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## Reintegration of Former Combatants

Reintegration of former combatants entails the transformation of disarmed and demobilized fighters into civilian life or the state security forces. It is usually the third step in a process aimed at dismantling armed organizations, which begins with combatants' surrendering their arms, then concentrating in designated sites to demobilize, and finally returning to their communities in order to transition back to civilian status. Reintegration is deemed a prerequisite for consolidated peace, reconciliation, reconstruction, and transitions to democracy. Accordingly, it has become a key tenet of the international community's peace-building doctrine. Programs run by the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Organization of Migration proliferated in the 1990s. At this writing, sixty reintegration programs have been launched since the late 1980s, principally in sub-Saharan Africa, with processes also present in Central America, Southeast Asia, the Balkans, and the South Pacific.

### The Process in Detail

The fundamental goal of reintegration is to return former combatants to civilian status such that they prove unlikely and unwilling to return to arms and to commit acts of violence. In this sense, reintegration works toward transitional justice's objective of "no repetition" or "never again": war and human rights abuses are less likely to recur if reintegration is effected.

### *The Reintegration Recipe*

While reintegration programs vary across countries and aim to be context-specific, the dominance of several international organizations in the programs' implementation has meant that they tend to follow a set of standard operating procedures based on best practices. Specifically, the reintegration programs usually involve the following components of the combatant-to-civilian transformation: social, economic, political, and psychological reinsertion.

### Social Reintegration

After concentrating in specific locales for a short period in order to disarm, register, and receive basic medical and psychological assistance, combatants migrate to the towns of their choosing. Usually, this involves homeward relocation back to their families and communities of origin. At times, however, former soldiers will instead remain in their former combat zones or migrate to third locales, which are neither their towns of origin nor their theaters of war. The combatants' postwar migration determines which communities they are reintegrated into and their relations with the civilian population.

The process of social reintegration seeks reconciliation between the ex-combatants and their recipient communities. For this reason, certain programs, such as those in Colombia and Indonesia, have become community-oriented. In these cases, the definition of program "beneficiaries" is extended to include not only former combatants, but also their families and the communities in which they live. These populations become eligible for reintegration program services and assistance (consisting of health, education, stipends, and judicial aid). In these cases, the reintegration program becomes involved with transitional justice.

### Political/Civic Reintegration

Reinsertion of former combatants into society involves differing levels of political reintegration. Some programs aim to turn former fighters back into "normal" civilians (Guinea-Bissau, Haiti); others seek to create more civically minded and politically active citizens (Sudan). In the latter case, emphasis is given to encouraging ex-combatants to create formal political parties that will allow them to participate in electoral politics or to form civic associations such as nongovernmental organizations or think tanks to participate in public debate or community development. Doing so enables them to pursue their ideological platform and to seek redress of their grievances through nonviolent means. The logic is that less socioeconomically and politically aggrieved individuals are less likely to return to arms.

### Economic Reintegration

Reintegration also involves an economic component. The former combatants usually receive monthly stipends and economic assistance. In addition, the reintegration programs may help former fighters find jobs, offer them vocational training, or create projects to employ them. The goal of economic reintegration is to create alternative livelihoods, which raise the opportunity costs of returning to war. It seeks to offer material incentives such that legal employments become rationally preferable to illicit ones. Unfortunately, this is usually infeasible in practice. The illicit economies, which flourished during war, are often unaffected by Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, a peace-building strategy, and thus continue to offer earnings well in excess of those available through licit employment.

### Psychological Reintegration

Finally, reintegration often includes a gradual, psychological transformation from a military mentality to a civilian one. This aspect of reintegration usually involves

psychological counseling for cases of post-traumatic stress syndrome and other related illnesses. It also may comprise citizenship education – workshops in which ex-combatants learn “how to be civilians.” These sessions aim to undo the moral codes learned within the illegal armed factions and to instill the state’s norms of justice. These educational programs may also try to teach the former combatants what emotions they are supposed to feel: responsibility and regret for the acts of violence they committed, guilt, and a desire to seek pardon and forgiveness from their victims. It is proposed by Daly (2010) that if the former combatants undergo this emotional transformation, they will prove more willing to voluntarily provide reparations to victims, disclose the truth about crimes perpetrated, and accept punishment for these crimes.

### *Variation in Reintegration Paradigms*

While reintegration of former combatants usually involves these social, political, economic, and psychological components, there are several ways in which the programs differ.

#### Definitions of Reintegration Success

First, they differ on their benchmarks for success. Some programs and scholars conceive of effective reintegration in minimalist terms, as ex-combatants who do not return to commit acts of violence (Daly 2010). Others instead deem successful reintegration in a more all-encompassing, maximalist fashion to include not only security, but also democracy and development (Colletta et al. 1996; Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). They propose that reintegrated ex-combatants should be civically active, productive in society, reconciled with their families and communities, and contributing in positive ways to the state’s economic and political development.

Many academic and policy studies also equate effective reintegration with organizational bankruptcy: that former combatants break their ties with their former armed groups and that these groups cease to exist (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). The international community tends to concur with this view that all intact structures and sustained command and control arrangements are threats to peace. Accordingly, due to international community pressure, financing, and intervention, in the majority of cases, states choose reintegration tools that aim to break chains of command, undermine commanders’ influence, atomize former combatants, and transform ex-fighters back into civilians able to disappear into their former social milieus. Most commonly, they adopt the policy of homeward ‘relocation’ to affect the former armed commanders’ and foot soldiers’ incentives for non-cooperation. This relocation aims to return former combatants back to their families in order to reproduce civilian networks, which will compete with combatant camaraderie.

An alternative view finds that successful demobilization does not require the disintegration of ex-armed structures and the atomization of former combatants (Daly 2010). Organizational bankruptcy may impact reintegration success, but it is not determinate. For example, if an organization survives and forms a non-violent political party, pulling its ex-combatants along this trajectory, reintegration should be deemed effective although the organization endures and its members retain ties to it. Meanwhile, if an organization disintegrates, reintegration is not necessarily successful. Instead, the analysis shifts

to the individual ex-combatant level. This means that ex-combatants' transformations depend not on their organizations' trajectories, but on their individual traits and objectives. They may *individually* join a criminal or political armed group, commit solo acts of violence, transition into 'normal' civilians, or become highly politically active citizens, but organizational bankruptcy does not determine these outcomes.

### Determinants of Reintegration Success

Determining the causes of reintegration success requires an agreed-upon definition of success. While this does not exist, it is worth highlighting the proposed causes of success.

Those who equate reintegration success with organizational bankruptcy find the prospect of defection from one's former armed group and thus reintegration effectiveness to depend largely on the abusiveness of the units to which the ex-combatants belonged (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). Several other policy and academic studies find gender, education, and age to significantly impact reintegration success (Colletta et al. 2006). Daly (2010), for example, finds that females prove less likely to remain connected to their former armed employers and more highly educated individuals prove more likely to do so. Many female combatants are not directly part of the armed organizations and, if alternative networks "pull" ex-combatants away from the formerly militarized web, the pull of family and children often operates more strongly on females than males. With respect to the relationship between education and individual defection, the mechanism is likely one centered on status. More educated recruits often climb the ranks to leadership roles within the armed groups. They therefore resist the status reversal that comes with demobilization and hold tighter to their ties with the organization in which they enjoyed respect and power.

A final study (Daly 2010) finds that individual ex-combatants are more likely to break their bonds with their armed group if they are geographically isolated and have thin prewar ties to their colleague combatants. They are also more likely to do so if they live in a resource-poor region.

### Benefits versus Responsibility

Programs also vary in their emphasis on benefits versus responsibilities. Some programs (Colombia pre-2006) employ a benefits-only approach, whereas others (Colombia post-2006) use a benefits-in-exchange-for-responsibilities one. In the former case, former combatants receive subsidies with no strings attached, whereas in the latter case, the economic support is conditioned on and varies according to the individuals' commitment and performance in the reintegration program.

The benefits-in-exchange-for-responsibilities approach has a more positive impact on transitional justice, as it works to undermine the sense of entitlement that ex-combatants may exhibit. Specifically, these former fighters may believe that, because they demobilized and thus did their country "a favor," they deserve a wide range of benefits. This "benefits-oriented" approach generates resentment among victims who usually do not receive commensurate assistance or services from the state. Many of the conflicts that arise between victimizers and victims in the postwar period appear to be less about past crimes and more about the post-demobilization benefit scheme.

### Reinsertion versus Reintegration

A final way in which programs vary is in their time frame. Some envision short-term “reinsertion” (Côte d’Ivoire), whereas others strive for long-term and sustainable “reintegration” (Colombia). In the former case, the transition from militarized to civilian life is time-constrained, whereas in the latter case the program dictates that the ex-combatants will “graduate” from and exit the program only when they are deemed “reintegrated.” For some, this could take a year; for others, a decade. Additionally, rather than assume reintegration to be a uniform process, some programs, such as that in Colombia, plot each individual ex-combatant’s trajectory over time, registering his/her psychological, social, vocational, educational, and civic attributes and tailoring his/her program accordingly.

It merits mention that programs also vary in their consideration of “vulnerable groups.” Certain reintegration programs accept the heterogeneous nature of their target population and create programs aimed at special populations such as children, women, disabled ex-fighters, and ethnic and racial minorities (Liberia, Burundi).

### Outcomes

There are several controversies and issues surrounding the reintegration of ex-combatants. First, reintegration is often divorced from the transitional justice and reconciliation processes. There is little integrated research on reintegration and transitional justice; rather, academics and policy makers have relegated these two outcomes to quarantined realms. As a result, the effectiveness of reintegration is usually not measured by its impact on transitional justice. Moreover, by granting to former perpetrators benefits that are often in excess of those received by victims, reintegration processes can complicate or adversely affect transitional justice as they have in Colombia, Indonesia, and Uganda.

Second, as discussed earlier, definitions of reintegration success are contradictory and vary significantly. The absence of agreed-on and realistic objectives obstructs program evaluation and research on the determinants of success.

Third, reintegration is often deemed a technical process, not linked to the broader, political war-to-peace transition process. While criticized on these grounds, it is also often viewed as a panacea, able to generate peace, democracy, and reconstruction. A middle ground has not been achieved in this respect. Related to this, while context-specificity has been advocated, in practice, the international community tends to operate with a uniform and universal recipe for reintegration, which prescribes the four elements outlined earlier.

### Conclusion

Reintegration of former combatants has had varied success. In some cases, ex-fighters have become productive members of society; in other cases, they have returned to war or drifted into banditry. In some cases, they have proven willing and able to reconcile with their victims, whereas in other cases they have defied transitional justice and generated additional victims. Design and execution of the reintegration programs have influenced these outcomes. However, the programs often prove unable to compete with the forces set in motion during the wars. These forces impact the postwar landscapes and help determine the prospects for consolidated peace and reconciliation.

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Cross-references: Afghanistan; Burundi; Colombia; Compensation Packages; Conflict (Ongoing) and Transitional Justice; Haiti; Indonesia; Liberia; Mozambique; Philippines; Uganda.

### *Further Readings*

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## Reparations

Although increasingly employed as a key transitional justice method, “reparations” is “a term whose meaning is not settled in theory or in practice” (de Greiff 2006a, p. 13). Sometimes, it is conceptualized as a reparative response to harm that comprises a number of forms, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of nonrepetition (United Nations General Assembly 2006, pp. 7–9; Vandeginste 2003, pp. 145–146). Alternatively, it may be defined more narrowly as a policy or program designed to benefit victims of particular types of injustices, which often affected significant segments of a society (de Greiff 2006b, p. 453). Either way, consensus exists that reparations can be vital to transitional justice, fueling attempts to clarify their purposes, their relationship to other transitional justice methods, and their outcomes.

### The Method in Detail

The concept of reparations underwent dramatic change over the twentieth century. In the Versailles peace treaty that ended World War I, the Allies demanded enormous reparations from vanquished Germany, held as politically, legally, and morally responsible for the war. The reparations were seen as punitive and a deterrent to future aggression (Teitel 2000, p. 121). Following World War II, Germany again paid enormous reparations, but these were different: Germany not only owed the victors, but also agreed to pay victims of Nazi persecution (many of whom were its own citizens), an organization representing them, and the state of Israel (which did not exist during World War II) (see entries on Germany – the Nazi Past, and Israel). Teitel (2000) observes that “the post-World War II payments changed forever the concept of reparations,” starting a movement (supported by the 1949 Geneva Conventions) toward obliging abusing states to pay reparations to civilian victims in other states and also to their own violated citizens (p. 123).