

LmunA 2025

# Research Report

Forum: United Nations Security Council

Issue: The Rising Threat of Non-State Armed Groups In Politically Unstable Regions

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Position: Head Chair



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## Introduction

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## Definitions of key terms

**Non State armed groups** - Groups that have armed forces and many weapons and organize into an army like militia structure but have no official connection with a government branch and work independently their motives can vary from money to ideological power.

**Conflict zones** - Areas in the world where there are ongoing violent conflicts current conflict zones include central africa, the middle east and south and central america.

**Pseudo Government** - Organization that does some functions of governments and behave like them but have no official legal standing or recognition

## General overview

The concept of non-state armed groups has been around throughout most of history. However, one of the earliest and most prevalent examples are most likely the pirates roaming around the Golden Age of Piracy around the 17th and 18th century, such as the infamous Blackbeard and other pirate gangs (Royal Museum Greenwich). These gangs often operated to disrupt and steal trader ships, usually associated with governmental organizations, such as the British East India Trading Company. In the 20th century, however, non-state armed groups began to operate more for ideological reasons, such as the Vietnam War and other revolutionary forces around Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa that fought for either the prevalence of the capitalist or communist system. In modern day, non-state armed groups have become an existential threat, with places like Central Africa being marked by rebellion groups such as M23, or, like in Colombia and Central Latin America, drug cartels posing a serious threat in these nations. There are many reasons for the prevalence of these groups, the biggest reason being that these groups take control and exploit weak governments and failing economies to provide self-imposed security and justice, meaning that, in the eyes of citizens, these groups can even be considered an upgrade.

One of the best examples of the conditions of a weak government leading to armed groups is in one of the most politically unstable regions, Sub-Saharan Africa. In many nations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the weak central government and the large amount of naturally valuable resources, such as diamonds, lithium, and other raw materials underground, have allowed groups such as the M23, also known as the March 23 Movement, to capture large territories in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This group then has gone on to profit from the sale of these resources, which they have mined illegally using sometimes

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forced or slave labor, creating further complications for the government, as it allows for companies to trade with this group for cheaper than the actual legal government mining operations. These groups also fuel tensions between other states, such as the DRC and Rwanda as Rwanda is alleged to be supporting this armed group, leading to further conflict, allowing these groups to become not just criminal organizations, but political actors that are able to take advantage of the incivility in these nations, profit from it, and cause chaos(Carlos Mureithi).

These non-state armed groups also have influences beyond borders and cause further political issues in conflict areas. An example of this is ISIS, operating out of the Middle East, who, with modern technology like social media, have been able to recruit multiple people from nations outside of the Middle East, like Europe and Africa, and commence attacks in those nations, and get more soldiers into their Middle Eastern locations, allowing them to get stronger and cause further political distress to the areas affected by the attacks, and to the areas where these groups are located(Dylan Gerstel). Other armed groups, like the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico, are able to operate with authority that challenges even that of the local government, and, with this type of power, are able to control cities and diminish state authority, allowing them to further spread their ideology and maximize their profit, creating more and more issues for the local governments and for other nations bordering Mexico.

Another significant part of how non-state groups control local environments and social dynamics to successfully keep their power is that, in many regions, they don't rely on the weapons and force; they successfully show themselves to be a better substitute to the local government in places such as Afghanistan, where the Taliban, at times of weak central power, gave services to people, collected taxes, and enforced laws and justice where the government didn't. This led them to gain the loyalty of the people and receive even more resources for their efforts, which only led to more expansion. This can also be seen in West Africa with groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, where they have exploited the people's poverty and the government's failures to recruit members and expand their territorial control. These groups lead themselves to become a sort of informal government, helping the people where needed and creating sustainable operations, funding themselves through often extortion or smuggling, which gives them an ongoing resource. Through these methods, non-state groups become a pseudo-government with loyalty from the people, making it near impossible to remove them.

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## Major parties involved

### *The Taliban (Afghanistan)*

The Taliban is a non-governmental, armed organization located in Afghanistan. This organization is now currently in control of a majority of territory in Afghanistan, having deposed the actual government after the US retreat from the area, and now serve as a pseudo government. However, make no mistake, they are still an authoritarian regime and an extremely violent organisation.

### *M23 (Democratic Republic of Congo)*

The M23, also known as the March 23 Movement, operating from the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are a rebel group who state their main objective is to secure rights for the Tutsi people. However, they are also a very violent group, currently controlling many illegal mines in the area, and have possible funding from the state of Rwanda.

### *Sinaloa Cartel (Mexico)*

The Sinaloa Cartel, located in Mexico, is a drug trafficking organization. Founded around 1987, they control much territory in the west of the country, including regions directly bordering the USA through Arizona and New Mexico. They are a drug trafficking organization who have also taken over some government-like activities in these regions, and have been known to resist the Mexican authorities for a long time and cause issues not just for the Mexican government, but also the Americans through the drug trafficking across their borders.

### *Local Governments (Non-Specific)*

Local governments, in this case, are any impacted by these non-government armed groups, such as Mexico in the case of the Cartel, or Syria and Iraq in the case of ISIS, or any different government. Their response is critical, as if they allow these groups to start flourishing, then, like a disease, these groups are able to expand rapidly without much way to easily prevent and remove them.

### *UN (Non-Specific)*

The United Nations, as a group, has a large role in these issues, as they are able to coordinate interstate resolutions. As most of these groups impact more than just one local government, they are vital to create multilateral efforts and to help achieve peaceful and sustainable solutions and eliminations of these groups through freezing of assets, travel bans, and through international manhunts of organizers of these groups.

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## **Timeline of Key Events**

- 1987                      Founding of the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico one of the largest cartels in history with notable members such as El Chapo now controlling huge territories in Mexico. Dealing in drugs and other substances since its founding.
- 1991                      Collapse of USSR creating power vacuums in many states and leading to a overwhelming USA dominance in global security leading others to rise against them
- 1996                      First Congo war fought as a brutal campaign that later would create the circumstances that allowed for the rise of different armed groups like the M23 movement
- 2001                      9/11 Terror attacks lead by the one of the most well known non governmental armed group Al Qaeda attacks that went on to fuel US middle east tensions and lead to USA invasion of different middle eastern nations spurring new similar groups
- 2002                      Formation of Boko Haram one of the biggest groups in western africa
- 2012                      M23 Insurgency in Eastern DRC foundation and origin point of one of the most dominant groups in African history fought against the government for the right of the Tutsi people but now control east congo with many illegal mines to profit from
- 2014                      ISIS declares a caliphate and begin their rise in Syria and Iraq causing problems and terror attacks to this day
- 2016                      Taliban Regain Control of Afghanistan and therefor become the defacto state of afghanistan whoever mostly unrecognized cementing themselves as the current biggest non governmental armed group

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## **Previous attempts to solve the issue**

### **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration(DDR)**

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs in Liberia and Sierra Leone came into being after the chaotic civil wars in the early 2000s. DDR programs provided incentives, vocational training, and avenues for reintegration of former combatants into society. While DDR programs initially proved effective in diminishing armed conflict at that time, identical programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) largely proved ineffective in achieving similar results. Armed groups consistently manipulated DDR programs by disarming temporarily for the purpose of gaining awards and then rearming afterwards. Lack of sustained monitoring and the government's inability to provide lasting security created an environment for many ex-combatants to return to violence, thus undermining the perceived effectiveness of DDR as a long-term policy.

### **Military Intervention(Both UN and Non-UN Contexts)**

A common approach has been direct military intervention by international coalitions or regional actors specifically targeting the dismantling of non-state armed groups. A useful example of this is the United States' intervention against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, utilizing airstrikes supplemented by assistance by local militia forces, and diminishing ISIS's territorial reach significantly by 2019. However, even as the physical destruction of the ISIS caliphate was achieved, many of its fighters went underground, re-emerging as part of rural insurgent groups. In not creating lasting governance and delivering stable alternatives, military success did not lead to political stability. This case demonstrates the direct effectiveness of military power while at the same time highlighting its long-term limitations when used in isolation.

### **Peace Negotiations and Political Agreements**

Many efforts have been made around the world to negotiate agreements with non-state armed groups, with outcomes ranging from modest success to outright failure. The 2016 peace agreement signed by Colombian government representatives and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has long been cited as one success, especially with respect to the significant reduction of violent encounters and FARC activity after ratification of the agreement. In practice, however, splinter units recognized as "FARC dissidents" have refused this agreement and continued their participation in organized crime, such as drug trafficking and extortion. Similar disappointments have occurred in South Sudan, where numerous agreements signed by government representatives with rebel groups later proved ineffective, mainly due to issues of distrust, the relative marginalization of weaker factions, and resource conflicts. These examples highlight the difficulty in maintaining such agreements amidst ongoing political upheaval.

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**Counterterrorism and Intelligence Exchange**

Another effort has focused on strengthening international cooperation in intelligence to monitor and counter the activities of non-state armed actors. The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has forged alliances with countries in the Sahel to counter the threats of jihadist groups, such as Boko Haram and al-Qaeda affiliates. While the use of drone attacks and satellite imaging has decreased the difficulty in locating leaders, the decentralized structure of these organizations has limited long-term success for plans designed to eliminate leaders. Also, in countries like Mali, reliance on Western intelligence has promoted distrust among local populations, which got leveraged by local armed groups.

**Community Based Security Initiatives**

In some cases, state agencies and civilian groups have attempted to involve local groups in projects intended to counterbalance armed non-state actors. Iraq's "Sunni Awakening" between 2006 and 2008 successfully mobilized tribal military forces with the aim of weakening al-Qaeda, which resulted in a dramatic decline in violence during the following period. However, this project eventually failed since the Iraqi state later isolated these militias by withdrawing political support and funding. Without gradual integration into national systems, these local armed groups dissolved or were absorbed into other military factions, thus emphasizing the need for simultaneous political incorporation within projects intended to secure sustainable success in local mobilization efforts.

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## **Possible solutions**

### **Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing**

Enhance coordination between neighboring states to track movements, financing and recruitment of nonstate armed groups between borders and establish joint intelligence networks and standardized protocols to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This allows for early warning and preventative measures and fast, informed emergency response.

### **Addressing Root Causes Through Development and Governance**

Implement programs that improve education, create economic opportunities and strengthen infrastructure in politically unstable regions to provide alternatives to joining nonstate armed groups. Simultaneously promoting transparent governance and reduce corruption to prevent armed groups from exploiting the local dissent against the government.

### **Enhancing Legal and Judicial Frameworks**

Support the development of robust judicial systems to deter armed groups from acting against the law, which enforces the rule of law and keeps them from growing into regional or national players at the early stage of development.

### **Countering Radicalization and Extremist Propaganda**

Launch community outreach programs, educational campaigns, and media counternarratives to reduce recruitment. At the same time local leaders, educators and former combatants should be engaged to promote credible and culturally relevant and accepted messaging.

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## Further reading

[https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file\\_list/challenges-report\\_ihl-and-non-state-arm-groups.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/challenges-report_ihl-and-non-state-arm-groups.pdf)

Report by the Red Cross titled  
INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN LAW  
AND THE CHALLENGES  
OF CONTEMPORARY  
ARMED CONFLICTS

The report goes in depth into the human experiences with these groups on the ground. The report mainly talks about different laws and humanitarian strategies. Key chapters are 4 and 5.

<https://unicri.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/F3-2024-Non-state-armed-groups-and-today%E2%80%99s-intractability-of-conflict-Benjamin-Petrini.pdf>

This report by Benjamin Petrini in association with the UN explores Non-state armed groups and the challenges they pose in modern conflict zones. This report features some data and charts that could be referenced.

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