiefly by their independence from states and state authority would be extremely misleading, especially in the context of globalisation. Increasingly, in both domestic and international politics, the theoretical purity of these supposedly 'opposing' idealised types is muddled by the complexities of practice (Josselin and Wallace 2001: 2-5). However, for research manageability, non-state actors will be understood in terms of the definitional confines of those actors/movements that operate outside of the "formal" state spheres (while also appreciating their discursive contexts and environments). As such, the focus will be on actors, which are at least, "in principle, autonomous from the structure and machinery of the state" (Josselin and Wallace 2001: 3). In particular, our focus will be on militias. Also, it should be noted that these non-state actors can exist at "state"/national, transnational/regionalised, and individual levels (Davis 2009). In addition, the relations between the state and non-state may be understood as ambiguous, clearly defined (encouraging or antipathetic), or indifferent, all existing along a continuum.[ii] These groups have a propensity to use violence for political and economic ends. In some contexts, they have a monopoly on the use of force/violence in a given territory or state. Also, the fact that these armed non-state actors operate outside the formal state sphere does not negate their potential to move into the formal state machinery and neither does it exclude interaction with units in the formal state system at any point of their operation.

It is beyond the scope of this article to develop a comprehensive typology of armed non-state actors, but we feel it is imperative to discuss what terminology we use throughout our research. Our purpose here is not to create another nomenclature for the armed groups; instead we have deliberately settled on using the broad 'label' of militias.[iii] Overall, like most concepts in International Relations and Security Studies, that of militias is blurred at the edges. The word militia historically, notably in the context of American and British history, referred to a reserve body of citizens enrolled for military duty and called upon only in an emergency. However, in the contempor-

ary period, the term has been used loosely in two consistent ways. Firstly, it has been to describe the private armed groups of pro-regime strongmen and the paramilitary formations that organise in defence of the political order in a given country. Secondly, militias have also been used in connection with states where the central authority has been considerably weakened. In such cases, the armed formations established by warlords, tribal or regional strongmen, drug lords, and the like are referred to as militias.

For the purposes of this article, militias should be understood as a military force composed of civilians outside of a state's formal military structure. The focus of this article is very much on understanding militias within a continuum of non-state armed groups in weak and failed states that resort to violence in pursuit of their objectives. These objectives can range from collective to private interests and can include challenging the balance and structure of political and economic power as well as defending or controlling resources and territory for the benefit of a particular identity including a state, or for the private accumulation needs of militia leaders. Critically, the line of continuity between a historical understanding of militias and that of contemporary militias is that they all put forth a public explanation and defence of their armed presence on the need for 'self-defence' as understood by their own trajectory.

While qualifying contemporary militias as non-state actors, it should be emphasised that the relationship between state and militia is still the definitive one. There are limited exceptions where 'militias' are still developed as official state institutions and these should be understood more as historical anomalies, such as ongoing efforts in Venezuela to form 'Bolivarian' militias, and even as the foundation of a state's national defence, such as the Swiss military as a militia structure. Rather, the vast majority of current militias should still be understood as non-state actors distinct from official state structures even though their relationship with the state is imperative. Indeed, militias as paramilitary forces are a driving dynamic in contemporary international relations, especially in the context of weak and failed states where militias provide an expediency of force for governments. Conversely, however, militias can also be understood in certain instances as insurgent forces as well. As described previously, the key point of militias is that they apply violence in pursuit of their respective objectives, including both challenging established state

power structures or acting in the interests of particular identities, including those of a state.

3. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

As part of a multi-layered framework of analysis, we propose a model of conceptualising militias. The framework is meant to find common ground between the traditional 'military capabilities analysis' approach employed by military commanders and intelligence specialists to understand an adversary's style of war; and the more dynamic approach that is anchored in the historical, anthropological and cultural narratives of modern non-state armed actors (Shultz and Dew 2006: Chapter 2).

This framework will hopefully be instrumental for future International Relations (IR) theorising, conducting empirical field work more consistently, as well as for drafting innovative policy formulation, especially demilitarisation and security sector reform initiatives. The bedrock of analysis is an understanding that militias are lucid, rational players operating within the international system who can successfully politicise and instrumentalise identity cleavages, not only for the mobilisation of fighters in particular and society in general, but also for the retention of their support base. Since this is the fundamental assumption underlying the model, a non-acceptance of this rationality undermines the entire model. The second level conceptualises motivations of militias, which are loosely organised along a continuum of 'greed and grievances', and are fundamentally fluid, thereby having the ability to oscillate between both extremes depending on the specificities of the case study and subsequent circumstances. The third level of analysis considers the tactics and strategies of militias, which rests on contextual uses of violence linked to the main motivations of the militia organisation. This means that militias choose certain tactics and strategies to address strategic and expressive motivations, such as to garner community support, to display resolve to their adversary and the community, to recruit and retain fighters, to protect local communities and to occupy resource-rich areas. The fourth key element of the framework focuses on the organisation of the militias, which are structured along a continuum, ranging from the highly organised to the loosely, dispersedly organised. Finally, it is imperative to consider the robustness of the legitimacy and ac-

countability that militias in the areas where they operate and the country at large; as well as the unearthing militia relationships with external actors (including state supports and regional economic and political networks) as well as probe inter-non-state armed group relations (that is, partnerships and alliances among these groups in a particular country).

MULTI-LAYERED FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS	
Motivations	- Lucid, rational actors - Oscillation between greed and grievances, with a focus on broader political and socio-economic contexts - Layers of motivation: combatants, leadership, society - Evolution of motivations hence understanding motivation on a continuum
Strategies and tactics	- Linked to motivations; choose certain strategies and tactics to address motivations - Linked to targets: certain strategies and tactics will be employed to express objectives and resolve to the adversary, community, regional/international actors
Structure	- Continuum: highly organised, hierarchical to dispersedly organised, networked - Evolution of structure and militia based on contextual factors (exogenous and endogenous to the organisation)
Other factors	- Legitimacy and Accountability: linked to motivations; militia's identity; set of ideas, beliefs, values and narratives that bind the organisation together - Relations with other actors (state supporters; non-state actors; regional actors/networks) - Regional dynamics - Role of the international community, civil society, local communities

3.1 Rationality and motivations

The framework of analysis outlined in this article rests on one main assumption: militias are lucid, rational actors operating within the in-

ternational system, many times defying the prevailing norms of 'international society'. Rationality must be understood as socially constructed and an actor's interests and behaviour are subject to socialising norms and as such, are fundamentally mutable. At the same time, the application of the traditional rational choice approach to interpreting the conduct of militias is limited, as it does not account for bounded rationality, cognitive dissonance and other social and environmental considerations, within understanding behaviour of actors. A more dynamic reconfiguration of the rational actor model utilised here enables us to construct a fuller understanding of militias that seem to function beyond the instrumental level of survival. In keeping with this insight, our country-specific case studies illustrated that motivations of militias are not only multi-faceted but also change over time, based on the perceptions of the local context held by leaders, the organisation and the community. This highlights the multi-levelled nature of interactions between various agents and the context; as well as, enables us to adopt an approach which emphasises rationality as 'bounded' within specific frameworks of limits of information, cognitive shortcomings and culture.[iv)]

After a discussion of our understanding of rationality, it is imperative to understand motivations underlying militia behaviour. Although the greed and grievances thesis is mainly applied to understanding civil wars, this framework is useful in understanding the evolution and oscillation of motivations of militias. As discussed earlier, the nexus can basically be understood as two 'rational' choice models. For the purposes of this article, it will be applied to the rationalisation of militias. Much of the academic debate on the economic causes of post-Cold War armed conflict has become polarised by the competing 'greed and grievances' dichotomy, juxtaposing 'loot-seeking' with 'justice-seeking' rebellions, and more generally, the significance of economic *versus* socio-political drivers of civil war. The greed argument, on the one hand, prominently articulated by Collier, posits that the ability to extract wealth through violence and war encourages armed/rebel groups to initiate and partake in civil conflict. This assertion is empirically substantiated by cross-country econometric analysis and by game theory modelling of warlord competition and looting models (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Berdal and Malone 2000; de Soysa 2002). It should be noted that earlier versions of the greed approach focused on economic combatants, while later on, emphasis

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was placed on the opportunity or economic feasibility for organised violence (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2003: 3).

While, proponents of the grievances thesis consider theories of conflict that explain group mobilisation for rebellion in terms of inter-group or horizontal socio-economic or political inequalities.[v] Economic and political differentials among groups is thus of fundamental importance to group mobilisation. Therefore, grievances are not necessarily socially constructed by rebelling insurgents, but are at the core of motivations in response to the resource scarcity, maldistribution of resources or political exclusion, sometimes also using the crutch of politicised identity-based cleavages (Homer-Dixon 1999; Stewart 2002). Collier and Hoeffler (2002) found that an integrated greed-grievance model, with only one of the potential sources of objective grievance (that is, ethnic dominance) added significantly to the ex-planatory power of the greed model. Keen, using a Foucauldian frame-work of analysis, asserts that the 'functions of violence' should include not only economic and political functions, but also 'psychological functions', which emphasises not only the 'subjectivity of the violent', but also the 'subjectivity of the 'victims' (Keen 2002: 4). Without being pigeonholed into the rationality-irrationality debate, specifically in the context of rational economic and political functions *versus* irrational emotive functions, we argue that it is important to conceptu-alise motivations along a continuum, and to emphasise again that motivations are not only fluid but also can evolve based on the con-textual realities of a specific locale and period.

It should be noted that the contexts in which armed non-state actors find themselves in are both caused and sustained by a com-plex and shifting interplay between political and economic factors; as such, while each approach has analytical utility, an accurate under-standing of the broad political economy of conflict requires a holistic approach incorporating both approaches, while also accounting for broader social, political and economic contexts. Within this perspect-ive, it is imperative to unpackage the many layers of militia motiva-tions within the wider context of the specific country. Due to the on-going violence taking place in many 'post-conflict' states, such as the DRC, Sudan, Timor-Leste, and Afghanistan, numerous groups emerged and flourished in this post-conflict disaggregated environment. In some cases, due to the weak state and security apparatuses, the state (with the support of the international community) is willing to

negotiate with any armed elements that could potentially be 'spoilers' to the ongoing peace process. Overall, the motivations of militias can be understood at three mutually constitutive and reinforcing levels.

At one level, militias are motivated by personal enrichment (at the individual and leadership levels), and economic-related activities (at the organisational level), including occupying and controlling mining areas, keeping supply routes open for arms/ammunition and logistics, arms trafficking, tax collection, and looting. However, there needs to be a division between the individual motivations of combatants and the leaders of the militia. Individual combatants find themselves in a disaggregated and hostile environment, where the austerity of the economic and social conditions provides these combatants with the incentive to engage in armed activity. The individual combatants receive far less of the economic benefits, as compared to high-ranking officers within an armed movement; which thereby forces individuals to exploit and loot local populations to supplement their income.

Closely linked to personal enrichment and economic survival, many militias are also motivated by the prospect of providing security to their communities, fused however within a dangerous identity-based trajectory. The politicisation of identity and protection, even at the level of rhetoric, as a guiding motivation enables groups to garner local sympathies, and has proven to be an effective strategy for re-cruiting and retaining combatants. This thereby forms and cements a common and mutually-binding identity, as well as creating an elusive 'other', to enable on-going armed and economic activities. The third level, which is closely linked to both the other levels, involves taking advantage of the post-transition political climate and resisting the de-militarisation process. The political transition and post-transition processes in many countries has emphasised political cooption, army integration and economic growth. As such, there is a low level of impunity, thereby making it easier for groups to emerge, engage in violent activities and finally be co-opted within the political and military structures.

3.2 Strategies and tactics

Militias employ a number of strategies to achieve their particularistic motivations, ranging from attrition, exploiting natural resources, forced recruitment (including, although not restricted to, children), manipula-

tions of identity, and partnerships based on expediency and mutual economic benefit. Due to their relative asymmetric weakness, in purely military terms, most militias employ a largely nocturnal strategy, including being most active in remote areas where dense forests and mountain terrain hinder search-and-destroy military operations, frequently dispersing after launching attacks, and making small-scale assaults on weak army positions.

As Kydd and Walter argue, the strategies employed by particular militias depend on the target of persuasion (that is, the government, international community, local population), and the characteristic or message they wish to convey through their strategies (to exert power, show resolve, foster trustworthiness).[vi] The most significant strategy employed by militias is the strategy of attrition against the government, international community and in some cases, local communities. This strategy is meant to persuade the government and the international community that the group is strong and resolute enough to inflict serious costs, while also illustrating its prowess and drawing symbolic power. Additionally, this strategy can also be reinforced by intimidating and disorienting local populations by launching indiscriminate attacks against civilians; thereby not only benefiting economically, but also gaining social control over said communities. This also inflates the perceived power of the group, by creating a sense of fear and terror amongst the population, political leadership and international community. This strategy is employed directly to achieve specific political motivations in the post-transition context, whereby the greater the costs the militia is able to inflict, the more credible its threat to inflict future costs, and therefore, the more likely the government and the international community will yield to the militias' demands and grant the required concessions (Kydd and Walter 2006: 59-66).

In addition, militias must acquire the necessary resources to finance training and logistical support for field operations, forge group cohesion by recruiting and retaining members, and maintain a clandestine network of supporters. The main sources of income for many militias range from trafficking, pillaging local communities, systematic looting and the confiscation of crop yields to smuggling and the trading of foreign merchandise. This economic imperative is intertwined with regional conflict complexes that produce not only cross-border economic interaction but also population migration and transborder political and identity links, which add another layer to complexity (Pugh

et al 2004: 25). These regional war economies solidify transnational economic networks, regional arms and mercenary networks, and socio-political and identity-based networks. The access to sources of income is a necessary strategy to recruit and retain combatants, on many occasions relying on the tactical utility of politicised ethnicity. As such, the politicisation of identity-based cleavages and the calls for protection of local communities from 'the other' is especially prevalent here, as many militias utilise strategic violence not only to meet certain tactical objectives but also to communicate the 'underlying' motivation of the organisation — usually for purpose of garnering support from the local community, displaying power and resolve to their adversary, and fostering group cohesion.

3.3 Militia structure

As our field work revealed,[vii] organisational structures of militias range from highly hierarchical, centralised formal units to informal, network-like units. Militias that follow a hierarchical structure have a clearly defined top-bottom communication chain, a strict framework for the division of labour, and adhere to a strict chain of command. Key decisions are made by the core leadership of the organisation. This structure is meant to emulate state-like military structures, where there are clear institutional structures and clear links of vertical communication within the organisation. However, since most militias engage in activities to counter the asymmetry in their own power, many groups have established network-like organisational structures, which make it more difficult to externally dismantle them. A hub network structure in contrast is relatively similar to a hierarchical structure. The main difference between the two is the lack of a formal division of labour in a hub network structure to control organisational activities, which allows the group much more manoeuvrability and innovation. In contrast, chain and multichannel network structures emphasise that the chain of command and control are relinquished for the purpose of attaining organisational goals, such as regime change, policy change, social control and personal enrichment. While the chain network structure still retains well-structured mechanisms of communication, the multichannel network allows for the free-flow of communication and encourages individual behaviour (allowing local units and branches the autonomy to act) within the framework of the

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organisation's goals and objectives. This network-like structure is inspired by the de-territorialisation of the new political order, and the decentralisation and informalisation of the organisation makes it not only a dynamic fast-moving entity but also emphasises that the strategic behaviour of the organisation itself relies on a process of vacillation between a territorial presence (as part of its activities) to a mode of disappearance and retreat (to regroup and create a further disorientation of its adversarial target) (Mishal and Rosenthal 2005).

Militias, depending on the level of 'institutionalisation', also form functionally specific sub-units, such as military, intelligence, political, financial and social development. One key issue that requires further investigation is the financial structure and network, especially where militias acquire resources to support their activities, including the training of members. At times, many militias operate within nefarious networks, which mean that it can be difficult to trace where resources come from and in what quantities they are. Finally, it is imperative to understand the cohesiveness of the group, as militias do have the potential to suffer from factionalism and disunity which can undermine the functioning of the organisation.

Initial success in securing their objectives triggers a process of militia 'institutionalisation' that extends beyond military and fiscal domains. Indeed, the development of organisational structures transforms these groups into forces to reckon with over the longer-term, although it should be noted that institutionalisation does not necessarily aim at, or result in, state-making. Regardless of their ultimate objective and of the final outcomes of their struggle, initially successful militias engage in a process of institutionalisation designed to meet the financial and organisational requirements of a protracted conflict or the contextual demands of operating in a weak state. However this institutionalisation in itself does not secure their legitimisation or their inclusion in peace negotiations, since there is always a normative judgment on whether a group is legitimate or not. In an effort to legitimate themselves in the eyes of other power contenders or international mediators, militias are likely to seek legitimacy through the emulation of the forms and procedures to which symbolic legitimacy is attached, forms and procedures usually identified with states. This emulation does not, however, result in homogeneity. Militia institutions are likely to borrow the specifics of their institutional forms and procedures from the templates that they are most familiar with in

their direct environment, most notably the government structure or other opponent that they are directly opposed to.

3.4 Legitimacy and accountability

Militias may follow a coherent ideology or a more *ad hoc* set of political beliefs and objectives that perform a number of crucial socio-political and psychological functions important to the effectiveness of the militia. Whatever form it takes, militias need a set of ideas, beliefs, values and narratives that bind the group together. For example, during the Cold War armed groups were drawn and committed to various left-wing and Marxist-Leninist ideologies. In the post-Cold War period, ethnic, cultural and religious ideologies have become dominant. Although militias can be motivated solely by financial and other strategic objectives, ideational factors form an important part of a militia's identity.

Aside from understanding the ideological, political, economic or other basis for the militia, it is important to assess the extent to which the organisation is able to rationalise, justify and legitimise the actions undertaken by the group, especially the use of violence. The use of political rhetoric, specifically the politicisation of identity-based cleavages, is used to create a social-psychological sense of unity, solidarity and commitment within the group which facilitates the ability of the organisation to recruit and retain fighters, but also to foster group cohesion. This 'auto-propaganda' also promotes a sense of collectivity and solidarity among the population,[viii] thereby leading to the reinforcement of enabling social norms that 'allow' violence to be used as a mechanism of achieving collective goals, including the security of a particular identity group. As well, the process of forging a militia identity involves using the concept of 'othering' in complex combination with the instrumentalisation of the scapegoat mechanism, while also fostering a strategy of moral disengagement.[ix]

Few militias can exist or succeed without some form of support, especially from the local community — which is able to not only replenish their supplies and update their intelligence but also to provide safe havens when necessary as well as replacements and new recruits. This support is interlinked with and inseparable from the legitimacy of the militia organisation; as violence undertaken without some political, social or economic purpose will generate little popular

support. Although Mao's analogy of the 'fish' (guerrillas) that would die without the 'sea' of popular support, and Che's *foco*, or heart, of revolution seem a bit clichéd in this discussion, it is important to highlight that both emphasise a strong link between armed groups and the population in order for the organisation to have effective legitimacy, especially in the areas it operates. With legitimacy comes an element of accountability that binds militias to linking their 'violent' actions with achieving a justifiable political end to their overarching goals and objectives.

3.5 Relations with other actors

Militias often establish linkages with other state and non-state actors for a number of tactical and strategic reasons, especially acquiring resources (be they financial, military, intelligence or political). In order to balance the asymmetry in power between militias and the states (and other non-state actors) they challenge, they frequently seek the assistance and resources of others to level the playing field. As discussed earlier, since militias most often operate in overlapping clandestine networks, finding accurate information on the nature and extent of these linkages can sometimes prove to be difficult. However, when possible the key issues that should garner closer analytical attention are: to what extent are militias reliant to the linkages with state and/or non-state actors, and at what costs to the group does this support continue.

The relationship between the militias and state actors and non-state actors can be understood as mutually constitutive and dynamic, meaning that their interactions will in some sense have an effect on their perceptions of each other and the context in which they operate, as well as what motivates them to remain engaged in the relationship (Wendt 1987: 359-360). That being said, both the militias and the actor they interact with should be seen as being self-autonomous, as an entity, and in the simplest sense, this means the ability to pursue particular interests (ranging from regime consolidation to protecting an ethnic community to resource exploitation), using a range of political and military instruments (Thakur 2005: 194). Due to the fact that militias tend to be weaker, in terms of military and political power, compared to other actors such as states, they exhibit a greater propensity to assert themselves in the local context. There-

fore, shifting alliances are for militias to accommodate their own asymmetry and evolve within the broader environment (such as peace processes and government military campaigns) in which they find themselves. Not only is this a tactic of survival, but if executed properly can prove to be an effective strategy towards achieving their broader objectives.

4. CONTEXTUALISING DEMILITARISATION

Since the local context is of paramount importance not only for demilitarisation and security sector reform strategies but overall peace in post-conflict environments, we felt it was imperative to discuss certain issues that are key to understanding local dynamics. Please note we do not intend to provide an exhaustive list of contextual issues, rather, based on field work and case studies, wanted to highlight major local circumstances that critically texture demilitarisation. Our earlier section focused on an interpretative framework necessary to understand the unique characteristics of militias. This section will discuss the context in which these militias operate, as well as some of the over-arching contextual realities facing post-conflict countries.

4.1 Historical context

Without necessarily falling in the divisive relativist-universalist debate, we feel it is essential to recognise that although post-conflict environments share certain 'thin' characteristics; in essence, a 'thick' (Walzer 1996) (contextualised) understanding reveals the nuances and underlying challenges to peace in a specific post-conflict society. In this regard, abandoning certain universalising categories, and appreciating the 'true historicity' and a *longue durée* perspective (Bayart 1993: 5) of the post-conflict state, focusing particularly on the societal and political logic underlying configurations of power and violence, will provide for a much richer analysis of not only the militias and violent spoilers involved, but also provide a way forward for developing effective demilitarisation and post-conflict peace-building strategies. As well, it is important to that "historical consciousness is also necessary to escape the false dichotomy between 'domestic' and 'international' politics" (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 24). This is especially

significant when considering the colonial historical trajectories of many states, such as the DRC and Sudan, as well as the history of militias and violent actors, in the case of Afghanistan. It is important to note that although all post-conflict environments have a specific historicity, in some cases such as DRC and Afghanistan it is much more embedded within the country's political, economic and societal framework than other cases, and therefore requires closer examination.

4.2 Political context

The shape and form of political arrangements in a 'post-conflict' environment has a significant impact on how demilitarisation will be undertaken and its outcomes. Demilitarisation is an inherently political endeavour. Combatants who hold considerable power are often part of the formal political formation process and are allocated important positions with the state apparatus. In some cases, however, militias are excluded from the formal political process and in turn revert back to violence, thereby spoiling the overall peace efforts. Political co-option and power-sharing arrangements are prevalent in numerous cases; however the prevalence of former combatants can undermine the legitimacy of the state. But, the alternative option of political exclusion can bring forth increased violence and instability (Torjesen 2009: 414).[x)] The government's position on integration of former combatants either in government, as part of the national army/police, or societal reintegration can have an instrumental impact on the demilitarisation process.

As well, electoral politics is a crucial component that is often times overlooked. Elections are extremely important as they are designed to end the transition from war to peace, to instil 'democracy' by creating robust political institutions and rules of competition, and to serve as symbolic endpoints for the involvement of the international community (Lyons 2002). However, all too often, elections have proven to be risky because the competition for power through the ballot box sharpens social differences — usually along the lines over which the war was fought. In many cases, this militarisation of political parties results in providing electoral legitimacy to military-based authoritarian parties who continue to rely upon coercion, fear and chauvinism to remain in power. For example, the hurried search for 'local' Iraqi groups to be transformed into political parties and to

form a new Iraqi government resulted in the co-option and elevation of various sectarian and militia-wielding elements, none of whom enjoyed much legitimacy or support among the Iraqi population (Ucko 2009). As such, there needs not only be a focus on the demilitarisation of politics, that is, the separation of political parties from militias, but also a focus on creating a broad coalition among competing elites (including militia 'strongmen') prior to elections that institutionalise the distribution of power and thereby reduce uncertainty.

A broader issue related to this is the state capacity, or more importantly, political will of the government and its legitimacy. In a post-conflict environment, the struggle for political power is contested by numerous actors, including militias. As such, the government's resolve to not only foster legitimacy and good governance, but also provide security, encourage a well-functioning economy, deliver basic social goods, and bring perpetrators of crimes to justice. These tasks require state resolve and institutional capacity-building. This has significant implications for the demilitarisation process, as a weak government is more likely to negotiate with militias that continue to operate in the post-conflict environment, and the national army is unable to protect civilians or combat new violent groups that may emerge in the security vacuum resulting from a weakened state. This is especially salient in the case of the DRC and Afghanistan. Therefore, effective demilitarisation strategies must consider the political dimensions of the political arrangements that are the cornerstone of peace-building processes. Overall, the weakness of political governance can have a significant impact on demilitarisation outcomes.

4.3 Economic context

Very closely linked to political governance and institution-building, the provision of tangible material benefits are crucial for the population to have confidence in the state's ability to steer the peace and democratic transition processes. As such, there should not be a focus on deconstructing the previous institutions which may have served a pervious regime's interests, but also in addressing socio-economic inequalities and grievances, which in many circumstances are the roots of violence, through progressive and equitable economic development. As well, the government's ability to manage the natural resources in the country are essential, as there is the possibility that

resources could continue to be exploited for dubious political gains by not only the militias but also the government. In this regard, the strengthening of the legal economy is important. Decreasing the impact of the war economy is paramount, as illicit activities provide the means of continuing armed conflict by militias. Finally, the financing modalities and mechanisms of how funds for demilitarisation are delivered must be examined with the overall context of demilitarisation. One major concern has to be the robust disarmament and demobilisation initiatives relative to reintegration activities, as well the weak institutional capacity of national demilitarisation agencies. For example, the Congolese national agency responsible for demilitarisation, CONADER, was crippled with high levels of funding mismanagement and weak institutional capacity to help coordinate DDR programs with the United Nations (UN) mission, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local governments, communities and former combatants. With budgetary limitations and numerous priorities, national governments must be cognisant of the various economic necessities of implementing an effective demilitarisation program among other post-conflict reconstruction priorities.

4.4 Politicisation of identity-based cleavages

For our analysis, identity-based cleavages include ethnicity, communal, religious, regional/geographical and linguistic. As discussed earlier, militias often politicise identities for political and strategic objectives, and usually to garner the legitimacy of local populations. While we recognise the importance of the politicisation of identity-based cleavages as a powerful device used by both militias and national governments in many instances, the preoccupation with identity undermines the complex interplay between the strategic politicisation of identity, structural imbalances and turbulent regional contexts — all of which combine to generate a multi-layered context in which demilitarisation activities take place. We also employ a constructivist conceptualisation of identity which does not take it as a pre-given, but rather as being developed, sustained and transformed through the processes of interaction.[xi] The term itself originates in social psychology and refers to "images of individuality and distinctiveness ('selfhood') held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant 'others'" (Jepperson *et al* 1996: 59).

As such, "the term (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Jepperson *et al* 1996: 59).

In addition, identity should also not be considered as 'essentialist' attributes, but rather one of several identities; and as such should not be discussed outside the confines of their precise historical and geographical context, meaning that religion and ethnicity are a function of the circumstances under which they become salient (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 58-59). For example, under colonial rule in most African states, there was the prevalence of the 'invention of ethnicity' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 58), meaning that ethnicity was constructed and instrumentalised to achieve the respective goals of the colonial administration. In the African context, specifically in the Great Lakes/Central African region, ethnicity formed the predominant component of Congolese, Rwandan, Burundian and Ugandan identities, usually broadly defined along the Tutsi-Hutu ethnic continuum. Mamdani asserts that rather than conceiving of identity as simply 'invented' or 'imagined', it should be discussed as the 'making' (Thompson 1963) of an identity; in the sense, that identity serves as a means to achieve a particular political end (Mamdani 1996: 185). Interestingly, the politicisation of identity exists in most states, as on the one hand, identity has been forged in effect to "normalize a population by giving it a sense of unity", and on the other hand, it has been formed by exclusionary practices, which attempt to secure the "domestic identity process of spatial differentiation" (Burchill *et al* 2001: 194-196).[xii)]

The notion of the politicisation of identity-based cleavages has been the focal point for the literature on 'identity politics'. Identity politics principally involves the claim to power on the basis of a particular identity, and as such identities are reinvented in the context of the corrosion of other sources of political legitimacy (Kaldor 2006: 77). In a post-conflict environment, this can be dangerous since both the state and militias utilise identity as a means to garner political accountability and legitimacy which is essential to the consolidation of political power. For example, in the Kivus and Ituri regions of eastern DRC, the politicisation of ethnicity have been used by local/provincial/national governments and armed groups alike to foster political legitimacy. Militias have also successfully used ethnicity to garner local community and support, and as a means to recruit and retain fighters. The key identity-based conflict centres on the manipulation along dangerous Hutu-Tutsi and Bantu-Niolotic ethnic lines under an

over-arching *rwandophone* ethnic configuration, and on the debate on autochthony (conflict between 'originaires' and 'non-originaires') (Thakur 2008).

4.5 Regional dynamics

Regional dynamics cannot be understated within the context of demilitarisation. Firstly, the political economy of war emphasises the prevalence of extensive transnational resources and arms trafficking networks.[xiii] As well, many contemporary conflicts have had spill-over effects in neighbouring countries in the form of refugee population movements and armed incursions as in the case of DRC and Sudan, as well as part of a transnational ideological or political movement, such as in Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Being in a 'bad neighbourhood' can also diffuse negative consequences on to other states;[xiv] and therefore, a regional perspective on conflict and peace must be emphasised. There is also increasing recognition that conflicts are fluid and the 'regional' dimensions not only nuance our understanding but in some cases, may reveal that significant differences from other post-conflict environments (Shaw 2003: 487). Understanding the regional dynamics allows us to consider the various regional interests by various state and non-state actors at play, including actors who wish to enrich themselves in transnational economic networks, destabilise rival neighbours for political gain, or strengthen particular identity-based networks. Finally, the role of regional bodies, such as the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Oganization of American States (OAS) cannot be overlooked as these bodies have vested interests to maintain peace at the regional (and in the case of the EU, global) levels.

4.6 Role of international community

The role of the international community is a significant contextual issue when developing and executing demilitarisation programmes. Depending on the nature of the external support, demilitarisation efforts can be assisted with an infusion of financial resources, new ideas and the benefits of international personnel that bring their rich experiences to the country. However, the international community

also brings with it technocratic, top-down, cookie-cutter approaches as well as a short-attention span with the application of 'results-based' indicators used as a 'magic fix' and a point of departure. The sometimes overly ambitious agenda, especially with regards to demilitarisation, pays little attention to the local context as well as the institutional gaps of international organisations, donor agencies and the national government. The demilitarisation project specifically, and the post-conflict reconstruction project, in general is marred by the international community's inability to address not only the root causes of the conflict but also have a view of peace as the absence of war (negative peace).

Post-conflict reconstruction, and especially demilitarisation, is fundamentally about rebuilding and modifying the political, social and economic infrastructure to support the institutionalisation of more stable and responsive systems to avert conflicts.[xv] Although the international community may control the form of the institutions they help build, such as the national army; without understanding the post-conflict contextual dynamics and the nature of militias and incorporating them into the overall national initiatives, the substance of the institutions will also leave them open to manipulation and decay in the long-term period. Again, governmental capacity to implement demilitarisation programmes is of paramount importance (as discussed earlier), however, it is imperative to critically assess the role of the international community. Post-conflict decisions affect the lives of people, but there needs to be more emphasis placed on the international community understanding the impact of its own actions, in a critical and constructive manner. External actors are encouraged to make deeply interventionist decisions for other societies (sometimes in close coordination with a weak government), unbound by outside control or scrutiny, and unaffected by outcomes.[xvi] This lack of self-critique, 'we-know-best' attitude, and the overarching technocratic, universalised approach divorced from local contextual realities has unfortunately be internalised in the normative thinking of the entities within the international community. This hegemonic DDR discourse leaves little room for critique, change, and bottom-up initiatives.

4.7 The role of civil society and local communities

Demilitiarisation efforts have mostly been centred at the national-

level, linking the state apparatus with international efforts from various actors, including the UN, bilateral agencies, regional bodies and international NGOs. Less attention has been paid to civil society and local community initiatives, which could perhaps provide vital insights to overcome the numerous gaps in the development and execution of effective demilitarisation programs. Civil society organisations and local communities, due to their proximity to local-level actors at the end of the implementation chain, can play a key role in ensuring that peace is sustainable. As well, local communities have the advantage of access to local knowledge, which can inform a deeply contextualised understanding of the barriers and opportunities of making peace a reality at the local levels. For example, in South Sudan, local communities and NGOs played a significant role in encouraging their youth (who were part of localised village militias known as the White Army) to disarm peacefully and voluntarily through various 'sensitisation exercises' and 'peace meetings' (Arnold and Alden 2007).

However, civil society should not be seen as a panacea for successful demilitarisation or post-conflict reconstruction, as they can reinforce divisive policies based on patronage, especially those consumed by the war economy. As well, due to the fact that 'civil society' and 'local communities' are most often pinned against 'failed state' and 'weak state' by external actors, the dichotomy elevates local communities to an apolitical, virtuous position, while the 'state' is equated with being highly political, but institutionally weak and corrupt.[xvii] As such, it is imperative to understand and appreciate that in addition to top-down implementation, there must be concurrent bottom-up processes aimed at constructing a new social contract and healing societal divisions (Prendergast and Plumb 2002).

5. CONCLUSION: FROM THE THEORETICAL TO THE EMPIRICAL

This article provides a multi-layered framework to better understand militias, as well as highlighting key political, economic and social contextual processes that texture the demilitarisation process. This framework is meant to assist with policy formulation of effective DDR initiatives; whilst recognising that there are strong risks accompanying the imposition of security promotion interventions from above,

particularly if they are divorced from the political, social and economic context in which such activities are embedded. As such, integrating the significant factors which are derived from an understanding of the militias and the local contexts in which they operate, will be a key determinant of success of DDR initiatives. This thinking is very much in line with the growing literature on critiques of the DDR process (see edited volumes by Berdal and Ucko, 2009; and Muggah, 2009). At the heart of this process is a need to identify localised security needs as understood by local actors in the context of their environment and 'fix' these into any post-conflict strategy. Failing to do so is likely to result — as events have too often shown — in a reversion to violence.

The confluence of scholarly concerns and policy imperatives is evident in any study of militias and the process through which the international community hopes to subdue them. By reverting to and questioning the underlying principles which inform both the scholarship and policy work on militias, we have opened up the subject to a reconsideration of the sources of conduct. Rationality, albeit bounded by the narrow ideational and socio-economic factors that compose the setting in which militias arise and act, can be usefully applied to deepen our understanding of their behaviour, and developing more effective DDR strategies to combat them. Further application of the framework proposed here will undoubtedly highlight nuances and themes that are not fully developed yet: we would welcome such attempts to test these propositions against the experiences of researchers and practitioners in the field.

ENDNOTES

i. This article builds upon our work discussed in Alden, C, Thakur, M and M Arnold. 2011. *Militias and Post-Conflict Peace: Silencing the Guns.* London: Zed Books.

ii. According to Hill, state and transnational actor relationships can be categorised as: normal, bargaining relationship; competitive, power relationship; or transcending relationship. See Hill, C. 2003. *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy.* Houndsmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 8, especially p 205.

iii. We recognise that using a particular label may be value-laden, but we felt it was important to adopt a specific label as it will allow us to help define the context, highlight what factors are important, and helps us to

code the abundant information on armed groups so as to provide policy directions. This does not, however, take away from the fact that labels and terminology are value-laden, contextual, and impose patterns and foster an element of exclusion; and that 'naming' a specific actor in the international system not only removes it from the unknown but also is assigned a set of characteristics, motives, values and behaviours. However, for conceptual clarity we felt it was important to use a term we felt best encompassed the diversity of the armed actors in our research, while also understanding that the identity of militias is fluid and shaped by the context and how the world/discourse sees them. See Bhatia, M. 2005. "Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and other Violent Actors". *Third World Quarterly,* Vol 26, No 1.

iv. Herbert A Simon defines rationality as denoting a "style of behaviour that is appropriate to the achievements of given goals, within the limits imposed by given conditions and constraints". Simon, H A. 1984. *Models of Bounded Rationality. Vol 2*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p 408.

v. Refer to Stewart, F. 2002. "Horizontal Inequalities as a Source of Conflict", in Hampson, F O and D M Malone (eds). *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System.* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp 107-109.

vi. The strategies include: attrition; intimidation; provocation; outbidding; and spoiling. See Kydd, A H and B F Walter. 2006. "The Strategies of Terrorism". *International Security*, Vol 31, No 1.

vii. See Alden, C, Thakur, M and M Arnold. 2011. *Militias and Post-Conflict Peace: Silencing the Guns.* London: Zed.

viii. See Hoffman, B and G H McCormick. 2004. "Terrorism, signaling and suicide attack". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol 27.

ix. See Bandura, A. 1990. "Mechanisms of moral disengagement", in Reich, W (ed). *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind.* Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

x. Also see: Sisk, T D. 2003. "Democratization and Peacebuilding: Perils and Promises", in Crocker, C A, Hampson, F O and P Aall (eds). *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict.* Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press.

xi. See Wendt, A. 1992. "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics". *International Organization,* Vol 46, No 2, pp 391-425; Wendt, A. 1994. "Collective Identity Formation and the International State". *The American Political Science Review,* Vol 88, No 2, pp 384-396; Wendt, A. 1996. "Identity and Structural Change in International Politics", in Lapid, Y and F Kratochwil (eds). *Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory.* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers; and Wendt, A. 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

xii. For example, according to Campbell, the violence of ethnic cleansing former Yugoslavia in pursuit of a "pure, homogeneous political identity" is simply a "continuation, albeit extreme, of the same political project inherent in any modern nation-state". Campbell, D. 1998. *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, p 23.

xiii. See Pugh, M and N Cooper, with J Goodhand. 2004. *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation.* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner.

xiv. See Iqbal, Z and H Starr. 2008. "Bad Neighbors: Failed States and Their Consequences". *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol 25.

xv. See Busumtwi-Sam, J. 2004. "Development and peacebuilding: Conceptual and operational deficits in international assistance", in Ali, T M and R O Matthews (eds). *Durable Peace: Challenges for Peacebuilding in Africa.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

xvi. See Uvin, P. 2001. "Difficult choices in the post-conflict agenda: The international community in Rwanda after the genocide". *Third World Quarterly,* Vol 22, No 2, April.

xvii. See: Lemarchand, R. 1992. "Uncivil states and civil societies: How illusion became reality". *Journal of Modern African Studies,* Vol 30, No 2, p 187.

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