

# Merging Competing Militaries After Civil Wars

BY ROY LICKLIDER

Until the end of the Cold War, conventional wisdom held that civil wars necessarily ended in military victories. Nonetheless, over twenty negotiated settlements of civil wars have been reached since 1989 in places as disparate as El Salvador and South Africa. Some of these compromise settlements have ended civil wars and resulted in postwar regimes that are substantially more democratic than their predecessors.

These settlements have often involved power sharing among the former contestants and other sectors of society. Many of these agreements have, as a central component, provisions to merge competing armed groups into a single national army. But how can people who have been killing one another with considerable skill and enthusiasm be merged into a single military force?

Other than a few scattered case studies and some contradictory aggregate data analyses, we have very little information about the process of military integration. Why has it been used? What strategies have been most effective? Does integration help prevent renewed civil war? Recent research has produced a number of case studies which suggest some tentative answers to these questions.

These are postwar cases, as opposed to cases of ongoing conflict. Military integration during the war is a much more difficult undertaking, as we have discovered in Afghanistan, although in both Uganda and Rwanda some integration was done during wartime, which served as a model for successful postwar policies.

Many (although not all) examples of military integration are linked to negotiated settlements of civil wars. Such settlements, in turn, have become more common because military victories are increasingly difficult to achieve for several reasons. The issues in dispute now tend to involve identity rather than ideology, making it more difficult for the vanquished to “convert” to the victor’s position. Genocide and ethnic cleansing have become increasingly difficult to implement, making military stalemate increasingly likely. The end of the Cold War reduced external support for many Third World states, making them less able to count on big power support to win quick victories. The peace industry, the new complex of international and nongovernmental organizations dedicated to encouraging the end of mass violence, has also contributed.

*Roy Licklider is a Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University.*

Military integration is often seen as a response to three common problems after civil wars. (1) Security is a major issue. A generally agreed upon principle is that ending a civil war involves disarmament; but how do you persuade people to put themselves and their families at the mercy of untried security institutions controlled in part by people who have been their deadly enemies? Security is, of course, the central problem of any state, but the issue is particularly important after civil wars when the combatants must live side by side indefinitely in states with weak institutions to protect them from one another. Very few civil wars have ended in partition.

(2) Merging armies is one way to reduce the number of former fighters who have to be disarmed and integrated into the society. Most settlements include provisions for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of fighters into civil life (DDR), but at best this is

a lengthy and expensive process, usually taking place in countries that cannot easily afford it. Taking some of these people into the military could presumably improve the situation. However, in practice relatively few people are usually involved, since a country usually needs to reduce the overall size of its military after a civil war, and indeed the necessity for armed forces itself often comes into serious question.

(3) The longer-term problem of negotiated settlement is how to create a nation out of competing groups. Creating a working state, a governmental apparatus that can collect taxes and deliver public goods to society, is hard enough after civil war; creating a nation, a diverse population that feels that they are part of a common loyalty group, is more difficult by an order of magnitude. We know that it is not impossible; most of the major states in the current international system have had to do this at one point or another, although usually



Former Taliban fighters line up to hand over their rifles to the government of Afghanistan during a reintegration ceremony at the provincial governor's compound in Ghor. The re-integrees formally announced their agreement to join the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program during the ceremony.

after victorious wars—Britain after its civil war and then in integrating Scotland, Wales, and Ireland; France after the French Revolution; Germany after the wars of German unification; the Soviet Union and China after their respective revolutions. The United States has done it twice, after its revolution and its civil war. There is a tradition that the military can be used to create a feeling of national unity, although recent scholarship has generally been critical of this argument.<sup>1</sup>

### Military Integration Process

Why do some states use military integration after civil wars and others do not? A study of 128 civil wars between 1945 and 2006 found that the single most important factor in predicting military integration was involvement by outsiders.<sup>2</sup> The most extreme case is probably Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Dayton Accords, which ended the war, called for three separate military forces, but NATO essentially forced them to integrate into a single institution. In general, it makes sense that people who have been killing one another will not be enthusiastic about working together. Negotiated settlements of civil wars are not popular; they are everyone's second choice because they can not win the war. So not surprisingly outside support and pressure may be particularly important for military integration (although not in all cases as we will see), but this raises important ethical issues which are discussed later.

It is possible to successfully integrate competing militaries after civil wars under a wide variety of conditions. It has happened after civil war victories as well as negotiated settlements. A striking example was the successful integration in Rwanda of roughly 50,000 former enemy soldiers and individuals involved in the genocide into the victorious army to

produce "a disciplined patriotic army that punches above its weight—the Israel of Africa."<sup>3</sup> Other cases include Uganda,<sup>4</sup> Nigeria,<sup>5</sup> Sierra Leone where the British intervention had defeated the opposition, and the Philippines where the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) had essentially been defeated by the combination of the government army and defections to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Military integration happened in cases with intensive international support (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sierra Leone) and with little or no involvement (South Africa, Rwanda, and Sudan in 1972). It happened when local political leaders supported it (South Africa and Mozambique), and when they opposed it (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC], although this opposition drastically limited the success in the latter case). There is an argument that militaries in developing countries may develop an identity so strong that it is equivalent to a separate ethnicity;<sup>6</sup> something like this seems to have happened in some of these cases.

However, political leaders can wreck even a successful military integration. Examples of this include political leaders breaking the peace in Sudan in 1983, reversing the integration and turning the military into a domestic political instrument in Zimbabwe, and deliberately destroying the integrated units in the DRC because they did not want a strong central military. Political concerns also severely limited the capabilities of the new militaries in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lebanon. This certainly supports Stephen Burgess' argument that lack of political will can make military integration unworkable,<sup>7</sup> but it is at least possible that political will is a variable which may be

favorably influenced by the integration process itself.

Former adversaries were integrated as individuals rather than units in many cases, including the most successful ones. Successfully mixing the groups at the lowest level seems likely to ultimately improve cohesion,<sup>8</sup> so it is encouraging that this rather risky strategy seems to have worked fairly well. Examples of relative success include Namibia,<sup>9</sup> Lebanon, Rwanda, Philippines, South Africa, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Nigeria. Two cases which used segregated units were Sudan in 1972, which ended in renewed civil war after eleven years, and Bosnia-Herzegovina which remains under outside control.

*Human rights violators were often not excluded from the new armies. It sounds plausible to recommend that each individual be vetted, but this is actually quite difficult and expensive.*

---

Intuitively, bringing together people who have been killing one another and giving them guns seems a bad idea. But in fact there was little or no violence during training that mixed former adversaries in most cases. This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that former combatants had volunteered for the new force and knew that getting along with former enemies was necessary. Fighters often avoided talking about the previous war, sometimes with a sense that it was a terrible mistake. Rwanda is an interesting exception since integration hinged on the *ingando* process which required personnel to participate in an intensive discussion of the past which seems to have overcome deep divisions. But regardless,

large-scale violence within newly integrated militaries was the exception rather than the rule.

Very little adaptation in normal military training techniques was involved. The changes in training that took place generally reflected the different backgrounds and skill sets of the different groups. South Africa had a distinctive challenge in integrating eight military forces, ranging from a modern government military to rebel forces which had been trained and organized for guerilla warfare. They lacked even a common language. Basically they got the standard training; officers were sent to the usual military courses (shortened to get them through quickly), and enlisted personnel were trained conventionally. Not surprisingly this caused considerable tension, and a fair number of trainers had to be replaced, but it was eventually successful. In the Philippines the military changed policies to meet the needs of Muslim men and women from the MNLF. In Burundi the rebels were in some ways more sophisticated militarily than the government forces, which made training easier than it might otherwise have been.

Outside support was helpful but did not guarantee success in preventing renewed civil war and was not always necessary to do so. It was helpful in South Africa (although the overall plans and control were local), which was a success, but not so in Zimbabwe which was a political failure. It was dominant in the DRC (an immediate failure), Sierra Leone (a success), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (still under outside control). It was non-existent in Rwanda (a major success) and Sudan (a failure but only after eleven years) and Lebanon (limited success).

This record does not really tell us much about the actual impact of outside support. It

seems likely that outsiders will be called in only for hard cases, making their record fairly weak. What is clear is that the amount of outside resources does not seem to have much to do with success, and the success of Rwanda, done almost entirely without outside support, is a case in favor of autonomous development.

Human rights violators were often not excluded from the new armies. It sounds plausible to recommend that each individual be vetted, but this is actually quite difficult and expensive. Moreover, negotiated settlements to civil war often involve some sort of amnesty, formal or informal. Interestingly, even forces whose members were not screened often did fairly well in terms of human rights violations (Sierra Leone is a particularly striking example); training and environment may be more important than past behavior.

Quotas were often used and were generally quite successful. Simple formulas (50-50 in cases with two groups, such as Burundi; 33-33-33 with three groups, as for senior appointments in Bosnia-Herzegovina) often were more useful, even if less obviously fair, than ratios based on population or other figures that might be unclear and disputed.<sup>10</sup>

Several of the new integrated armies were able to successfully fight unintegrated ethnic militias, one of the most demanding criterion for success. The Rwandan army has not only battled Hutu guerilla groups for years both inside and outside of Rwanda, but at one point it almost conquered the capital of the DRC (a tribute to its military prowess independent of the judgment of its political goals). In the Philippines the MNLF fighters were seen as very useful by the Filipino army in fighting the MILF, and in Burundi the new army defeated the remnants of the opposition. Several other new militaries have been fortunate enough to

escape this issue—South Africa, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Zimbabwe among them. The most conspicuous failure involved the integrated units of the army of the DRC, many of which simply collapsed because of lack of support from their government.

The new armies were almost always less effective militarily than their predecessors, but they were also under civilian control and usually committed many fewer human rights violations. Examples of this pattern are South Africa, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Zimbabwe and DRC are exceptions.

Less clear is whether and how military integration made renewed civil war less likely. Several statistical studies suggest that cases with agreements to carry out military integration are less likely to restart war,<sup>11</sup> but it is not clear whether implementation of the agreement is necessary as well. Even if this relationship exists, we do not really know why. Several observers have felt that the symbolic role of the new force is often more important than its coercive capacity. The military is often the most integrated institution in the country. People who have been killing one another but show that they can work and live together peacefully become powerful symbols in deeply divided countries. Thus even a weak military can become important in shaping the national image (Lebanon is an interesting example). However, as Ronald Krebs points out, this conclusion is based on opinion rather than hard evidence.<sup>12</sup>

The final conclusion is that military integration is not a technological substitute for politics. By itself it cannot prevent a renewed civil war, but if completed successfully it can be one element in a transitional process leading from war to peace. However, its use has

consequences and potential costs which should be explored.

### Post-Integration Issues

There often does not seem to be a real need for a strong military after a civil war since there may be little real external military threat. Military integration often occurs at the same time as the total force is being reduced. Many of the new militaries search for a mission to justify expenditures which loom large in relatively poor countries. Peacekeeping is one popular choice; it employs soldiers, gains some prestige for the country, and can be self-supporting.

This in turn raises the question of what sort of military the country really needs. Obviously it varies from case to case—South Africa has no obvious outside enemies, for

example, while the DRC literally cannot control its own territory in part because of encroachments by its neighbors. Outside advisers are sometimes accused of forcing other countries to adopt their own military models, not without some reason. But South Africa is a relatively advanced country with no obvious external foes and no foreign involvement in its decision-making whose military wants to sustain an expensive mechanized, land-based force even though its major tasks seem likely to be counterinsurgency and peacekeeping on land and monitoring of coastal waters.<sup>13</sup> This seems to reflect some general cross-national professional concept of the image of a “real military.”

At a minimum it seems plausible that locals should decide on the kind of military that is required since they will pay the penalty



Staff Sgt. Erik Cardenas, U.S. Air Force

In coordination with the French military and African Union, the U.S. military provided airlift support to transport Burundi soldiers, food and supplies to Central African Republic.

for any errors in such a consequential decision. International advisors should try to avoid creating a military which is not financially and politically viable after the war, and work with locals to develop plans for a military that is sustainable in the long term. This is especially true since a weak military may be as useful as a strong one in preventing a new civil war.

But there is a more fundamental question—should external policy advisors be encouraging military integration at all? Military integration is attractive to outsiders because it promises to fulfill a real need for security in the post-conflict society. The importance of security was overlooked by many of those engaged in peacekeeping for a long time, although it was highlighted in one of the first systematic studies of the field.<sup>14</sup> Today it is seen as critical. Military integration is also relatively easy to do by outsiders. It involves training a fairly small group of people to do things that they are generally interested in doing, as compared to, for example, setting up a functioning justice system which would usually be much more useful in establishing security but may well require changing the culture of the society as a whole. Moreover it fits the skill sets of the international community as a whole; we can readily deploy substantial numbers of people who can do this sort of training, but as shown in Iraq and Afghanistan we simply do not have the organizations or personnel to do the same for important civilian activities or institutions.

Unfortunately this does not mean that military integration is necessarily a good idea. A strong security apparatus inside a weak and ineffective government creates a temptation for military domination or coup. The impact of such change may go beyond the individual state; recent research on interstate war suggests that autocratic governments controlled by

civilian elites are no more likely to initiate violence than democracies, but that military autocracies and personalist regimes are significantly more likely to do so.<sup>15</sup>

*Outsider advisors should stress not only the abstract values of civilian control, but the evidence that military governments do not bring economic development or political democracy and often result in the eventual weakening of the military itself. There are serious ethical issues when outsiders recommend policies in postwar societies. If these policies backfire, the locals will pay the price while the outsiders go home.*

---

Zimbabwe is a powerful example of an alliance between civilian politicians and military leaders to eliminate democracy (and military integration) in favor of authoritarian rule. Similar tendencies can be seen in Rwanda and Uganda. It is perhaps no coincidence that all of them have been involved in military action within the neighboring DRC. I am on record supporting policies that will produce short-term peace such as amnesty, power-sharing governments, and military integration, even at the possible risk of longer-term problems; my preference is to save as many lives as we can now and worry about the consequences later.<sup>16</sup> But ignoring the risks involved is not simply oversight; it is negligence. Ultimately, of course, these decisions will be made by some of the locals, but it is likely that those with guns will have a disproportionate influence on the choices. Outsider advisors should stress not only the abstract values of civilian control, but the evidence that military governments do not bring economic development or political

democracy and often result in the eventual weakening of the military itself.

There are serious ethical issues when outsiders recommend policies in postwar societies. If these policies backfire, the locals will pay the price while the outsiders go home. This gives the outsiders multiple ethical obligations: to learn more about whether military integration works to help keep the peace; to learn more about the “best” way to go about integrating militaries under different sets of circumstances; to give more thought to the implications of all of this beyond short-term outcomes such as keeping the peace; such as its effects on democracy and human rights; and to be as candid as we can with the locals about these costs and benefits. All while not withholding our own inevitable uncertainties, even if we are concerned that some of the locals will use this information for ends that we would deplore.<sup>17</sup> PRISM

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Krebs, “A School for the Nation? How Military Service Does Not Build Nations, and How It Might,” *International Security*, 28, 4 (Spring 2004), 85–124; Ronald Krebs, “One Nation under Arms? Military Participation Policy and the Politics of Identity,” *Security Studies*, 14, 3 (July–September 2005), 529–564; Ronald Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Henry Dietz, Jerrold Elkin, and Maurice Roumani, *Ethnicity, Integration and the Military* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Hartzell, “Mixed Motives? Explaining the Decision to Integrate Militaries at Civil War’s End” in *New Armies from Old: Integrating Competing Militaries after Civil War*, ed. Roy Licklider (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Gettelman, “The World’s Worst War,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2012, Sunday Review, pp. 1 and 7.

<sup>4</sup> Sabiiti Mutengesa, “Facile Acronyms and Tangled Processes: A Re-Examination of the 1990s ‘DDR’ in Uganda.” *International Peacekeeping* 20, 3 (2013): 338–356.

<sup>5</sup> Florence Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars: Multiethnic Armies, Identity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Zirker, Constantine P. Danopoulos, and Alan Simpson. “The Military as a Distinct Ethnic or Quasi-Ethnic Identity in Developing Countries,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 34 (2008), 314–357.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen F. Burgess, “Fashioning Integrated Security Forces after Conflict.” *African Security*, 1, 2 (2008), 69–91.

<sup>8</sup> Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars*.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Knight, “Security Sector Reform: Post-conflict Integration.” Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform, University of Birmingham, UK, August 2009, 34–37.

<sup>10</sup> Cyrus Samii, “Do Ethnic Quotas Exacerbate or Reduce Ethnic Conflict? Evidence from Burundi’s Military,” Political Science Department, Columbia University, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 63–86; Monica

Toft, *Securing the Peace: The Durable Settlement of Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 12-13 and 58-60; Matthew Hoddie and Caroline Hartzell. "Civil War Settlements and the Implementation of Military Power-Sharing Arrangements." *Journal of Peace Research*, 40, 3 (2003), 303-320; Katherine Glassmyer and Nicholas Sambanis, "Rebel Military Integration and Civil War Termination," *Journal of Peace Research*, 45 (2008), 365-384; Karl DeRouen, Jr., Jenna Lea, and Peter Wallensteen. 2009. The Duration of Civil War Peace Agreements. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26, no. 4: 367-87.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Krebs and Roy Licklider, "Does Military Integration Make Renewed Civil War Less Likely: Some Initial Hypotheses," forthcoming 1914.

<sup>13</sup> Len LeRoux, "The Revision of the South African Defence Review and International Trends in Force Design: Implications for the SA Army" in *South African Army Vision 2020: Security Challenges Shaping the Future South African Army*, ed. Len LeRoux (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Stephen John Stedman, Donald S. Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens, *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Jessica L. Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review*, 106, 2 (May 2012), 326-346.

<sup>16</sup> Roy Licklider, "Ethical Advice: Conflict Management vs. Human Rights in Ending Civil Wars," *Journal of Human Rights*, 7 (2008), 376-387.

<sup>17</sup> Hartzell, op.cit.

Note: This article is part of a project funded by grant BCS 0904905 from The Social and Behavioral Dimensions of National Security, Conflict, and Cooperation, a joint program of the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense/ Department of the Army/Army Research Office. I acknowledge with gratitude the support and hospitality of the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute of the U.S. Army War College for our conference, particularly Raymond Millen and Col. Stephen T. Smith.

Except when noted, discussion of individual cases is based on material in Roy Licklider, *New Armies From Old: Merging Competing Militaries after Civil Wars* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Brittany J. Kohler/Released



Marines assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Assault Amphibian Battalion supporting the Security Cooperation Task Force of Amphibious Southern Partnership Station 2011 conduct a subject matter expert exchange with Guatemalan Kaibil soldiers. Amphibious Southern Partnership Station 2011 is an annual deployment of U.S. ships to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility in the Caribbean and Latin America.