

**Dangerous allies:
States, Paramilitary Violence, and Civil War**

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Masters Essay

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APRIL 2017

Acknowledgements

This essay, like so many academic essays of its kind, is written by an author who has no first-hand experience of the subject about which he writes. Undertaken by a young and privileged middle class man, the research, conception, and writing of this project took place in various agreeably bourgeois locales; Bordeaux, Québec, Worthing, far from the realities and dangers of the places and topics that it discusses. In this it suffers from typical university-itis; it relies heavily on books, journal articles, and grand theories rather than the day-to-day experiences of the people who live in the regions and countries that it so boldly tries to analyse. To the good people of Belfast, Bogota, and Bali, I apologise in advance for the inevitable generalisations that a transversal project like this, which seeks to analyse a global phenomenon using but a few examples from different locales, must make.

This essay is the culmination of the ‘student’ period of my life, a period that has taken rather longer than some of my peers, but for various positive reasons. It has been a period of adventures, academia, new languages, and most importantly, love. To the fine people of Bordeaux and Québec, I thank you for your warm welcomes, for your toleration of my far-from-perfect French, and for showing an English boy a world beyond the Anglosphere. To Leeds, I thank you for the intellectual and social stimulation that made me the person I am today. To Toronto, I thank you for giving me the taste for travel and for introducing me to the startlingly wonderful country of Canada. To the sunny seaside town of Worthing, I thank you for forever being home.

To professors Aurélie Campana and Sebastien Laurent, I thank you for your patience and your words of wisdom.

To my friends and family, I thank you for your confidence and love across great distances and multiple time zones.

À Camille, simplement, merci.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AUC – *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*.

ACCU - *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*

CIRA – Continuity Irish Republican Army

COIN – Counterinsurgency

DCAF – Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces

DDR – Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

DUP – Democratic Unionist Party (Northern Ireland)

EPDP - Eelam People's Democratic Party (Sri Lanka)

Hashd – Popular Mobilisation Forces (Iraq)

IRA – Irish Republican Army

NSA – Non-State Actor

OAS – *Organisation Armée Secrete* (French Algeria)

ONH - *Óglaigh na hÉireann*

PGM – Pro Government Militia

PIRA – Provisional Irish Republican Army

PSP – Pro State Paramilitary

RIRA – Real Irish Republican Army

SDLP – Social Democratic and Labour Party (Northern Ireland)

SSR – Security Sector Reform

UDF – Ulster Defence Force

UDR – Ulster Defence Regiment (British Army)

UUP – Ulster Unionist Party (Northern Ireland)

UVF – Ulster Volunteer Force

Introduction

Even the best theories often fail to perfectly capture the nuance of the phenomena they seek to describe. David Kilcullen, whose various works on counterinsurgency warfare have been immensely useful to this essay, describes this problem in the introduction to his recent book on urban guerillas. Despite being the man who literally wrote the book on counterinsurgency, he winces at the cognitive dissonance he feels when he tries to apply the theories he developed to the conflict situations he finds himself in.¹ Pure or ‘binary’ theories, he muses, never quite seem to fit “the facts on the ground.”²

Nonetheless, despite the shortcomings of an academic approach to the messy and complex phenomenon that is civil war, theorising and detached analysis remain important. They allow us to discover broader patterns of behaviour that may not be visible from inside the dusty suburbs of Fallujah or from the lush valleys around Medellin. Standing in front of the murals on Thorndyke Street in Belfast, it may be difficult to see how this scruffy white working class corner of Loyalist Britain is linked to the throbbing city of Barrancabermeja, nestled in the verdant river valley between the Cordillera Central et Cordillera Oriental mountains. But by drawing upon recent studies by Sabine Carey, Neil Mitchell, and Will Lowe,³ and by Corinna Jentsch, Stathis Kalyvas, and Livia Isabella Schubiger,⁴ amongst others, I argue that the paramilitary movements which emerged in these two distant places *are* linked.

Though the political, social, and religious contexts in which paramilitary groups emerge are diverse, the phenomenon of paramilitarism has been rife in conflicts the world over. And yet paramilitaries have generally only been studied in their local contexts; until recently there have been few attempts to understand why these groups emerge so frequently and are so widespread. Scientific definitions of civil war rarely take them into account, instead overlooking their status as a separate phenomenon worthy of study, or by classifying their actions in with those of the state.

¹ KILCULLEN, David, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 2013, p. 15

² Ibid, p. 15.

³ CAREY, Sabine C; MITCHELL, Neil J; LOWE, Will, “States, the security sector, and the monopoly of violence: A new database on pro-government militias,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 50 (2), 249–258 (2013).

⁴ JENTZSCH, Corinna, KALYVAS, Stathis N., SCHUBIGER, Livia Isabella, “Militias in Civil Wars”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 59, 5: pp. 755-769, (2015).

However, by collecting together the wide variety of groups that fight not against the state, but alongside it, aggregate patterns of behaviour can be established and analysed.

Paramilitarism itself is both an ancient and a very modern phenomenon. Although this essay will spend a lot of time discussing the relationship of paramilitaries to the state, irregular armed groups existed long before the state's monopoly on legitimate force was even a twinkle in Max Weber's eye. Although some authors, such as Bruce Campbell and Arthur Brenner, argue that death squads and terrorism are inconceivable without the counterpoint of the Weberian state, this essay will demonstrate that paramilitarism has its roots in pre-modern, even ancient history. Paramilitarism has existed for as long as men have been willing to take up arms to fight not against the prevailing social order, but for it. Kingdoms, Empires, and modern States have long been inclined to turn a blind eye to these non-official friendlies, whose violence might have been uncontrolled or even uncontrollable, but was at least directed against common enemies. However, for as long as it has existed this pro-status quo violence has produced unpredictable results, creating dynamics and tensions that damage the incumbent order. For states both modern and ancient, the outsourcing of violence to paramilitaries has long been a fool's game.

The use of paramilitary forces can be very tempting for governments in a context of escalating internal violence, or as a cheap stand-in when state capacity is weak. The use of irregular forces or paramilitaries enables governments to try and achieve certain military objectives whilst maintaining a veneer of plausible deniability, especially when the chosen tactics violate internal or international law. Yet, once established, non-state pro-state groups can be difficult to control and disband, and therefore become a lingering problem for the reconstruction of post conflict states. Paramilitary forces become embedded in the criminal economy, challenge state authority, use destabilising levels of violence, and may continue to use operate regardless of peace agreements.

The thrust of this essay's argument is built upon three ideas. Firstly, that the Pro-State Paramilitary (PSP) is a common and distinct type of armed group worthy of our study. Secondly, that although PSPs are 'potential allies' to the state they are not subservient to them. And thirdly, that although

PSPs and states often find themselves fighting a common foe, PSPs are ultimately the enemy of the security and stability that states seek to restore.

The theoretical basis of this essay builds upon the excellent *Pro-Government Militias Database Project*, headed by Sabine Carey and Neil J. Mitchell, as well as extensively citing articles from a special edition of the *Journal of Conflict Studies*, published in August 2015, entitled *Militias in Civil Wars*.^{5 6} We will apply this essay's definition of paramilitary groups to a number of conflicts around the world, but we return most frequently to two particular case studies: Colombia and Northern Ireland. These two conflicts are advantageous for this essay because they have both been extensively studied already, they both have long historical antecedents, and both conflicts are currently undergoing peace processes, albeit at different stages of advancement. In neither country is the peace guaranteed. But they are also note-worthy for their differences. In Northern Ireland, the principal split has traditionally been between the 'Loyalist' ('loyal' to the union with the United Kingdom and mostly Protestant) community and the 'Republican' (wishing to reunite the island of Ireland into a single republic and mostly Catholic) community. It has been a mostly urban conflict, concentrated in its densely industrialised coastal cities, whose fractures literally divide streets in two. By way of contrast, Colombia's civil war has been characterised by an ongoing left-wing insurgency based out of the country's rural and mountainous regions. The IRA and the UVF frequently dissolved into the anonymity of the concrete jungle; the FARC, ELN, and AUC would retreat into a real one.

Colombia's conflict traces its roots in the *La Violencia*, the civil war of 1948 – 1958 between the Liberal and Conservative Parties. Its' sheer length has seen a variety of actors rise and fall in importance across its timeframe, and has spawned an ongoing side-conflict with narcotraffickers. In terms of conflict intensity, they are almost incomparable: the worst year for Colombia in terms of conflict deaths saw over 3,000 casualties (although 1,000 – 2,000 annually was more common), whereas the equivalent year for Northern Ireland saw a high of around 500 (although since the late

⁵ CAREY, MITCHELL, & LOWE, (2015).

⁶ 'Journal of Conflict Studies Special Edition: Militias in Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, Volume 59, Issue 5, August 2015.

1970s the number has only occasionally exceeded 100 per year).⁷ ⁸ Yet despite the contrast in conflict intensity, in both countries the experience of paramilitarism has had distinct effects on the nature of warfare and on civilian life.

This essay will proceed by reviewing the existing literature in order to sift through the confusing web of conflicting terms and misleading synonyms so as to produce a working definition around which to build the rest of this essay. In Chapter 2 we will analyse how and why paramilitary groups emerge in conflict, arguing that despite local knowledge and willingness to use violence they are a poor choice for successful counterinsurgency operations. Chapter 3 then takes a closer look at the chaos and brutal violence that PSPs produce when unleashed in conflicts, and the way in which they can postpone and complicate efforts at conflict resolution. Chapter 4 returns to the State, arguing that PSPs are ultimately a major challenge for state capacity, and then examines some approaches states have taken to try and draw the venom of paramilitary violence, including Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), and Security Sector Reform (SSR). We conclude by arguing, like so many wise grandparents over the years, that prevention is ultimately better than cure. The best solution to the PSP problem is to address the conditions that favour their emergence, before the fact.

⁷UPSALLA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAMME, “Colombia: Number of Deaths”, Available at: <http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/100>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

⁸ ROGERS, Simon, “Deaths in Northern Ireland since 1969: Data”, *The Guardian*, 10th June 2010, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/jun/10/deaths-in-northern-ireland-conflict-data>, [Accessed 6th March 2017].

Chapter 1: What are paramilitaries?

1.1.1 Defining paramilitaries

The UVF, The AUC, The Tigers, Right Sector, Bloque Meta, Janjaweed, Shabiha, Interahamwe. The names of these paramilitary organisations are infamous and their deeds are well documented, yet these groups have only been infrequently studied as a common phenomenon. In Columbia and Peru they are called the *Autodefensas*, in Iraq we know them as the Popular Mobilisation Units, and in Northern Ireland they take care to remind us that they are ‘Loyalists’.⁹ In Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Indonesia they are often described simply as Death Squads. This motley crew of armed actors are as varied as their names suggest, but they form part of a common yet understudied typology of armed non-state actor, the *Pro-State Paramilitary*. This choice of term is not accidental. To justify it, this section will review the contemporary and historic terminology used to describe non-state armed groups, and then examine the literature on paramilitary violence so as to review other proposed definitions, especially with respect to the relationships between PSPs and the state, before finally developing the working definition which will guide the rest of our analysis.

What exactly is a paramilitary? A broad and slippery concept, the word ‘paramilitary’ can be used to describe a wide variety of armed groups, not all of which are relevant to our discussion. The terms groups use to describe themselves are influenced by the context and nature of the conflicts in which they appear, by the groups’ organisational structure, and by both internal and external perceptions of them. Some of the most common of these broader labels include militia, death-squad, self-defence force, vigilante, gang, and of course paramilitary. Confusion arises because these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and sometimes used within studies to denote separate phenomena. One commonality however is that the majority of the literature reviewed for this essay places these groups within the broad category of Non-State Actor.

For the moment let us begin our definition by establishing what paramilitaries *are not*. Although sometimes describes as ‘paramilitary’, auxiliary but formal elements of state forces, including coastguards and border patrols, can be immediately excluded our analysis because these are self-

⁹ JENTZSCH, Corinna, KALYVAS, Stathis N., SCHUBIGER, Livia Isabella, “Militias in Civil Wars”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 59, 5: pp. 755-769 (2015), p.756.

evidently branches of the state. The same can be said of organisations like Pakistan's 'Rangers', which, although organised in a separate structure to the Pakistani Army, and is described as being part of that country's 'paramilitary' forces, are directly subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior. They were formed by the state, its leaders are appointed by the Army, and they are directly under state control.¹⁰ The same goes for the 'State Militias' that exist in the United States, which are essentially reserves of the United States military. Yet the dividing line between 'State militia' and 'Pro-State' militia, or between state-run and non-state-pro-state paramilitaries, *can* be a fine one. In historical usage there is often little distinction made between them. The waters are muddied further when states 'contract-out' security to paramilitary groups, or when during post conflict development programmes, governments attempt to integrate non-state armed actors into their security apparatus.

1.1.2 A "New Wars" actor?

Although sometimes described as a phenomenon of the "new wars", (a questionable concept in of itself), paramilitaries and militias are present in recorded histories of warfare going back to at least the time of Herodotus.^{11 12} In fact, the western model of a small and highly trained volunteer army is, from a historical perspective, more of an anomaly than the 'new' reality of a multiplicity of armed non-state actors. However, the importance of militias and informal armed bands in wars throughout history is often overlooked by the principal political histories of warfare. For example, terms of convenience such as "the English army" or "the Norman Army" help simplify the narrative of William's conquest of England in 1066, but they give the reader a false impression of the unity and organisation of these forces. Whilst Harold's defending army at the Battle of Hastings was apparently a patchwork quilt of peasant militias (fyrd), household troops (housecarl), and noble forces of varying quality and loyalty, there is little agreement about how and by whom the military forces of Saxon England were organised. For many historical narratives, it has apparently proved easier to cut through this typological and terminological bog by ignoring the complexity of military composition in this era, and simply call this ragtag force "English", as if it were merely

¹⁰Pakistan Punjab Rangers Official Website, 'History', Available online at <http://pakistanrangerspunjab.com/history.html>, [Accessed 25th November 2016].

¹¹ KILCULLEN, David, *Counterinsurgency*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press), 2010, p.148.

¹² MAZZEI, p.5.

the medieval equivalent of today's British Army.¹³ Modern analyses can be similarly macro in outlook, overlooking paramilitary groups and militias as actors in their own right, and simply classifying their actions in with those of the state.

Although it is difficult to analyse the importance and relevance of non-state forces in an era before the modern state, the organisation of modern armies was nonetheless a conscious attempt to move away from a model based on messy coalitions of armed groups with conflicting interests and towards something more unified and permanent. In the British Isles it only made sense to talk about a "state" army, in the proper sense of the word, after the organisation of Sir William Waller's New Model Army in 1645; before the English Civil War the monarchy called upon mercenaries and the militias of its nobility in times of war.¹⁴ However, this practise had the effect of prolonging conflict, as only victory could provide the spoils with which such hired forces could be rewarded. The use of militias had also long generated the problem of what to do with these men following the cessation of hostilities, and successful strategies for demobilisation and disarmament were hard to come by. The (re)creation of standing armies was partially an attempt to solve this problem, through the regularisation of pay and a more defined structure of hierarchy and discipline.¹⁵ Although they did not use the term, DDR and SSR were crucial elements of the 'military revolution' of the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁶ The rise of standing armies in pre-modern Western Europe was arguably a necessary step towards the creation of the modern state, a lesson that we should bear in mind as we reflect on the wisdom of the current trend for subcontracting out violence to non-state groups, and the implications that this holds for state capacity.

Yet governments have long contracted out violence to non-state actors not directly under their command, and states have often learned and relearned to regret it. Privateering was a favoured method of the colonial powers, whereby the great European powers of the colonial period granted 'letters of marque' to pirates, assigning them the mandate to attack the ships and colonies of rival

¹³ HOLLISTER, Warren C., *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1962, p.2.

¹⁴ CHILDS, John, "The Military Revolution I", in TOWNSHEND, Charles, ed., *The Oxford History of Modern War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005, p.36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

powers.¹⁷ The state thus legitimised the violence of private armed actors, who in peacetime were essentially common criminals, against both civilian and military targets, so long as these were of the rival nation.¹⁸ The acts of England's "Elizabethan Sea Dogs" were arguably an early modern form of state-sponsored terrorism. Despite the widespread adoption in Western Europe of the standing army system by the end of the 17th Century, it was not until the middle of the 19th that the outsourcing of violence to private forces ceased to be considered a legitimate tactic.¹⁹ This was confirmed by Article I of the Declaration of Paris in 1856, which in a useful diplomatic fiction declared: "Privateering is, and remains, abolished."²⁰ By this point however, the actions of private militias had become just as painful for their sponsors as they were for their targets. Privateers' loyalty was tenuous at best, reliant as it was on the continued acquisition of booty, and they proved difficult to control and near-impossible to demobilise. Their tendency to ignore orders could be damaging diplomatically, therefore needlessly prolonging conflict. As Janice E. Thomson argues, the insubordination of privateers "weakened the links between a state's declared policy of being at peace or at war with another state and the actions of its subjects beyond its borders [...]" Ultimately, pirates, mercenaries and mercantile companies challenged the sovereignty of the nascent national state itself."²¹ As the model of the modern industrialised state crystallised in the 19th century, in the western world militias were either outlawed or integrated definitively within a state's formal security structures.

Throughout Europe's empires, colonial forces were formed out of pre-existing militias. In the former British Dominions in North America and Oceania this process paralleled those country's progression towards developed states. Canada's army can directly trace its lineage back to the locally formed Sedentary Militias and Fencible units of the 18th and 19th centuries, whose role was crucial in the War of 1812.²² In the United States, evidence of this lineage can be found in the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, which still guarantees the right of citizens to keep and bear arms, noting that the existence of a "well regulated militia" is essential to preserve

¹⁷ THOMSON, Janice E., *Mercenaries, pirates, and sovereigns: State-building and extraterritorial violence in early modern Europe*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press), 1994, p.21

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.106.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.71

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.68

²² SUTHERLAND BROWN, Brigadier J., C.M.G., D.S.O., *The Canadian Defence Forces*, Royal United Services Institution Journal, 75:497, 11-26, (1930), p.13.

the survival and security of a free state.²³ Yet in both of these North American states, the “militias” were from the start overseen by the government, based on the principle of citizen service, and their powers and behaviour decided by the state.²⁴ These ‘militias’ were in effect units of the army.

However, in the colonies of the Middle East and Africa there was much less direct control of local militias, and the process of military formalisation did not consistently advance to the same extent as elsewhere. Instead, local units were only loosely co-opted into the governance structure.²⁵ In German East Africa for example, the dependency model of colonialism meant that the German administration relied mostly on local tribal forces to maintain order, a structure which allowed them latter much freer rein in their actions.²⁶ This setup, drawing upon a model of imperialism which favoured maintaining or imposing the helpful divisions of tribalism rather than seeking to create European-style citizen-states, roughly resembled that of most British colonies in Africa.²⁷ The heritage of this model of military organisation is arguably still felt today. Ariel Ihram argues that there is a correlation between the stability of post-colonial states and their inheritance of colonial military structures, noting that those states where colonisation and decolonisation produced “more decentralised and localised force structures” are less likely to have governments which control the monopoly of force within their borders today.²⁸ This correlation between paramilitary activity, state instability, and conflict poses questions for both the way in which governments attempt to overcome civil conflict (and particularly in the context of counter-insurgency campaigns, as we shall see) and for post-conflict development and state building. In short, both historical and modern experiences suggest that whilst alliances with paramilitaries may have short-term advantages, in the long term they create significant obstacles to the peaceful settlement of conflict and to long-term prosperity.

²³ UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION, Amendment II.

²⁴ SUTHERLAND BROWN, p.13.

²⁵ COOPER, Frederick, “Reconstructing Empire in British and French Africa”, *Past Present*, 210 (suppl_6): 196-210, (2011), p.197.

²⁶ CONRAD, Sebastien, *German Colonialism: A Short History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2012, p.75.

²⁷ COOPER, p.197.

²⁸ AHRAM, Ariel I., “Origins and Persistence of State-Sponsored Militias: Path Dependent Processes in Third World Military Development”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34 (4), 531–556, (2011). p.532.

1.1.3 Militia or paramilitary?

In order to examine this phenomenon further however, we must first establish our terms of reference. This essay favours the term ‘paramilitary’ to describe its object of study rather than ‘militia’. This is because although the term ‘paramilitary’ is sometimes also used to describe certain elements of regular armed forces, the term ‘militia’ is almost ubiquitously used. For example, the Canadian Army was known as the Canadian Militia until the outbreak of the Second World War, and today the word militia is frequently used to describe state controlled forces such as the Kentucky Active Militia, as well as state-initiated groups like the Basij militia in Iran.²⁹ Therefore, we find that the term ‘militia’ is ambiguous and creates an image which is too immediately state-centric, thereby clouding rather than clarifying our investigation. For this reason, we do not favour it as our working term of analysis, although many of the groups studied are nonetheless widely described as militias, such as the Hashd Shia Militias of Iraq.³⁰ It is worth repeating here that throughout the literature the terms militia, death squad, and paramilitary are frequently and confusingly used interchangeably.

1.1.4 Not Insurgents...

If paramilitaries are a form of non-state armed actor, how do we distinguish them from insurgent or guerilla forces? Superficially they may look the same, using illicit means to obtain materiel, and practising violence against civilians. In Colombia, forced recruitment (including recruitment of children)³¹, drug trafficking³², and terroristic violence³³ are signature tactics of both the FARC and ELN, left-wing guerrillas, as well as paramilitary groups such as the AUC. Yet although the tactics and demographic makeup of these groups may be similar, their aims are quite distinct. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) / Geneva Call working paper on Armed Non-State Actors (NSAs) distinguishes paramilitaries from insurgent forces by noting that: “Unlike insurgents acting against the state, such groups operate in lieu of the state.” This is a good

²⁹ LUST, Ellen, *The Middle East*, (Washington, CQ Press), 2011. p.421.

³⁰ DCAF, Geneva Call, “Armed Non-State Actors: Current Trends & Future Challenges”, *DCAF Horizon 2015 Working Paper Series*, 2011, p.17.

³¹ ROSENAU, William; ESPACH, Ralph, ORTIZ, Román D.; HERRERA, Natalia, “Why They Join, Why They Fight, and Why They Leave: Learning From Colombia's Database of Demobilized Militants”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26:2, 277-285, (2014), p.282.

³² AL-JAZEERA NEWS, “Colombia's FARC apologises for past kidnappings”, 13th September 2016, Available online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/colombia-farc-apologises-kidnappings-160913044052120.html> , [Accessed 25th February 2017].

³³ SIMONS, Geoff, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, (London, SAQI), 2004, p.41.

start, but such a definition could easily include private defence firms such as Blackwater/Academi. Perhaps a better approach is to examine what insurgents are. David Kilcullen, in his seminal work *Counterinsurgency*, describes an “insurgency” as being “an organised, protracted politico-military struggle to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government [...] while increasing insurgent control.”³⁴ By contrast, paramilitaries do not seek to overthrow the state but instead try to defend some form of the status quo, albeit perhaps in an imagined and idealised form. Indeed, in most cases paramilitary forces form in order to defend against some threat to the established order, emerging as a defensive counterpoint to insurgents. The established order to be defended might be conceptualised in a communitarian way, as in Northern Ireland or in the Balkans, or defence of it may be described in terms of ‘law and order’ or security. Often there is some mix of the two.

1.1.5 ...nor the state.

Although unlike insurgents, Pro-State Paramilitaries do not seek to overturn the state, it should not be assumed therefore that these groups are simply autonomous extensions of the state itself. Despite the recent interest in the subject, many of the definitions offered in the scientific literature overemphasise the state’s role with respect to these groups. Sabine Carey, Neil Mitchell, and Will Lowe, joint architects of the expansive *Pro-Government Militias Database Project*,³⁵ are typical of this tendency, despite the excellence of their research on this type of non-state violence.

“We define a PGM [Pro-Government Militia] as a group that 1. is identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government (national or subnational), 2. is identified as not being part of the regular security forces, 3. is armed, and 4. has some level of organization.”³⁶

Although they note that these groups are not part of the “regular security forces”, the term “pro-government” is misleading. In many examples of conflicts around the world where paramilitaries are present, these groups may well oppose the government of the day. This is especially true during peace processes, where such groups may fear betrayal. Sentiments of betrayal or of insecurity in the face of the government’s inability or unwillingness to protect a community are in fact strong

³⁴ KILCULLEN, 2010, p.1.

³⁵ CAREY, Sabine C; MITCHELL, Neil J; LOWE, Will, “States, the security sector, and the monopoly of violence: A new database on pro-government militias,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 50 (2), 249–258 (2013).

³⁶ Ibid, p.250.

motivating factors for groups to take up arms in the first place.³⁷ And although it is not difficult to see why the ruling British Labour Party and the right-wing Ulster Defence Association (UDA) were strongly opposed to each other, especially during the Good Friday Agreement process, this in no way meant that the latter sought to undermine Britain's authority in Belfast. In Colombia and Northern Ireland, paramilitaries sometimes attack members of the state security services,^{38 39} and have assassinated political figures.^{40 41} Yet neither the AUC nor the UDA sought to overturn the state, quite the opposite. Paramilitaries are status quo actors, seeking to effect change within the context of the incumbent authority. The numerous attacks perpetrated by the *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) against both the FLN as well as those elements within the French state perceived as betraying the *Pied Noir*, who sought the maintenance of the French regime in Algeria, illustrate excellently the nuance that we need to make between 'pro-government' and 'pro-state'. In this sense paramilitaries are a form of pro-system armed opposition, perhaps acting illegally but ultimately seeing themselves as seeking to maintain or 'restore' the state, rather than precipitate a revolution that would destroy it. Describing these groups as "Pro-Government" is to automatically assume that they are politically aligned with the government of the day, when in fact they may oppose it ideologically just as virulently as insurgents or rebels.

Yet Carey, Mitchell and Lowe are not alone. Nicholas Sambanis, in the article "*What is Civil War?*" argues that a civil war, by definition, must include the state as one of its principal actors, but notes that the state may be represented by its own army or by militias.⁴² Yet to bundle the formal security services and informal militias together as a single actor again assumes too great an alliance between these paramilitary forces and the state. The support for, and legitimacy of, paramilitaries is often anchored in its community and can thus be independent of state support,

³⁷ HUMPHREYS, Macartan; WEINSTEIN, Jeremy M., "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 52 (2), 436–455 (2008). p.452.

³⁸ BRODZINSKY, Sibylla, "Colombia's road to peace: new militia threatens stability with bloodshed", *The Guardian*, 7th April 2016, Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/07/colombia-peace-talks-farc-eln-guerrillas-usuga-klan> , [Accessed 25th February 2016].

³⁹ MCDONALD, Henry, "Belfast police attacked during clashes with loyalists", *The Guardian*, 9th August 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/aug/09/belfast-police-protests-attacked-clashes-loyalists> , [Accessed 25th February 2017].

⁴⁰ CADWALLADER, Anne, *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Northern Ireland*, (Dublin: Mercier Press), 2013, p.32.

⁴¹ TATE, Winifred. "Paramilitaries in Colombia," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 8.1, 163-176, (2001)., p.166.

⁴² SAMBANIS, Nicholas, "What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 6 (Dec., 2004), p.821.

even where such support exists. In Ukraine and Iraq the state has explicitly worked with, supported, and contracted out military tasks to paramilitary forces, especially for the purposes of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. But in Northern Ireland and Colombia the state has officially proscribed the paramilitaries, albeit belatedly and to different degrees. Some studies of civil war suffer from an underlying assumption that the state is a unitary actor, when in fact the complex dynamics of such conflicts means that elements of even the formal organs of the state can find themselves working at cross-purposes.⁴³ Analyses that do not factor in the independence of PSPs may produce misleadingly simplistic results.

However, it would be equally false to state that paramilitaries have no relationship with the state at all. In the conflicts in Ukraine and in Iraq, paramilitaries are regarded by the state as a helpful ally, and have operated directly alongside the army in certain operations. In Colombia and Northern Ireland, where paramilitary groups were officially illegal, there have nonetheless been varying levels of informal collusion between them and the official forces. Some definitions of paramilitarism explicitly take this into account. Jeffrey Sluka focuses on “death squads”, a particular type of PSP, noting that members of these “are either directly or indirectly connected with the government and / or security forces. There is usually overlap in membership and in various forms of collusion – including the provision of weapons and intelligence.”⁴⁴ In Sluka’s reading, the state-paramilitary relationship *always* exists, although it may be in a non-official capacity, facilitated by shared membership or by sympathetic members of the establishment. Much collusion is like this, informal, murky, and self-defeating

Julie Mazzei’s definition of paramilitary groups also takes in account the subtlety of the state-paramilitary relationship, focusing on the importance of well-placed individuals within the state security structure:

“Paramilitary groups are political, armed organisations that are by definition extramilitary, extra-State, noninstitutional entities, but which mobilise and operate with the assistance of important allies, including factions within the State. Thus, while officially illegal, PMGs enjoy some of the resources, access, and status generally exclusive to the state but *which is funnelled off by political and military allies.*”⁴⁵

⁴³ CAREY, MITCHELL, LOWE, 2013, p.250.

⁴⁴ SLUKA, Jeffrey A., ‘The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland’, in *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, Jeffrey A. Sluka, ed., (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press), 2000, p.141.

⁴⁵ MAZZEI, p.4.

Mazzei's approach is an improvement on Carey and Mitchell's in that it better captures the importance of interpersonal relationships as a driver of paramilitary activity and violence. We begin to understand that rather than being contractors for state violence, paramilitaries emerge on those frayed edges of the state, where its capacity to act is limited or is at least perceived to be. Weakness, illegitimacy, and fear are the conditions which allow the emergence of paramilitaries, and collusion, either official or otherwise, allows these groups to thrive. Paul Staniland is right when he asserts that paramilitaries "are not intrinsically subservient junior partners of government" nor just "manipulated thugs."⁴⁶ Indeed they are symptoms of the same structural problems which encourage the emergence of insurgencies, and perhaps unsurprisingly therefore these two group types share many characteristics, as we have seen.

DCAF and Geneva Call, in their working paper on Armed Non-State Actors, automatically exclude from their study any armed group which is under the "effective control" of a state.⁴⁷ Yet this is to go too far, and presents us with the dilemma of what "effective control" really means. A paramilitary group's status with respect to the state may change over time, clouding our attempts to categorise them. The Shia Militias, or al-Hashd al-Shaabi, fighting in Iraq alongside state forces, are by some definitions under its "effective control", as for example, they coordinate and share intelligence in the assault on Mosul, currently ongoing as this essay is written.⁴⁸ Yet these militias, operating alongside but independently from the military,⁴⁹ have been accused of sectarian massacres and human rights abuses across the country⁵⁰, and have previously undermined the state's capacity and legitimacy within Iraq, as during the violence in Fallujah and elsewhere in

⁴⁶ STANILAND, Paul, 'Militias, Ideology, and the State', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 59(5), 770-793, (2015), p.771.

⁴⁷ DCAF, Geneva Call, "Armed Non-State Actors: Current Trends & Future Challenges", *DCAF Horizon 2015 Working Paper Series*, (2011), p9.

⁴⁸ ELABDI, Florian; AL-JIZANI, Mohammad; SILVERSTONE, Tom; TAIT, Michael, "The Shia militias taking back Iraq from ISIS", *The Guardian*, 21st July 2016, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2016/jul/21/the-shia-militias-taking-back-iraq-from-isis-video>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

⁴⁹ Office Order 91, issued by the Iraqi executive, has declared these militias to be an 'independent' unit of the Iraqi Army, answerable directly to the Prime Minister's office. It remains to be seen however, how these explicitly sectarian units, some proscribed as terrorists organisations by the United States, and some with links to Iran, can be successfully and legitimately integrated into the military. AL-JAZEERA NEWS, "Can Shia militias be integrated into the Iraqi army?", *Inside Story*, 28th July 2016, Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2016/07/shia-militias-integrated-iraqi-army-160728180931271.html>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

⁵⁰ VICE NEWS, "Shiite Militias in Iraq Reportedly Tortured and Executed Sunnis Fleeing Fallujah", 14th June 2016, Available online at <https://news.vice.com/article/shiite-militias-in-iraq-reportedly-tortured-and-executed-sunnis-fleeing-fallujah>, [Accessed 28th February 2017].

previous episodes of the country's post-2003 chaos.⁵¹ If and when the common enemy of Daesh is defeated, and the Iraqi government continues the process of consolidation of sovereignty over its territory, these Shia militias may be fully integrated into the military. Or they may once again reform as an independent sectarian force, both thriving in, and contributing to, a “failed and shattered state”.⁵² Using the popular mobilisation forces of Iraq as an example, we understand how paramilitaries are an autonomous subcategory of armed non-state actor which, although they are “a potential ally” of the state, have their own motivations and goals and thus are a complicating factor for the dynamics of violence in civil conflict.⁵³ By misconstruing paramilitaries as mere extensions of the state or government we risk overlooking the true complexity of conflict.

1.2 Our definition.

The remainder of this essay will use the following definition:

Pro-State Paramilitary. An organised armed group that exists outside of the state, but which does not seek to challenge the existence of the state or system. Pro-State Paramilitaries use violence, or the threat of violence, to achieve political or military objectives.

Whilst a standardised definition is useful to guide our analysis of this topic, it is worth stating that there are limits to the usefulness of any 'one-size-fits-all' label when it comes to discussing the wide variety of groups that can be described as 'paramilitary' in nature. Each paramilitary group is very much a product of its own cultural, political, and historical context. Some of the groups studied in this essay only roughly match the definition proposed above, and the nature of groups can change across time. Let us proceed then on the understanding that whilst a standardised definition is necessary for the rigour of an academic analysis of any phenomenon, an overly strict application of our defining criteria risks clouding rather than clarifying our analysis by needlessly and artificially excluding certain groups from its scope.

⁵¹ KHEDERY, Ali, “Iran’s Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq”, *Foreign Policy*, 19th February 2015, Available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/19/irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq/> , [Accessed 19th October 2016].

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ STANILAND, 2015, p.771.

Chapter 2: What role do paramilitaries play in conflict and why do states ally themselves with them?

2.1 – What roles do paramilitaries play in conflict?

So what actually are Pro-State Paramilitaries, what role do they play in conflicts, and why do they emerge? PSPs are found in a wide variety of different conflict types and are characterised by a diverse typology, but their exact nature is shaped by the socio-political dynamics of the states involved as well as the dynamics of their host conflict. Unlike other types of armed groups, such as international socialist revolutionaries engaged in national liberation-type conflicts, there is no “paramilitary international.” And although these groups are almost universally conservative, reactionary, or on the far-right, they cannot be said to be formally linked by any unifying transnational ideology. As such, funding for these groups tends to be domestic. In the Northern Ireland conflict, Republican insurgent groups received financial support from the Irish diaspora across the world. Loyalist paramilitaries, however, struggled to find outside support, relying instead on fundraising activities from within their own communities, such as unlicensed pubs.⁵⁴ In Colombia, funds came from protection money, narcotics, or from like-minded businessmen.⁵⁵ Paramilitary groups, by and large, do not seem to enjoy the formal international solidarity and sharing of resources that so typifies left-wing insurgent groups. This is one reason why PSPs become so deeply embedded into the criminal economy once established, although insurgents are not aliens to the black market either.

PSPs are very much products of their own environment, and their enemies tend to be defined within the domestic context. Yet we can identify some commonly recurring motivations, and various observers have attempted to design typologies of the paramilitary phenomenon. The sheer number of conflicts and PSPs illustrate that these groups are not native to any single conflict type. They are found in civil wars in which ethnicity is a major driving factor of violence, in wars of separation and of independence, in civil wars in which foreign occupiers are present, and in both conventional

⁵⁴ FREEMAN, Michael, ed., *Financing Terrorism: Case Studies*, (Burlington, Ashgate), 2012. p.171.

⁵⁵ SONTAG, Deborah, “The Secret History of Colombia’s Paramilitaries and the US War on Drugs”, *New York Times*, September 2016, Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/world/americas/colombia-cocaine-human-rights.html> , [Accessed 28th February 2017].

and unconventional, symmetric and asymmetric wars.⁵⁶ Common enemies include social movements seeking to change the status quo (particularly throughout Latin America), local minorities or oppressed majorities (in Iraq, Northern Ireland, and Ukraine), and more generally anybody who openly opposes the existence or actions of the PSPs themselves.

Most of all, PSPs are characterised by their near-ubiquity. In his 2010 study of over a hundred ‘irregular’ wars, Max Manwaring identified the “gang phenomenon” in over half, whilst Carey, Mitchell and Lowe’s dataset found that pro-government militias were present in 81% of “country-years affected by civil war between 1981 and 2007”.⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ Paramilitary groups are a chronic recurring actor in civil conflict, both in history and in modernity. This next section will analyse four different models for the emergence of paramilitary groups, based on the roles they play in conflict: Self-defence; As an expression of elite power; as part of COIN; and as Death Squads. It is worth noting that the boundaries of these categories are somewhat arbitrary, as their *raison d’être* often overlap. Paramilitaries may consider themselves to have several objectives at once, and these can evidently change over time.

2.1.1 Self Defence

A great number of what this essay regards as PSPs describe themselves as ‘Self-Defence’ units. Sometimes portrayed as citizens in arms, and sometimes merely a more loosely regulated form of state militia, they are created to defend their communities from some perceived threat to their security. This ‘defence’ might be indirect, for example in the form of community patrols designed to reassure ‘their’ people and intimidate their rivals, or it can be overtly violent, using beatings, vigilante justice, murders and mass violence to preserve order and maintain their social control.⁵⁹ The community-level nature of these groups means that violence can follow social or personal patterns, with victims and perpetrators knowing each other very well.⁶⁰ People and communities are left to enforce their own social norms and act according to local and community-driven

⁵⁶ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.757.

⁵⁷ MANWARING, Max G., *Gangs, Pseudo-militaries and other modern mercenaries*, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press), 2010, p.10.

⁵⁸ CAREY, MITCHELL, LOWE, 2013, p.254.

⁵⁹ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.755.

⁶⁰ KALYVAS, Stathis N., ‘The Ontology of “Political Violence”: Action and Identity in Civil Wars’, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1 (3), 475–494, (2003), p.485.

definitions of what ‘security’ looks like. Present both in and outside of periods of conflict, common ‘threats’ which justify the existence of self-defence groups include political violence from rival parties or groups, ‘existential’ type threats from the presence of rival ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups, as well as the dangers posed by criminals and bandits.^{61 62}

A context of insecurity is a common justification for the existence of paramilitaries the world over, but self-identified “self-defence” forces are particularly rife throughout South America. From the Los Pepes, formed to ‘defend’ Colombians against the narco-traffickers, to the AUC and the ACCU, which were confederations of different paramilitary groups operating in that country, these *juntas de autodefensa* nominally sought to defend farms, villages, and local businesses from violence, intimidation, kidnapping, and forced recruitment.⁶³ However almost immediately these groups adopted these very same tactics that they claimed to decry.⁶⁴ Their real value to the fight to restore security is therefore questionable.

Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger argue that self-defence groups are a product of the quest for security.⁶⁵ They are often found in contexts where the power of the state to ensure stability and the rule of law is challenged, or where an insurgency seeks to disrupt the current status quo with an alternative form of social order. In this sense self-defence paramilitarism is a reaction to, and an attempt to overcome, a lack of human security.⁶⁶ It is a grassroots way of trying to achieve the normality that a state is normally expected to provide, and for this reason in conflicts the world over the state has proved reluctant to oppose self-defence groups. The state has reacted to them in a variety of different ways, ranging from active support to informal collusion. In Colombia in the mid 1990s, César Gaviria’s and Ernesto Samper’s governments attempted to legitimise and officialise paramilitaries through the abortive CONVIVIR scheme, whereby ‘security

⁶¹ ROMERO, Mauricio, ‘Paramilitary groups in contemporary Colombia’, in DAVID, Diane E.; PEREIRA, eds., Anthony W, *Irregular Armed Forces and their role in politics and state formation*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2003, p.178.

⁶² “SANÍN, Francisco Gutiérrez, “Telling the Difference: Guerillas and Paramilitaries in the Colombian War”, *Politics & Society*, Vol. 36 No. 1, 3-34, (March 2008), p.16.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “‘The Sixth Division’ Military-paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia”, *Human Rights Watch*, Human Rights Reports Series, 2001. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/6theng.pdf>. [Accessed 19th October 2016], p.2.

⁶⁵ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.759.

⁶⁶ SISK, Timothy D., *Statebuilding: Consolidating Peace after Civil War*, (Cambridge, Polity Press), 2013, p.106.

cooperatives' were established as a way of developing and regulating self-defence groups, and formally establish their 'right' to protect their property and families against insurgents and criminals.⁶⁷ Yet accusations that CONVIVIR was a convenient front for the ACCU, allegations of human rights abuses, and perceptions that the scheme was a revival of the government's reviled counterinsurgency strategy from Colombia's 1950s civil war, meant that the programme was controversial from the start.⁶⁸ CONVIVIR seemed to give a legal basis to the paramilitaries' reign of terror in the Colombian countryside, where the definition of 'enemy of Colombia' had been expanded by unaccountable armed men to the point where virtually anyone active on the left of politics could be considered a legitimate target.⁶⁹

Yet when the courts and the government began to restrict CONVIVIR's freedom of action and prosecute paramilitary leaders, ranchers in the province of Cordoba wrote to the government defending the actions of the self-defence groups.⁷⁰ Colombian paramilitaries were ruthless in their methods but they remained popular, and they emerged in response to a real need for security.⁷¹ David Kowaleski argues that the widespread emergence of self-defence groups is because "citizens value order above other public goods", such as the rule of the law or the protection of human rights.⁷² In this interpretation, achieving security becomes the primary objective for any community, and where individuals believe that legal restrictions on the security services inhibit their effectiveness, self-defence groups and vigilantes emerge to 'do what is necessary'.

In Northern Ireland, Loyalist paramilitaries were officially proscribed, nor were there any CONVIVIR-like programmes to try and manage them. Unlike in Colombia, a large number of well-trained soldiers and police only had to cover a relatively small geographic area (in 1997 there was a total of over 30,000 soldiers and policemen in a province that is only three times the size of Prince Edward Island), but the highly urban nature of the conflict meant that there were nonetheless

⁶⁷ ROMERO, p.179.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.179.

⁶⁹ "'The Sixth Division' Military-paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia", *Human Rights Watch*, Human Rights Reports Series, 2001. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/6theng.pdf>, [Accessed 19th October 2016], p.4.

⁷⁰ ROMERO p.199.

⁷¹ SIMONS, Geoff, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, (London, SAQI), 2004, p.10.

⁷² KOWALEWSKI, David, "Counterinsurgent Paramilitarism: A Philippine Case Study", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 1992), p.72.

distinct pockets of towns and cities, particularly in Belfast and Londonderry, which were unsafe for the respective members of the two communities there.⁷³ The British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary appeared reluctant to prevent the paramilitaries from operating in these “no-go zones”, and many individuals within these forces were happy to allow the paramilitaries to take measures that they themselves were prevented by law from taking.⁷⁴ However ‘self-defence actions’ by Loyalist paramilitaries, justified in public statements as merely ‘reactive’, triggered violent responses by armed Republican groups, for whom armed Loyalist self-defence was merely the latest stage in a centuries-long campaign of anti-Catholic intimidation.⁷⁵

Indeed a historical experience of intercommunal or class-based violence appears to have been a catalyst for self-defence strategies in both Northern Ireland and in Colombia. Protestant violence against Catholics in Belfast and Londonderry goes back centuries. The paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force claims its heritage from a group of the same name that was active in the years before the First World War, whose stated objective was to pressure the British government into resisting Home Rule, by staging armed marches around northern Irish cities.⁷⁶ Ulster unionists have long reacted with fear at the prospect of losing their status as a privileged minority within Ireland, and later (as a majority) within Northern Ireland, periodically raising the spectre of ‘Rome Rule’ so as to catalyse Irish protestants into defending the union with Britain. Jeffrey Sluka even goes so far as to argue that the ‘Orange’ Northern Irish identity was forged in the sectarian violence of the English Civil War in the 1640s, with its government-supported pogroms against Catholics.⁷⁷

It is difficult to draw upon history to explain current events, indeed the elevated risk of making lazy deterministic statements can mean that such an approach is unwise. Yet historical experiences clearly do have a role to play in the formation of group identity, and give elites credible stories and national myths around which they can rally nationalist sentiment. One could argue, like Sluka, that the very essence of Ulster protestant nationalism has crystallised around a militantly defensive anti-Catholicism. This does not mean that Protestants and Catholics are history-bound to hate each

⁷³ TOOLIS, Kevin, “British troops in N. Ireland 1969 – 2007”, *The Daily Mirror*, 1st August 2007, Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/british-troops-in-n-ireland-1969-495279> , [Accessed 1st March 2017].

⁷⁴ SLUKA, p.131.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.133.

⁷⁶ KEE, Robert, “*The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism*”, (London, Penguin), 2001, p.485.

⁷⁷ SLUKA, p.134.

other, but it does complicate their reconciliation. In Colombia, paramilitary self-defence follows on from a history of community terror and death squadism dating back to *La Violencia* and beyond, and in the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s many commented on the role of a shared and “terrifying oral history” regarding inter-communal violence in motivating the formation of ethnic paramilitaries.⁷⁸ The notorious Chetniks of the Second World War served as a horrifying reminder of what the worst could be for civilians in the 1990s, and were a source of inspiration for the new paramilitaries.⁷⁹ The Chetniks continue to be regarded today by their respective communities as either national heroes or villains. Paramilitary self-defence is the armed expression of communitarianism; within a pluralistic system self defence groups form because of a collective consciousness or memory within certain segments of a population, and act as a kind of armed and defensive member of civil society.

Yet the formation of self-defence groups appears to be a self-defeating strategy, as the self-regulating nature of paramilitary groups, the vagueness of their objectives, and their tendency to provoke a spiral of violence (which we will analyse further in our third chapter) can end up disrupting the very security they seek to restore. Groups that begin by offering security to their community can become predatory over time, using violence against civilians or even becoming co-opted through collusion to engage in community-level state terror.⁸⁰ Other forms of community solidarity, as well as attempts to reduce inequality, may be more effective as self-defence mechanisms. Kofi Annan argued in 1999 that communitarian divisions are particularly dangerous when they match up with patterns of economic inequality.⁸¹ This was certainly the case in Northern Ireland and in Colombia. Although self-defence groups attempt to provide community security and in some sense represent an admirable form of self reliance, they can become easily and quickly criminalised, inflame pre-existing tensions, and aggravate social fractures.⁸² States would be wise to bear in mind that social and economic inequality can nonetheless become a security issue, and should refrain from allowing those voids of security in which self-defence groups emerge.

⁷⁸ POSEN, Barry R., “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict”, in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, (Princeton, N.J, Princeton University Press), 1993, p.113.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.113.

⁸⁰ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.758.

⁸¹ MURER, Jeffrey Stevenson, “Ethnic Conflict: An Overview of Analyzing and Framing Communal Conflicts From Comparative Perspectives”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:4, 561-580, (2012). p.571.

⁸² DCAF, 2015, p.19.

2.1.2 As an expression of elite power

Whereas Jentsch et al, as well as David Kowaleski, discuss some of the positive interpretations of paramilitarism, others, such as Mazzei, Mauricio Romero, and Sluka, argue that they are rarely genuinely grassroots organisations, but rather a form of reactionary class-based armed struggle, instigated by status quo elites to resist social and economic change. In these analyses, which tend to focus on landowner-dominated agrarian societies, paramilitaries are little more than private armies or bands of paid thugs, who may use the communitarian language of self-defence, but are in fact instruments of terror, designed to quell opposition to the incumbent establishment.

Romero argues that throughout Latin America, so-called self-defence groups are merely AstroTurf shells, products of landowners' fears that political changes created by a liberalising society threaten to destabilise their position through social mobility and the more equal redistribution of land and resources.⁸³ Indeed the long history of paramilitarism in Latin America may have been encouraged by the model of land use there. In contrast to North America, where following colonisation new lands were opened up to any person willing to purchase and develop them, in Latin America the older European model of land use prevailed, that of large landowners and serfdom.⁸⁴ Latin America's dominant land-use pattern is therefore founded on inequality, and class tensions have regularly generated violence of which paramilitarism is but the tangible expression.

The elitism of paramilitaries seems to have been a particularly prevalent theme during discussions of PSPs during the 1980s and 1990s, which is perhaps understandable considering the wave of upheaval in South America during this time, as military juntas haltingly gave way to democratic systems, encouraging both progressive and reactionary movements. Indeed, in Kowaleski's definition of paramilitarism, as being "the mobilisation of private citizens to protect the established order against deviance", elitism is at the very core of PSPs' reason for being.⁸⁵ Similarly, Mazzei argues that in contrast to insurgent groups, who in Mao Tse Tung's famous dictum must "swim in the sea of the people", paramilitary groups act independently of the population and only require

⁸³ ROMERO, p.180.

⁸⁴ MARSHALL, Tim, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten maps that tell you all you need to know about global politics*, (London: Elliot and Thompson), 2015, p.236.

⁸⁵ KOWALEWSKI, David, "Counterinsurgent Paramilitarism: A Philippine Case Study", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 1992), p.71.

support from a small number of well placed individuals within the dominant regime in order to survive.⁸⁶ This complex interplay between community support and the instrumentalisation by elites is a subject worthy of further research in its own right. Conflict and social change can be threatening to both elites and to any sector of society that feels it risks ‘losing out’. Our understanding of who belongs to the ‘elite’ is also open to question, and we should be aware that this word has long been used as a term of abuse by those who wish to alter the current balance of power in a society, thus becoming the status quo elites themselves. It can seem that the word ‘elite’ is applied to any group or individual with access to a certain amount of resources and who subsequently have something to lose.

This idea is encapsulated by the “divided elite” theory, whereby a social opening precipitated by shifts within a society offer previously neglected actors the chance to change their social position through an alliance with a pre-existing faction of the current elite.⁸⁷ Factions of society, threatened by these changes, but prevented by legal or other mechanisms from using the state security apparatus to ensure their position, turn instead to non-state violence. In Mazzei’s reading, paramilitarism therefore springs from the tensions between reformers and hardliners in a society.⁸⁸ Romero argues that during *La Violencia* in Colombia, this tension between the two sides of a divided elite was expressed in the conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties, whereby an existential fear of what dominance by the ‘other’ elite would look like led to gruesome levels of deliberately shocking violence by paramilitaries against civilians.⁸⁹ In cases like these, the State, control of which may itself be divided between different factions of the elite, is either unable or unwilling to effectively prevent such violence. Yet, although support of paramilitaries is a self-defeating strategy for elites, as long-term conflict is rarely beneficial to anyone, some form of collusion, whether formal or informal, appears to be essential for the sustained existence of PSP groups. Elements within the state assist PSPs as a way of taking matters into their own hands. This is collusion. Such collusion is often at its most explicit in the state-PSP partnerships developed for the purpose of counterinsurgency warfare.

⁸⁶ MAZZEI, p.12.

⁸⁷ MAZZEI, p.11.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.22.

⁸⁹ ROMERO, p.180.

2.1.3 As part of COIN

Paramilitary forces have long played a significant part in counterinsurgency operations. In Frank Kitson's seminal work on the topic, *Low Intensity Operations*, he advises military commanders to utilise "locally raised forces", "home guards", and "counter-gangs" to supplement the army's work, a tactic which he drew upon extensively during his experiences combating the Mau-Mau Rebellion in Kenya, where he observed the decisive role of the Kikuyu militia in fighting the rebels.⁹⁰ ⁹¹ The employment of local militias and irregular forces was a classic tactic of colonial COIN warfare. The British made extensive use of them throughout their empire, for example in Palestine, Kenya, and Malaya, whilst the French were helped, during the Algerian War of Independence, by local militias such as the Muslim *Harki*.⁹² Paramilitaries are perceived as a useful ally in COIN operations because they provide a supply of a particularly valuable resource, local knowledge. During the wars of decolonisation, and today in civil wars featuring some form of international military intervention, alliances with paramilitaries are a useful way of "bolting on" situational awareness, local customs, and the ability to communicate with local people.⁹³ For this reason, alliances with paramilitaries have proved to be equally useful even in the context of non-internationalised or non-colonial civil wars, especially in large or culturally diverse countries, where soldiers from other areas may be almost as ignorant of local realities as they might be of those abroad. The British Army in Northern Ireland for example, foreigners in their own country, struggled at first to understand the situation in Belfast and Londonderry, contributing to the rapid alienation of local people there.

Paramilitaries are therefore perceived as being useful by conflict actors because they fulfill many of the ideal conditions for successful COIN. The US Army's Field Manual for COIN operations, FM3-24, demonstrates this, underlining the need for: good and up to date local knowledge; knowledge of the local language(s); community trust; links with community leaders; and the provision of security at the street level, i.e. that of the market square.⁹⁴ Pre-existing local self-

⁹⁰ KITSON, Frank, *Low intensity operations: subversion, insurgency, peace-keeping*, (London, Faber and Faber), 1971., p.31.

⁹¹ KITSON, Frank, *Gangs and Counter Gangs*, (London, Barrie & Rockcliffe), 1960.

⁹² HUGHES, Geraint, "Militias in internal warfare: From the colonial era to the contemporary Middle East", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27:2, 196-225, 2016, p.201

⁹³ HUGHES, p.198.

⁹⁴ US ARMY, "FM3-24: Counterinsurgency", Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006.

defence units are the very embodiment, (in theory at least), of these needs, and can be deployed much more rapidly and cheaply than regular forces, who take time to organise, brief, and acclimatise.⁹⁵ Additionally, by existing outside of the formal military structure, their freedom of action is less inhibited and they can provide a useful fig leaf of plausible deniability for ‘dirty’ operations.⁹⁶ In short, they can provide for a state and its armed forces a convenient way of ‘getting things done’ with minimal fuss and low financial cost. It is no wonder therefore that guides to counterinsurgency, from Kitson to Kilcullen, and from *Regulations for Counter guerrilla Combat*⁹⁷ (issued by US forces to their Colombian counterparts), to the field manuals FM3-24 and FM31-20-3,⁹⁸ have all encouraged practitioners of COIN to develop links with local non-state forces.

Yet although PSPs may at first appear to be an attractive and inexpensive force multiplier, their tendency to make liberal use of extralegal tactics means that they are a self-defeating strategy for COIN. Ultimately, COIN is only partly about the use of armed force. Successful COIN depends on the construction of good, durable, institutions, and the creation of credible paths towards social trust and prosperity. As we shall explore later, although alliances with PSPs can help achieve short terms goals, their proliferation can very quickly become a problem, as a multiplicity of non-state armed actors, each with their own objectives, prejudices, and reasons for being, can quickly challenge the legitimacy of the state itself. Unchecked and brutal violence against civilians erodes trust, creates health and social problems, and tears at the very fabric of a society. The scars of any conflict take a long time to heal, but the suspicion and hatred generated by paramilitary violence and collusion (real or suspected) can become a chronic problem for a post-conflict society.

These social divisions are arguably the principal enemy of a successful counterinsurgency campaign. David Kilcullen argues that the objective of COIN is to construct a rival, more attractive

⁹⁵ CAREY, Sabine; MITCHELL, Neil, “Pro-Government Militias, Human Rights Abuses and the Ambiguous Role of Foreign Aid” *German Development Institute, Briefing Paper Series*, April 2016, p.5.

⁹⁶ MALYARENKO, Tetyana, & GALBREATH, David J., “Paramilitary Motivation in Ukraine: Beyond Integration and Abolition”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 16 (1), 113–138 (2016), p.115.

⁹⁷ “‘The Sixth Division’ Military-paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia”, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Reports Series, 2001. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/6theng.pdf> , [Accessed 19th October 2016].

⁹⁸ WIKILEAKS, “FM 31.20-3: US Special Forces Foreign Internal Defense Tactics Techniques and Procedures for Special Forces”, *US Army*, 2003, Available at: https://wikileaks.org/wiki/US_Special_Forces_counterinsurgency_manual_FM_31-20-3 , [Accessed 1st March 2017].

narrative than that of the insurgents.⁹⁹ But for this narrative to take root, it must bring as much of the population on board as possible. Practitioners of COIN have long known that ‘winning hearts and minds’ is a crucial component of sucking away support from insurgent groups, yet in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Iraq, the partisan and brutal nature of paramilitary groups drove even more people into the arms of insurgents, prolonging the conflicts, and hardening social divisions.¹⁰⁰ Conversely, there is some evidence from the recent coalition wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that local tribal or clan-based paramilitary groups were more effective in protecting local communities from insurgents than were coalition troops.¹⁰¹ Local knowledge and an ability to develop links with the local population more easily than the ‘foreign occupier’ may have contributed to their success. Yet more recent evidence from Iraq, where Shia militias have been crucial in the retaking of cities back from Daesh, amply illustrates the pitfalls of PSP deployment. Hashd groups ran amok in Fallujah after its recapture, and were accused of indiscriminately attacking the Sunni civilian population, leading the Iraqi government to more strictly delimit their areas of operation during the subsequent assault on Mosul.^{102 103} Furthermore, Jessica Stanton found that, in a study of civil conflicts between 1989 and 2010, 35% of COIN-type civil wars involved PSP violence against civilians.¹⁰⁴ During the Guatemalan Civil War (1960 – 1996) it was estimated that the *autodefensas* were responsible for 18% of the total recorded human rights violations¹⁰⁵ The conclusion that we can draw from these studies is that PSP violence against civilians is very common. However, it also demonstrates that is not inevitable.

If insurgents operate in Mao’s ‘sea of the people’, then it is logical that in order to defeat them, practitioners of COIN must also do combat in what Max Manwaring calls the “psychological” or “human” theatre of war.¹⁰⁶ PSPs, as self defence and as intelligence, are in some ways very well

⁹⁹ KILCULLEN, 2010, p.42.

¹⁰⁰ MALYARENKO, GALBREATH, p.115.

¹⁰¹ HUGHES, p.200.

¹⁰² KHEDERY, Ali, “Iran’s Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq”, Foreign Policy, 19th February 2015, Available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/19/irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq/>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

¹⁰³ AL-JAZEERA NEWS, “Can Shia militias be integrated into the Iraqi army?”, Inside Story, 28th July 2016, Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2016/07/shia-militias-integrated-iraqi-army-160728180931271.html>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

¹⁰⁴ STANTON, Jessica A., Regulating Militias: Governments, Militias, and Civilian Targeting in Civil War, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2015, Vol. 59(5), p.908.

¹⁰⁵ SLUKA, p.235.

¹⁰⁶ MANWARING, p.57.

suited to this type of combat. Yet they are often imbued with the same social, ethnic, or political prejudices that shape their host conflict. This makes them useful in some respects but also potentially very dangerous. A possible conclusion that we could reasonably draw from these apparently contradictory circumstances is not that states should completely ignore the very real advantages that PSPs present, but rather that their deployment should be carefully circumscribed, and their activities overseen and integrated within formal military structures as much as possible. Colombia's experience of such a strategy is enlightening however: President Uribe's 'democratic security' approach only began to successfully decrease rates of murder and violence when the focus moved away from systematic collusion with paramilitaries (denied but widely practised) and instead focused on their demobilisation and replacement by regular troops, who were deployed as widely as possible throughout the towns and villages affected by the ongoing conflict.¹⁰⁷ ¹⁰⁸ Even if collusion can have short term advantages, in the long term PSPs are not worth the bother.

2.1.4 As part of COIN II: Death Squads

Before we move on to a more in-depth discussion of the reasons why states collude with PSPs, it is worth lingering on one final manifestation of organised paramilitary violence: the death squad. Although relatively widely studied compared to PSPs more broadly, they are generally studied as a standalone phenomenon, and are rarely considered within the literature as being part of a broader group-type. In some studies, the term 'death squad' is misleadingly used as a direct synonym for what this essay describes as PSPs. These analyses do not always effectively distinguish between state and non-state groups. For instance, Sluka's anthology on the subject, simply titled *Death Squad*, categorises all Northern Irish Loyalist paramilitaries as death squads, thus placing them alongside the Argentinian 'Special Task Forces' with their state-sponsored programme of 'disappearing' enemies of the government, as well as the military *genocidaires* of Indonesia.¹⁰⁹ This essay argues instead that (non-state) death squads are a specific subcategory of PSPs.

To put it simply, not all paramilitary groups are death squads, and not all death squads are paramilitary. However, confusion arises because death squadism is probably the aspect of

¹⁰⁷ HANSON, Heather; PENNA, Rogers Romero, "The Failure of Colombia's "Democratic Security", NACLA, Available at <https://nacla.org/article/failure-colombias-democratic-security>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

¹⁰⁸ "Dystopia disarmed? Colombia's paramilitary demobilisation", *The Economist*, Vol. 373 (8404), 55–38 (2004).

¹⁰⁹ SLUKA.

paramilitarism that is most associated with state collusion. In reality, it may be difficult to distinguish between non-state death squads operating in collusion with the state, and those death squads which are directly employed by the state. As far as their victims are concerned the difference is admittedly rather irrelevant. Yet for our study of non-state pro-state violence the distinction is worth bearing in mind, as paramilitary violence remains more destabilising than state violence, as we shall explore further later. Sluka, in his desire to highlight collusion in Northern Ireland, muddies the water by failing to distinguish between state terror as practised by the state, and non-state violence which may nonetheless serve the purposes of the state.

Even so, death squads generally have some form of relationship with the state, whether this be through formal collaboration or collusion. The tactics of death squads are similar to those of state terror, employing disappearances, assassination, massacres, and gruesome tableaux of violence in order to terrorise and silence a given population.¹¹⁰ The methods of death squads can resemble those of terrorist groups, but their objective, as with all PSPs, is not to overthrow the state, but to defend the status quo. They are arguably a tool of counterinsurgency warfare in conflicts where the objective of winning hearts and minds loses out to a doctrine of COIN which aims to brutalise a population as a way of maintaining control and sap support for rebels.¹¹¹ They are useful for this particular kind of ‘dirty war’ because their tactics are outside of what legal boundaries on state violence usually permit. Common targets for death squads include opposition leaders, journalists unfriendly to the ruling authority, suspected rebels or rebel-sympathisers, and leading members of rival ethnic or political groups.¹¹² During the Mau-Mau Rebellion, British Kenya’s co-option of local Kikuyu militias had the explicit aim of repressing the dissident population by deploying levels terroristic violence that the British Armed Forces could not be legally permitted to.¹¹³

Bruce Campbell takes a structuralist approach to the death squad problem, arguing that their very nature guarantees that they will pose problems for a society further down the line. As informal, extra-legal, and covert organisations, the state must take steps to shield them from prosecution if

¹¹⁰ CAMPBELL, Bruce, & BRENNER, Arthur D., eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, (London, Palgrave Macmillan), 2002, p.4.

¹¹¹ ROMERO, p.179.

¹¹² CAMPBELL & BRENNER, p.6.

¹¹³ SABINE, CAREY & MITCHELL, 2016, p.15.

they wish death squads to do their tasks (i.e. killing) for them. But this freedom from prosecution, coupled with their independence from the state makes it likely that such groups will continue to use violence to achieve their own aims. They rarely settle for being mere obedient agents of the government.¹¹⁴ Collusion weakens the taboo on extra-judicial violence, which like the apocryphal genie is difficult to put back into the bottle. We only have to look at Latin America, where death squads have emerged across the region, to see how a historical experience of this particular type of brutality against civilians leaves a distinct mark on the consciousness of a society, and leaves the door open to the repetition of similar tactics in the future. Although unchecked violence is typical of PSP behaviour, death squadism is characterised by an especially gruesome and terrifying type of brutality, one in which victims are dehumanised and in which their suffering is purposely instrumentalised as a warning to others. The appearance of death squads should act as a kind of alarm bell for a society: it is a sign that the normal rules of human interaction and the taboos against violence are crumbling. It should not surprise us that many of the worst atrocities against mankind, both in the modern period and historically, have been undertaken by death squads.

The recurrent apparition of death squads in conflicts is an all-too-real demonstration of the grim reality that explicit brutality has frequently been favoured as a tactic of COIN. They exist at the murkier end of the spectrum of tools available to fight “dirty” wars. Death Squadism exists both in wars where paramilitaries operate independently from the state, as well as in those wars where the state actively subtracts tasks out to them. Indeed, their widespread recurrence, and the tendency for paramilitary groups formed for other purposes (such as for self-defence) to adopt death squad-like tactics over time is an excellent argument against the use of PSPs in conflict.

2.2 Why do states collude with paramilitaries?

Despite being less than ideal partners, the decision to collaborate with paramilitary groups is often no real choice at all, but rather is perceived as being an essential first step towards restoring security: a response to a need for an armed presence in a given territory. There is an established, if debated, correlation between the weakness of a state and the incidence of civil war, which should

¹¹⁴ CAMPBELL & BRENNER, p.6.

illustrate to us the reasons why a state may feel forced to seek alliances with non-state forces.¹¹⁵ Other factors are important too. As Geraint Hughes argues, the current western model of small, professional, increasingly transparent, accountable and casualty-averse armies means that there is more incentive than ever to deploy these cheap and brutally effective local units, rather than risk their own troops.¹¹⁶ Other analysts, such as Bruce Campbell, point to the increased vigilance of international organisations and NGOs as a reason for the growing place of paramilitaries in conflict.¹¹⁷ States, conscious of international scrutiny and dependent on their reputation for the continued provision of aid and assistance surreptitiously contract out violence to third parties in order to preserve a veneer of plausible deniability. In these cases, co-operation is not openly justified for reasons of security, but rather takes a much more insidious form, that of collusion. Collusion is often born out of frustration on the part of individuals or groups within the state structure, who may feel that their hands are tied by red tape or by political considerations. This was certainly true in the Northern Irish and Colombian conflicts, where active service personnel were in direct contact with their paramilitary counterparts, or were indeed members of them.^{118 119}

In Northern Ireland various murals attest to the wide suspicion that the Loyalist UFF and UVF were composed of members of the local British Army regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment (now part of the Royal Irish Regiment), or even MI5, and that the latter were the principal source of arms for the paramilitaries. Government documents, declassified in 2006, suggest that in the early 1970s up to 15% of the UDR's personnel were also members of paramilitary organisations, and also illustrate that British ministers were well aware of the levels of collusion despite publicly denying it.¹²⁰ This dual membership was particularly worrying for the British Army's ability to guarantee the peace in Northern Ireland considering the death squad-like tactics favoured by UVF and UFF in this period. Paramilitaries would allegedly knock on doors in catholic areas and kill the first person to respond.¹²¹ Loyalist magazines openly called upon the paramilitaries to use "all

¹¹⁵ GURSES, Mehmet, & MASON, T. David, "Weak States, Regime Types, and Civil War", *Civil Wars*, Vol. 12 (1-2), 140–155, (2010), p.141.

¹¹⁶ HUGHES, p.98.

¹¹⁷ BRENNER & CAMPBELL, p.13.

¹¹⁸ SLUKA, p.142.

¹¹⁹ ROMERO, p.191.

¹²⁰ BOWCOTT, Owen, "Ministers aware of UDR links with loyalists, archives show", *The Guardian*, 4th May 2006, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/may/04/northernireland.northernireland>, [Accessed 1st March 2017].

¹²¹ SLUKA, p.138.

the horrors of terrorist warfare”, and these groups took it upon themselves to terrify the local Catholic population through a campaign of indiscriminate violence.¹²²

Collusion in this context only aggravated the spiral of violence, as any individual associated with the security services became a legitimate target for the IRA.¹²³ A trickle of official and unofficial reports in the years following the peace process, (such as the De Silva Report, published in 2012), gave credence to what was widely suspected during the conflict; that elements within the British forces were leaking intelligence to the paramilitaries, or even in some cases preparing ‘kill-lists’ for them to act upon.¹²⁴ Although for much of the conflict collusion was unconfirmed, the mere assumption of its existence damaged Catholics’ trust in the government and security services. This not only undermined the state’s efforts to keep the peace, it also damaged the effectiveness of the British counterinsurgency effort. A significant enough portion of the catholic population became prepared to conceal or cover up for republican insurgents that policing was hampered. Each atrocity drove more of the republican population into the insurgents’ arms.

Although death squadism was not representative of Loyalist paramilitary activities across the entirety of the conflict, it only took a relatively few examples of such an approach to drive a fatal wedge between the two communities. In Northern Ireland as much as anywhere, evidence of collusion is a propaganda gift to insurgent groups and is a fantastic recruitment tool, as some studies of insurgency participation and state repression have demonstrated.¹²⁵ Collusion damaged trust in the state to such an extent that it will take decades for Northern Irish Catholics to have confidence in their government, and almost certainly worsened and prolonged the conflict. As a tactic of COIN in Northern Ireland, collusion with PSPs was almost entirely counter-productive.

In Colombia, collusion between the state and paramilitaries was so widespread that a 2001 Human Rights Watch Report on the conflict describes paramilitary groups as being the “Sixth Division”

¹²² Ibid, p.135.

¹²³ CADWALLADER, p.16.

¹²⁴ WARE, John, “De Silva report on Finucane case turns spotlight on MI5”, *BBC News*, 13th November 2012, Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-20708070>, [Accessed 1st March 2017].

¹²⁵ TEZCUR, Gunes Murat, “Ordinary People, Extraordinary Risks: Participation in an Ethnic Rebellion”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 110, No. 2, May 2016, p.256.

of the Colombian Armed Forces. An excerpt from the report illustrates the extent to which collusion was embedded into the conflict, as well as the palpable horror of ordinary Colombians:

“For many Colombians, the existence of a “sixth division” translates into a daily terror that is impossible to evoke in these pages. Heavily armed paramilitaries move virtually unimpeded, captured paramilitary leaders elude detention with ease, and government forces make no more than token efforts to pursue or capture paramilitaries even when they are in major cities, footsteps away from military or police bases, and engaged in macabre caravans of death. Soldiers even tell civilians that paramilitaries will follow in their wake, prompting panic and forced displacement. Witnesses brave enough to testify about the “sixth division” and its links to the security forces are threatened or murdered with numbing precision.”¹²⁶

The most shockingly brazen example of collusion during the Colombian conflict was the Massacre of Mapiripan, a five day-long paramilitary operation, during the course of which around 50 people suspected of being rebel sympathisers were kidnapped, murdered, dismembered, and thrown into the river. Later trials found that the army had actively co-ordinated and planned the massacre alongside the AUC, and that local army commanders refused to intervene despite repeated requests for assistance by local people.¹²⁷ The same HRW report suggests that the army’s actions during the massacre were indicative of a longstanding and deep-rooted relationship, in which the security forces and the paramilitaries shared equipment, intelligence, personnel, shelter, vehicles, and even pay.¹²⁸ Whilst such a close collaboration may make short-term sense to local military commanders, this kind of collusion is largely ineffective in bringing conflict to an end, deepening as it does the fractures within a society, and contributing to the spiral of violence. Collusion did nothing to shorten the conflict in Colombia. Indeed rates of murder increased in the 1990s and early 2000s, the period most associated with state-paramilitary co-operation.¹²⁹ Paramilitary violence reached unprecedented levels following President Uribe’s alignment with George W. Bush’s “War on Terror”, a context in which the security forces were encouraged to use any means to defeat the insurgents.¹³⁰ It is telling that an end to the conflict in Colombia only became imaginable once the government changed tack and began a programme of demobilisation for paramilitary fighters.

¹²⁶ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2001 p.2.

¹²⁷ “Former Colombian general jailed for role in Mapiripán massacre”, *The Guardian*, 26th November 2009, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/26/former-colombian-general-jailed-massacre>, [Accessed 1st March 2017].

¹²⁸ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2001, p.1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.4

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.4.

Negotiated settlements with the FARC and the ELN did not make significant progress until it became clear that the state had withdrawn its support for the paramilitaries.

Even where state security forces play no part in the direct violence perpetrated by PSPs, other forms of collusion can be just as corrosive. Until 2001 the very existence of paramilitary groups in Colombia was not widely admitted by officials.¹³¹ In Northern Ireland, the RUC systematically failed to take prosecution of Loyalists seriously, arguing that since the paramilitaries were merely “reactive”, their time was much better spent investigating republican violence. Needless to say this policy only served to increase the impression that the RUC was biased against the catholic community. In Colombia, the “*parapolitica*” scandal highlighted the extent to which members of the paramilitaries benefited from extensive links to a considerable number of Colombia’s political elite.¹³² In the Balkans, governments have long dragged their feet on the issue of prosecution of war crimes by paramilitary leaders during the conflicts in the 1990s. Condemnations of paramilitary violence from within the respective ethnic groups continues to be lukewarm, and in some cases ex-paras are still feted as national heroes.¹³³ In the Balkan states, a positive interpretation of collusion has become embedded into national founding myths.

Yet the prevalence of collusion in conflicts involving paramilitary forces should not lead us to believe that for the purposes of conflict studies PSPs can be safely categorised as mere extensions of the state. Indeed, as Corinna Jentsch argues, “a state’s strategic collaboration with or tolerance of militias does not mean that it necessarily has complete control over their formation and activities” and warns that “even in cases in which states impose or co-opt militias and influence their activities, these groups may evolve into forces with their own goals and interests.”¹³⁴ In order to avoid further destabilising conflict by encouraging the emergence of additional actors, states seeking to bolster their security forces with improved ground knowledge and the credibility that having locally-sourced personnel brings should instead seek to recruit locals directly into their ranks.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.1.

¹³² BRODZINSKY, Sibylla, “Colombia's 'parapolitics' scandal casts shadow over president”, *The Guardian*, 23RD April 2008, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/23/colombia>, [Accessed 1st March 2017].

¹³³ VIVOD, Maria, “In the Shadow of the Serbian Paramilitary Units: Narrative Patterns about the Role of Paramilitary Units in Former Yugoslav Conflict”, *Advances in Anthropology*, Vol.3, No.1, 23-32, 2013, p.25.

¹³⁴ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.759.

Chapter 3: Why PSPs worsen violence and make conflicts harder to resolve

The last chapter analysed the roles that PSPs play and the reasons why collusion with them is so prevalent in conflict. We now turn to their impacts on the conflicts themselves. Where PSPs are a factor, violence becomes more brutal and more widespread, and it becomes self-perpetuating through cycles of radicalisation. PSPs make conflict resolution harder by increasing the number of actors, and they contribute to the hardening of attitudes on all sides, making common ground hard to find. Finally, although they can participate in peace processes, there are structural reasons why PSPs are unlikely to make positive contributions to the peaceful conclusion of conflict.

3.1 Violence

This section will explore the relationships between paramilitaries and the types and prevalence of violence used in civil conflicts. A state that colludes with PSPs is in theory a state that is trying to restore security. Yet in many civil wars the emergence and proliferation of paramilitaries is associated with increased violence and worsened security. PSPs aggravate the level of violence in conflict. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, paramilitary forces by their very nature tend to favour a particularly brutal and violent type of warfare. Secondly, the emergence of PSPs is both a cause and a symptom of a proliferation of generalised violence within a society; the ‘ubiquity of violence’. And thirdly, PSPs complicate the dynamics of violence within a conflict, adding new armed actors and splinter groups and by involving new grievances, local conflicts, and grudges.

Furthermore, the emergence of PSPs is related not only to an increase in violence overall, but also an increase in the level of violence against citizens. As community-based groups operating at the street level, PSPs normally have an increased local knowledge when compared to the regular army. Grievances can therefore become extremely localised, and as Stathis Kalyvas excellently illustrates in *The Ontology of Political Violence*, the macro conflict can be exploited to justify the violent resolution of all manner of local conflicts and vendettas.¹³⁵ In this context, civilians can easily become legitimate targets in the eyes of paramilitaries. As Carlos Castano, the head of the

¹³⁵ KALYVAS, 2003, p.475.

Colombian ACCU in 1996, put it: “In war, the term unarmed civilian is relative. Two thirds of the Guerillas are unarmed members who operate as civilians and collaborate with the Guerillas.”¹³⁶ By targeting civilians, paramilitaries aggravate their integration into conflict, both as victims and as participants. In such a context, non-participation becomes dangerous, even impossible. In an article written for *The Guardian* by Martin Chulov, Sunni residents of Buquba, Iraq, describe Shia Militias and Daesh as being equally terrifying options for them in a war in which each side will expect their loyalty.¹³⁷ States, having outsourced military tasks to PSPs, quickly lose control of the limits of this violence, violence which inevitably becomes more brutal, endemic, and complex.

3.1.1 Brutality

Firstly, as we have seen, paramilitaries often favour tactics which are inherently brutal or even terroristic. The use of torture, assassination, random killings, and massacres naturally increases the intensity of violence within a conflict and furthermore these tactics can provoke a response in kind from enemy actors, generating a spiral of ever more brutal violence. Brutality is a defining characteristic of unchecked paramilitary violence in conflicts the world over, with paramilitary groups often responsible for the most egregious acts of violence in civil conflicts. A German Development Institute briefing paper on Pro-Government Militias, published in 2016, argues that their presence in a conflict zone “substantially increases the risks for civilians, as the activities of such pro-government militias are usually accompanied by a higher level of human rights violations, including killings, torture and disappearances.”¹³⁸ In Syria, Shabiha militias have been accused of drive-by shootings and of sectarian massacres in Sunni villages.¹³⁹ During the Balkans conflicts it was Chetnik groups such as the White Eagles and Arkan’s Tigers that were responsible for much of the worst acts of ethnic cleansing, including participating in the genocide at Srebrenica.¹⁴⁰ Paramilitary death squads have been a fact of life across Latin America for much of the twentieth century, with massacres of civilians from Bolivia to Guatemala attributed to them.

¹³⁶ ROMERO, p.199.

¹³⁷ CHULOV, Martin, “Iraqis caught in a state of fear between Isis and Shia militias”, *The Guardian*, 29th June 2014, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/29/iraq-isis-shia-militias-baquba-baghdad>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

¹³⁸ CAREY, Sabine; MITCHELL, Neil, “Pro-Government Militias, Human Rights Abuses and the Ambiguous Role of Foreign Aid” German Development Institute, Briefing Paper Series, April 2016.

¹³⁹ BBC NEWS, “Syria unrest: Who are the shabiha?”, 29th May 2012, Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14482968>, [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

¹⁴⁰ LUPIS, Ivan. "Human Rights Abuses in the Wake of the Collapse of the United Nations - Designated Safe Area of Srebrenica and the International Community." *Helsinki Monitor*, 7.1, 65-72, (1996), p.71.

Why paramilitary groups tend to deploy particularly brutal methods has not been fully established. Jessica Stanton argues that paramilitary violence occurs only when the state encourages it. This ‘death squad’ theory holds that paramilitary forces are inherently violent because they are the embodiment of a state’s desire to exact violence against citizens. She cites the example of Sudan, where the Janjaweed and the Army worked hand in glove to carry out massacres of civilians, and where the former would receive airdrops from the latter before moving into an area to commit atrocities.¹⁴¹ Yet this explanation falls back on the assumption that PSPs are an extension of the state, with little to no agency of their own, and fails to account for those numerous conflicts where states actively try to combat PSPs. It does not acknowledge that collusion often occurs *despite* state policy, and is not necessarily a product of it. As we have already discussed, the relationship between PSPs and the state is complex. They are potential allies, but far from loyal to each other.

Another theory as to why paramilitaries favour brutality as a method derives from the motivations of the men who make up the ranks of the PSPs themselves. As we have discussed, paramilitary groups are frequently a feature of counterinsurgency warfare, a conflict type whose nickname, “dirty war”, already betrays a reputation for undisciplined violence and violations of human rights. PSPs tend to have a high number of current or ex-service personnel in their ranks, whose reasons for joining a paramilitary group may be partly born of frustration at the legal limits imposed on the security services.¹⁴² For them, the ability to use unrestrained violence to do ‘what is necessary’ is a crucial part of why they join in the first place. Such a motivation does not lend itself to personal or group restraint. Since COIN is inherently a type of conflict that takes place off the battlefield and amongst the population, civilians are thrust onto the front line and are therefore vulnerable. PSPs who see the conflict in communitarian terms are liable to divide the population into ‘us’ and ‘them’, a frame that is toxic for those people who find themselves on the wrong side.

Furthermore, another major component of PSP membership is people with a criminal record.¹⁴³ In the Balkans, men were recruited directly from prisons, and were apparently motivated by the

¹⁴¹ STANTON, p.900.

¹⁴² ROMERO, p.182.

¹⁴³ SANÍN, p.14.

promise of booty and the opportunity to settle personal scores with few consequences.¹⁴⁴ Often also members of football hooligan firms (something that the Balkan paramilitaries have in common with those of Northern Ireland), common characteristics of these men were said to be: “racist attitudes, a proclivity for extreme right-wing politics, a capacity to imbibe a huge amount of liquor, a strident and vicious boorishness, a deep need for camaraderie and for being accepted by “the lads”, and an affinity for, even a lusting after, the thrill of violence.”¹⁴⁵ In Colombia, the line between the paramilitaries and the Narcos is so fine as to barely exist, and in any case for the people of Colombia the difference is mostly academic, as both frequently use terroristic violence to achieve their goals. Such men, inclined to violence in peacetime, once thrust into the context of COIN warfare have no particular reason to hold back and need little encouragement to embark upon orgies of violence. Given some power and the legitimacy of the state’s blessing (real or perceived), criminal groups can quickly drag a large number of people along with them into violence. Mueller describes how, during the Balkan conflict, “a mass of essentially mild, ordinary people unwillingly and in considerable bewilderment [came] under the vicious and arbitrary control of small groups of armed thugs.”¹⁴⁶ Although war is not merely criminality writ large, studies of gang-led criminal violence outside of conflict may help us to understand better the drivers of paramilitary violence *in* conflict. Academics such as Mueller and Peter Andreas¹⁴⁷ are beginning to explore the relationships between peacetime violence and non-state violence in civil conflict; given the widespread nature of government collusion with paramilitaries in conflict, an interesting area for further research could be an examination of how and whether this collusion continues post-conflict, for example through relationships between criminal groups and states.

3.1.2 The ubiquity of violence

The second reason why the emergence of paramilitary groups worsens the level of violence is that it can favour the rise of an endemically violent society in which violence becomes the natural solution to any conflict. The ubiquity of violence within a society can have effects that are difficult to measure, but leaves its mark on the historical memory and culture of a nation, a factor which

¹⁴⁴ MUELLER, John, “The Banality of “Ethnic War””, *International Security*, Vol. 25 (1), 42–70 (2000), p.49.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.50.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.42.

¹⁴⁷ ANDREAS, Peter, “The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1), 29–52 (2004).

can hasten the emergence of inter-community security dilemmas and spirals of violence in future conflicts. This “myth-symbol complex” is particularly important in ethnic-type wars, where they both shape the actions of, and are instrumentalised by, community leaders to justify violence.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the experience of violence within a community may be felt in myriad ways other than through the direct violence of killings. Jean-Francois Ratelle’s work on the micro-dynamics of violence in the Caucasus reflects on the idea that *violences* are “eclectic”, but also banal and everyday. The securitisation of everyday life, the ubiquity of police and military forces, as well as the context of chronic inequality and marginalisation of certain groups, meant that the local population were living an experience of constant indirect violence.¹⁴⁹ When the state encourages or by omission allows paramilitaries to undertake security tasks, it loses control over the limits of the security context and consequently the regulating effect of legal structures on the use of violence is weakened. Their presence aggravates insecurity, and their partisan nature inspires terror.

In Geoff Simons’ history of Colombia, he recounts the story of a teacher who received death threats on his first day at work and who described leaving for work every morning wondering whether he would see his wife alive again.¹⁵⁰ Repeated across a village, community, or society, this kind of omnipresent terror has a corrosive effect on the social bonds and communal trust on which societies are built. If successful post conflict reconciliation partially depends on the reconstruction of the kind of “imagined communities” that Benedict Anderson argues is at the foundation of any nation,¹⁵¹ then the shattering of communities and the chronic mistrust that uncontrolled paramilitary violence engenders should be rejected as a completely counter-productive strategy.

3.1.3 Dynamics of violence and radicalisation

Thirdly, the emergence of a non-state pro-state actor complicates the dynamics of violence within a war, creating local sub-conflicts and encouraging vendettas between splinter groups who have to fight for resources and territory not only with their enemies in the macro-conflict but also with

¹⁴⁸ KAUFMAN, Chaim, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars”, *International Security*, Volume 20, Number 4, Spring 1996, pp. 136-175, p.51.

¹⁴⁹ RATELLE, Jean-François, “Making sense of violence in civil war: challenging academic narratives through political ethnography”, *Critical Studies on Security*, 1:2, 159-173, 2013, p.166.

¹⁵⁰ SIMONS, Geoff, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, (London, SAQI), 2004, p.10.

¹⁵¹ ANDERSON, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, (London, Verso), 2006, p.46.

‘competing’ like-minded groups.¹⁵² This expansion of violence is self-fulfilling. In much the same way as the experience of civil war makes civil war more likely in the future, so too does violence within a society lower the thresholds for the emergence of violence in the future.¹⁵³ If we push this comparison a little further we could argue that in addition to the “conflict trap”, there is also a “violence trap”. The use of paramilitaries should be avoided where possible because they are the very embodiment of the factors which make this trap so difficult to escape. Each new violent act within a conflict is a potential catalyst for the radicalisation and recruitment of new individuals into the ranks of the conflict’s actors, thus increasing the chances of further violence

This spiral of radicalisation is cogently illustrated by an *Extreme Dialogue* video about Billy McCurrie, a Northern Irish man whose father was killed by the IRA when he was young. This experience of personal tragedy, catalysed by the dominant rhetoric of his community at the time which encouraged him to seek revenge, led him to join the ranks of the Ulster Volunteer Force and to commit murder himself. Tellingly, when he applies to his local UVF Youth commander for the ‘opportunity’ to participate in a revenge killing, he is told that “there’s about fifty or sixty ahead of you, you’ll have to wait your turn.”¹⁵⁴ The cycle of paramilitary and Republican violence in Northern Ireland had made tit for tat killing endemic across both communities, thus creating a spiral of self-sustaining violence which fed off itself and encouraged each new generation to take up the fight. But there is nothing inevitable about this cycle. Catholic grievances in the 1960s could well have been addressed without violence had the government of the time been willing to listen. Yet a core of absolutists on each side, and a shared history of violence (ostentatiously memorialised during the July marching season), meant that militant armed groups on each side were able to draw off each other and radicalise elements of their communities with relative ease.

This cycle of violence became self-perpetuating, as any attempt by the dominant armed group of the time to step away from violence was undermined by the splintering off of more radical elements into rival groups. Thus the IRA spawned the Provisional IRA (PIRA), Official IRA (OIRA),

¹⁵² MALYARENKO & GALBREATH p.124

¹⁵³ BARBARA F. WALTER, Does Conflict Beget Conflict? Explaining Recurring Civil War, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 371-388, 2004, p.371.

¹⁵⁴ Extreme Dialogue, “Billy McCurrie”, Available at: <http://extremedialogue.org/billy-mccurrie/>. [Accessible 2nd March 2017].

Continuity IRA (CIRA), Real IRA (RIRA), Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH), and in 2011, a new group calling itself simply “The IRA”.¹⁵⁵ ¹⁵⁶ On the Loyalist side, there have been a number of competing paramilitary groups since the beginning of the troubles, with the Ulster Volunteer Force being an explicitly violent unit from its founding, seeing as its mission to hunt down members of the IRA, whereas the Ulster Defence Association was founded initially as a self-defence type organisation, rooted in the community.¹⁵⁷ The UDA however, also began a campaign of terroristic violence under the guise of the UFF, its armed wing, within a year of its creation.¹⁵⁸ Various points in the peace process begat new groups as radicals refused to lay down arms. The Red Hand Defenders, Ulster Resistance, the Orange Volunteers, Loyalist Volunteer Force, and the Real Ulster Freedom Fighters were created from former members of the older and larger UDA and UVF, and their respective factions, such as the Red Hand Commando (UVF), and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UDA)¹⁵⁹. Attacks between rival Loyalist groups have, and continue to be frequent, adding to the web of grudges and vendettas that drive much of the violence in the province.

In Colombia, a multitude of PSP groups have emerged, formed into coalitions, splintered, disappeared, and reformed, as the macro-conflict between the government and the left-wing insurgents has rumbled on. As in Northern Ireland, rivalries between PSPs have become a factor driving violence in addition to the violence they undertake against their stated enemies. The strategies of PSPs in both of these conflicts, as well as the wars’ *longue durée*, have contributed to the displacement of political moderates by hard-liners, and to the intensification of violence. The expansion of who is considered an enemy lies at the heart of the generalised violence that has characterised daily life in certain regions of Colombia for nearly forty years. As groups such as the AUC and ACCU evolved from their ostensible roots as *autodefensas* and towards active paramilitary participants in the conflict, their targets expanded to include almost anybody of a left-wing or pro-democratic bent. This included the political faction of the FARC, but also much of

¹⁵⁵ BREEN, Suzanne, “Former Provos claim Kerr murder and vow more attacks”, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 22nd April 2011, Available at: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/former-provos-claim-kerr-murder-and-vow-more-attacks-28610456.html> , [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

¹⁵⁶CAIN, “Loyalist and Republican Paramilitary Groups”, Available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary.htm> , [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

¹⁵⁷CAIN, “Abstracts on organisations,” Available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#uda> , [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹CAIN, “Loyalist and Republican Paramilitary Groups”, Available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary.htm> , [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

Colombian civil society, such as trades unions and activist groups.¹⁶⁰ A paramilitary campaign of murder and terror against these groups, emboldened by the government's COIN strategy, had the chilling effect of destroying or marginalising the moderate wings of the leftist movement, as it became too dangerous to be a mere FARC sympathiser.¹⁶¹ By attacking those who had the potential to moderate the actions of their allies, violence became the only way to defend oneself from violence. This is the crux of the violence trap, and has the additional effect of further hardening attitudes on each side. It embeds the use of violence within the overall conflict. In Colombia, Mauricio Romero argues that the government's collusion with paramilitaries "also sent a signal from the authorities that the use of violence as a means of resolving conflicts was legitimate."¹⁶² This has grave consequences for the prospects for conflict resolution.

3.2 PSPs and Conflict Resolution

States would be wise to avoid encouraging the presence of PSPs in conflict, because doing so makes wars harder to end. A growing body of research demonstrates that multitudes of actors increases conflict length and makes peace resolutions harder to achieve. David Cunningham, in his study of veto players and conflict duration, found a strong correlation between non-binary civil conflicts (i.e. conflicts with multiple competing actors) and increased civil war duration.¹⁶³ In his view, the expansion of the number of conflict actors shrinks the number of potential points of agreement, and increases the chances of a veto being wielded, thus preventing conclusion of an accord. States which actively encourage or at least permit paramilitary activity as part of conflict can find themselves, in the mediation stage, having not only to take account of the demands of rebel or insurgent groups but also those of the paramilitaries themselves. As we have seen, in conflicts where paramilitaries act independently of the state, PSPs and insurgent groups tend to become each other's principal enemies, a dangerous development which in conflicts like those of Colombia and Northern Ireland can provoke a perilous death spiral. Paramilitary atrocities encourage rebel recruitment, and rebel attacks provoke further paramilitary action.¹⁶⁴ States are then left with a chicken and egg problem of how to convince both to lay down their arms.

¹⁶⁰ SIMONS, p.10.

¹⁶¹ ROMERO, p.181.

¹⁶² Ibid, p.181.

¹⁶³ CUNNINGHAM, David E., "Veto Players and Civil War Duration", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50 (4), 875–892, (2006), p.875.

¹⁶⁴ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.760.

Although some states, such as Great Britain in the case of Northern Ireland, try and deal with this problem by presenting themselves as a neutral third party to rebel/PSP conflicts, the ubiquity of state collusion with paramilitaries presents a major challenge to the credibility of such an approach. Whilst Barbara Walter's study of civil war resolution suggests that the guarantor in peace treaties need not be a neutral player for peace to be successful, their commitment to the process needs to be credible.¹⁶⁵ A host state which has been tainted by paramilitary brutality through collusion is unlikely to inspire trust in rebel groups, and therefore the likelihood of the state being accepted for a mediation role is vanishingly low in the absence of credible measures to regain this trust. In Northern Ireland, state rejection of PSP violence was a necessary precondition for insurgents to believe they were acting in good faith. In Colombia, the state contributed to the demobilisation of PSPs, but the peace process was still dependent on the third-party mediation of Cuba.

However, states must proceed with caution if they are to keep everyone on board and moving forward with the peace process. The risk of rejection by both sides is high: they must work hard to convince rebels that they are negotiating in good faith, but at the same time avoid alienating PSPs. This is far from easy. When the Ukrainian state began to prosecute members of certain paramilitary groups for the various crimes they had committed, the members of these PSPs, which had been allied to the state during the conflict with pro-Russian insurgents, openly rebelled against the government, leading to a fresh wave of violence.¹⁶⁶ The Ukrainian PSP Right Sector refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Minsk II peace process and its leader, Dmytro Yarosh, declared publicly upon the peace accord's completion Right Sector's right to continue fighting.¹⁶⁷

Right Sector is not alone. Since paramilitary groups tend to take an even harder line towards rebels than does the state, their presence in the conflict can limit the government's room for manoeuvre. In the most severe cases, this can mean that the centre ground, where compromises can normally be found, shrivels to nothing, and peace negotiators find themselves of the unenviable task of

¹⁶⁵ WALTERS, Barbara, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement", *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 335-364, (Summer, 1997), p. 361.

¹⁶⁶ MALYARENKO & GALBREATH, p.124.

¹⁶⁷ LUHN, Alec, "Minsk ceasefire in balance as fighting escalates in eastern Ukraine", *The Guardian*, 13th February 2015, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/13/minsk-ceasefire-balance-fighting-eastern-ukraine>, [Accessed 2nd March 2017].

trying to find compromise between two absolutist positions. As in Colombia, where PSP targeting of almost anyone on the left drove the FARC towards a hardline position, in Northern Ireland the hardline DUP replaced the more moderate UUP as the principal unionist political party, and on the Republican side the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, replaced the centre-left nationalist SDLP. A pattern of mutual violence, and especially the increased targeting of civilians by both sides, drove both communities towards the support of hardliners, accelerating the cycle of violence and retribution. This pattern of violence, which legitimised the position of both protestant and catholic hardliners, complicated the peace process further down the line, as it was harder to find a resolution between the two extremes. It has also made the current unity government system, a product of the Good Friday Agreement, whereby the First Minister and Deputy First Minister must be drawn from parties representing the Protestant population and Catholic population respectively (or vice versa), very brittle. The first occupants of the posts, Ian Paisley and Adam McGuinness, were both active militants in the armed groups of their respective communities. Paramilitary violence upped the ante in the Northern Irish conflict, and established a context in which men with blood on their hands became legitimate representatives of their communities during the peace process. The conflict had hollowed out the centre ground to the point where nobody who had not been a militant could claim enough popular legitimacy to lead. It remains to be seen whether a political system dependent on the continued co-operation between enemies will be sustainable in the long term.

3.2.2 The dilemma of protection

Yet in theory the popular legitimacy that community-based PSPs such as the UDA enjoy should be an asset to peace processes, if they are able to avoid splits and successfully sell the idea of peace to their constituency. The leadership of PSPs can have outsized influence within their communities, and if their groups are sufficiently organised and disciplined then the groups themselves can play an important role in guaranteeing ceasefires and stability. It has often been observed of militant groups that they crave legitimacy, and by participating in peace processes in good faith, PSPs confirm their own importance to the conflict and see their positions being taken seriously.¹⁶⁸ Once involved, and having enjoyed the privileges that participation in political negotiations offers, they may prove less willing to jeopardise the process and their own position. One militant described how this influenced the UDA's reaction when the peace process was put in

¹⁶⁸ POWELL, Jonathan, *Talking to Terrorists: How to end armed conflicts*, (London: Random House), 2014, p.7.

peril by dissident republican attacks: “when there was no [Loyalist] violent response to the attacks in March, it sort of legitimised [our] organisation—we met with the Secretary of State, the DUP, there was lots of high-level and high profile interaction.”¹⁶⁹

Yet participation in such meetings poses a danger to these groups, as any suggestion that the leadership is ‘selling out’ its community or members can lead to internal coups or splits. Mitchell and Templer describe this as the “dilemma of protection”; paramilitary groups must continue to be seen to provide community-level protection, or be replaced by other, harder-line, individuals or groups.¹⁷⁰ PSP supporters may not tolerate inaction in the face of continued insurgent attacks. If paramilitary groups lose this support and are replaced by other groups then the utility of their presence in conflict negotiations is open to question; even if they agree to peace, their lack of popular legitimacy undermines their ability to guarantee it. Yet if they bow to their supporters’ demands for action and retaliate to violence in kind, they face the collapse of the peace process. In these circumstances, protection of the peace process and protection of the community become almost mutually exclusive.¹⁷¹ For this reason, PSPs are less than ideal partners to conflict resolution processes. They are structurally inclined to move towards hardline positions. It is far better to have the state assure people’s security than it be reliant upon partisan groups whose behaviour is too likely to be influenced by individual events within the conflict.

Colombia has experienced a number of abortive peace processes, across a number of long, bloody decades. Multiparty negotiations throughout the 1980s and 1990s were unable to withstand ceasefire violations, and with each collapsed round of talks the position of the Colombian paramilitaries hardened. They expanded their reach, and by 1995 the ACCU coalition had almost completely displaced state security forces in certain regions, including in Cordoba.¹⁷² By 2005 the AUC, successor to the ACCU, was performing state security functions in some form or another in 40% of Colombian municipalities.¹⁷³ In this way PSPs became an important actor in the conflict

¹⁶⁹ MITCHELL, Audra, & TEMPLER, Sara, “Paramilitaries, Peace Processes and the Dilemma of Protection: The Ulster Defence Association’s Role in ‘Keeping a Lid on Loyalism’”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 15 (3), 416–434 (2013), p.426.

¹⁷⁰ MITCHELL & TEMPLER, p.417.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.417.

¹⁷² ROMERO, p.197.

¹⁷³ MANWARING, p.62.

in their own right. Colombia's peace process has dealt with the multiparty problem by taking a multiphase approach. Instead of negotiating with all parties to the conflict at once, in 2004 President Uribe began by focusing on the demobilisation of paramilitary groups.¹⁷⁴ This demobilisation process was a necessary first step to restoring the Colombian state's credibility as a negotiating partner with the FARC and ELN. Overwhelming evidence of the state's collusion with the paramilitaries made peace in the early 2000s seem further away than ever, and only years of inaction by the paramilitaries following their demobilisation created the conditions in which the current peace agreement became possible. The government has yet to conclude an agreement with the ELN, and paramilitary groups, although much reduced in size and number, remain a problem. The peace process in Colombia remains far from assured.

3.2.3 PSPs in mediation processes

Indeed, a classic Realist critique of mediation processes as a method of conflict resolution is that the settlement process itself can prolong conflict, and can create perverse incentives for armed actors.¹⁷⁵ Knowing that a certain legitimacy is required to be included in talks, and that the strength of their hand depends on their position in the conflict at the moment of ceasefire, participants in conflict are incentivised to adopt maximalist positions rather than realistic ones based on a rational assessment of their capacity to prevail.¹⁷⁶ In wars where the only outcome is decisive victory however, paradoxically actors can prove more willing to compromise, as the alternative is annihilation. In mediated conflicts with multiple actors, the inevitable pre-talks jostling for position can prolong conflict instead of shortening it. This is especially the case where non-state armed actors split and re-split, with large coalition-type groups breaking down into its hardline rumps. The role of paramilitary groups as spoilers in conflict resolution is widely observed in the literature, as once established they often push for a hardline outcome and are reluctant to put down arms.¹⁷⁷ In *Talking to Terrorists*, Jonathan Powell discusses how avoiding in-group splits means that negotiations tend to go back and forth as delegates must return to their constituencies and convince people of the need for compromise. Move too fast, and rather than come round to new

¹⁷⁴ "Dystopia disarmed? Colombia's paramilitary demobilisation", *The Economist*, Vol. 373 (8404), 55–38 (2004).

¹⁷⁵ BURTON, John W., "The history of international conflict resolution", *International Interactions*, 12:1, 45-57, 1985, p.55.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.55.

¹⁷⁷ MALYARENKO & GALBREATH, p.118.

ideas militants instead reject them outright.¹⁷⁸ As well as delaying the moment when a conflict becomes ‘ripe’ for mediation, multiple actors complicate the negotiation process itself. David Cunningham argues that conflict negotiations give disproportionate power to those groups which can most afford to bear the costs of conflict, as they will be the most willing to hold out on agreement the longest in order to achieve the most advantageous deal.

Cunningham’s work on civil war duration suggests that the problem of splintered groups need not be fatal to peace processes however, by introducing the idea of ‘actor viability’. Only actors who wield a credible veto power, i.e. the ability to sustain the conflict unilaterally, need to be included in the peace settlement.¹⁷⁹ This has interesting implications for our study of PSPs because it suggests that the refusal of hardline groups to participate in conflict resolution need not be fatal. Groups must be viable in order to wield veto power. Cunningham suggests a number of potential factors which can affect group viability, such as the availability of “lootable” resources, and state weakness.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately for speedy conflict resolution, paramilitaries tend to be products of state weakness, as well as being embedded into the criminal economy.

Indeed, a major characteristic of paramilitary groups is the way in which they become quickly and deeply embedded in crime and the black economy. The role of Colombian paramilitaries in the cocaine trade is so well documented that there is little need to discuss it at length here, except to note that the illicit narcotics industry became such an important driver of violence that it is almost impossible to distinguish between narcoterrorism and counterinsurgent paramilitarism in the country. The PSPs’ involvement in narco-trafficking certainly expanded and prolonged the Colombian conflict, as well as increasing the longevity of the groups themselves.¹⁸¹ In Northern Ireland Loyalist paramilitaries were unable to rely on external sources for funding as did Republican insurgents, who were able to call upon a vast Irish diaspora, especially in the United States. Instead they sought local sources of income, funding their activities through drug dealing,

¹⁷⁸ POWELL, p.362.

¹⁷⁹ CUNNINGHAM, 2006, p. 879.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 879.

¹⁸¹ ARVELO, Jose E. "International law and conflict resolution in Colombia: balancing peace and justice in the paramilitary demobilization process," *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, Winter 2006, p.425.

bank robberies, as well as semi-legitimate businesses such as unlicensed pubs and taxi firms.¹⁸² Reliable sources of black market income meant that Loyalist PSPs remained viable even as the informal support of elements within the state dried up, and tougher anti-terrorism laws came into force in the years following 9/11. The new climate of George W. Bush's "war on terror" was particularly difficult for Republican insurgents, as it cut off their principal sources of funding and put increased political pressure on all 'terrorist' groups, but there was less direct impact on the Loyalists.¹⁸³

In Colombia and Northern Ireland, paramilitarism has spawned an underground of organised crime whose impacts are two-fold. Firstly, it enables these groups to remain "viable" actors in their conflicts, something which has contributed to the difficulty of resolving them, and secondly it has created a class of people whose livelihoods depend on the profits from crime and the black market. Peace has not ended crime in Northern Ireland, which continues to be dominated by paramilitaries, nor is it likely to end the cocaine trade in Colombia.¹⁸⁴ The effects of paramilitarism go far beyond wartime, and create deep-rooted problems for their societies as they move beyond conflict. The problems that paramilitaries create for post-conflict societies is related to Cunningham's other condition for group viability; the weak state. Restoring state capacity and state credibility should be one major objective to tackling PSPs. But whilst paramilitaries thrive where the state's reach is weak, they also challenge state capacity in of themselves. Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), and Security Sector Reform (SSR) are two approaches which have been designed to stabilise and improve state security institutions. In the next section we discuss the challenges that PSP pose to the very legitimacy of the state, as well as how DDR and SSR have been deployed by practitioners as part of attempts to build peace and restore state capacity.

¹⁸² KYNOE, Stein Fr., 'Financing the loyalists in NI', in FREEMAN, Michael, ed., *Financing Terrorism: Case Studies*, (Burlington, Ashgate), 2012, p.170.

¹⁸³ CUNNINGHAM, Christopher P., Northern Ireland and the 'War on Terror': Political Perceptions, *Irish Political Studies*, 24:3, 285-302, (2009), p.290.

¹⁸⁴ "Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland", UK Government Report, 19 October 2015, Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/469548/Paramilitary_Groups_in_Northern_Ireland_-_20_Oct_2015.pdf, [Accessed 2nd March 2017], p.2.

Chapter 4: PSPs and the State: Challenges and Opportunities

4.1 PSPs as a challenge to the state

In *Armed State Building*, Paul Miller identifies five possible types of state failure: failure from security (anarchy); failure from legitimacy (illegitimacy); failure from prosperity (unproductive); failure from humanity (barbarity); and failure from capacity (incapacity).¹⁸⁵ PSPs can aggravate all five of these challenges to the state. They contribute to insecurity through the complication of conflict and an increase in violence (anarchy). Where the rule of law and human rights are ignored, collusion with paramilitaries challenges a state's legitimacy in the eyes of its people (illegitimacy). Paramilitaries become self-sustaining through black markets and criminality, involving people in illegal, violent, and destructive activities and disrupting other people's ability to trade and produce safely and fairly (unproductive). We have seen how the often arbitrary nature of PSP violence breaks down taboos on its use, radicalises populations, and replaces peaceful conflict resolution with rule by force (barbarity). And finally, PSP activity is both a response to and a product of state weakness, in and outside of conflict (incapacity).

It is the question of state capacity to which we turn now. PSPs undermine the state because their very existence is a potent challenge to its monopoly on the means of violence. In Weber's famous conception of the state, there cannot exist multiple legitimate owners of the means of force: for such a situation to exist is to throw into doubt the viability of the state itself. Although PSPs do not exclusively exist in failed states, failed states almost always host some form of PSP. Somalia is home to several ever-evolving competing groups, such as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT), alongside various clan-based militias. Collectively, these PSPs challenge the legitimacy and capacity of the state's nominal official military service, the Somali National Army (SNA), a force which a UN official is quoted in *The Economist* as saying "does not really exist."¹⁸⁶ In Libya, fighting between and within the militias of the rival governments (Zintan, Libya Dawn, al-Sawaiq etc.), despite their respective stated goals of

¹⁸⁵ MILLER, Paul D., *Armed State Building: Confronting State Failure 1898 – 2012*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press), 2013, p.9

¹⁸⁶ THE ECONOMIST, "Most failed state: Twenty-five years of chaos in the Horn of Africa.", 10th September 2016, Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21706522-twenty-five-years-chaos-horn-africa-most-failed-state>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

restoring security, has prolonged conflict and created the security vacuum into which Daesh has emerged. In both Libya and Somalia, a crucial first step on the path back towards normality would be the replacement of these debilitating militias by a unified, disciplined military. In an ideal world, this military would be transparent, well-trained, and democratically accountable. But PSPs continue to be used in these conflicts because nascent states feel they have few other options, and PSPs can be an apparently effective way of restoring security in the short term.¹⁸⁷

But although paramilitaries such as the ARPCT and Zintan do not propose a revolutionary alternative to the status quo in the same way that insurgent groups like Al-Shabaab and Daesh do, they are nonetheless a major obstacle to the restoration of security and of state capacity, especially in prolonged conflicts. Military and security operations are conducted according to the self-interested priorities of these armed men rather than the interests of the state. In Libya, PSPs jealously protect their profits from people trafficking and from private detention centres, a trade known for its gratuitous and sexualised violence, by exploiting aid and government money.¹⁸⁸ In some towns in Libya, militia-run checkpoints, prisons, and migrant detention centres operate in defiance of the recognised authorities to which they are nominally allied, a development which has given birth to parallel, criminalised state structures.¹⁸⁹ The ways in which the division of state responsibilities can damage state capacity are myriad; for example Zintan, despite receiving money from the government, long refused to release Saif Al Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court, thus preventing Libya from meeting its obligations under international law.¹⁹⁰ ¹⁹¹ In the Balkans, paramilitaries assumed control over the distribution of international aid, as well as illicit goods such as heroin. By monopolising the influx of aid and controlling its distribution, PSPs replaced and perverted state functions to their own ends, making these groups both a “lifeline and a curse”

¹⁸⁷ HUGHES, p.198

¹⁸⁸ UNICEF, “A Deadly Journey for Children: The Central Mediterranean Migration Route”, *UNICEF Child Alert*, February 2017, Available at: https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/EN_UNICEF_Central_Mediterranean_Migration.pdf, [Accessed 5th March 2017], p.12.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.12.

¹⁹⁰ AL-JAZEERA NEWS, “Zintan militia in control of Libya Airport”, 15th July 2014, Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/zintan-militia-control-libya-airport-2014715222459300617.html>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

¹⁹¹STEPHEN, Chris, “Gaddafi son Saif al-Islam 'freed after death sentence quashed', *The Guardian*, 7th July 2016, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/07/gaddafi-son-saif-al-islam-freed-after-death-sentence-quashed>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

to the people who depended on them.¹⁹² Having expanded the scope of the internationalised black economy, PSPs frustrated Bosnia's attempts to construct an official army and 'normalise' the country. The experience of war aggravated the problem of organised crime in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which continues to be a major thorn in the side of the troubled state.¹⁹³

Criminal and military activities can become mutually self-sustaining to the point that the two are mutually indistinguishable. Thus embedded in the criminal economy, PSPs have little incentive to promote the restoration of state control nor to relinquish their hold on the informal economy. State institutions, rather than existing to serve citizens and promote the common good, become "extractive institutions", legal fiefdoms whose purpose is to provide reliable streams of revenue to well-placed groups and individuals.¹⁹⁴ This deepens inequality, destroys trust in the state, and creates destabilising resentments within society. If conflict resolution and state building are all about the creation of effective, accountable and transparent institutions then we should consider that PSPs are absolute anathema to this objective.¹⁹⁵ The damaging effects that PSP involvement in state functions has impacts that last far beyond conflict's end. In countries such as Bosnia¹⁹⁶, Guatemala¹⁹⁷, and Northern Ireland¹⁹⁸, contemporary criminality is a direct legacy of paramilitary activity during conflict. And although 2016 marked the point at which Colombians could begin to realistically plan a future free from conflict, criminalised paramilitary networks such as the Black Eagles continue to present a major problem for this beautiful country. The bulk of Colombia's paramilitary movement disarmed in the mid-to-late 2000s, but the criminalised element that remains is so organised, prosperous, and well-armed that these groups continue to actively frustrate

¹⁹² ANDREAS, Peter, "The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1), 29–52 (2004), p.42.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.44.

¹⁹⁴ THE ECONOMIST, "Conquering Chaos: Why states fail and how to rebuild them", 7th January 2017, Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21713835-fixing-fragile-nations-lessons-afghanistan-and-south-sudan-why-states-fail-and-how>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

¹⁹⁵ The UN's Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, No.16, on the reduction of violence, includes the following text: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." UNITED NATIONS WEBSITE, "Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: Goal 16", Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

¹⁹⁶ ANDREAS, p.42.

¹⁹⁷ WARREN, Kay B., "Conclusion: Death Squads and Wider Complicities: Dilemmas for the anthropology of violence", in SLUKA, Jeffrey, (ed.), *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press), 2000, p.234

¹⁹⁸ KYNOE, p.174.

law enforcement.¹⁹⁹ Increased levels of violent crime are found in the aftermath of virtually all civil wars where paramilitarism was a factor.²⁰⁰ This has implications for the state's ability to uphold the law, to collect taxes, and to enforce regulations pertaining to the environment, to health, to business and so on. If nothing else, paramilitaries have enormous staying power, developing a "parasitic relationship" with the state that far outlives their original purpose.²⁰¹

PSPs pose a major challenge to the state's ability to govern itself fairly and effectively, but in this they are arguably similar to other sources of state erosion, such as the neoliberal model of privatisation of government functions. The NGO DCAF warns against the privatisation of public order and security, arguing that it undermines the rule of law by making justice and security available not to those most in need, but to those most able to pay. Ordinary people become cut off from justice, increasing feelings of insecurity which itself increases the likelihood that citizens will turn to self-defence groups and the like to replace the state. In Northern Ireland, Loyalists PSPs almost entirely replaced policing functions in some areas, but also took it upon themselves to enforce their own interpretations of various laws, such as taxi and pub licensing.²⁰² Such regulations were re-interpreted so as to benefit the PSPs black market businesses, but it also meant that legitimate enterprises might turn to Loyalists to deal with problems "in community" rather than call the police.²⁰³ The emergence of an armed and violent civil society, where a brittle form of justice is meted out unequally and according to a society's ethnic or political fractures, is a perversion of social pluralism and threatens the legitimacy of democratic regimes. In Colombia, candidates, politicians, judges, activists, journalists and academics have suffered from threats of violence or assassination, a blight which undermines the democratic process.²⁰⁴ Elections can hardly be considered free and fair if the participants of democracy are unable to exercise their rights without fear of violent reprisals. The 2014 status of Crimea referendum may have genuinely reflected the desires of Crimea's citizenry, but we are unable to know for sure because armed

¹⁹⁹ MANWARING, p.59.

²⁰⁰ CALL, Charles T.; STANLEY, William, "Protecting the People: Public Security Choices After Civil Wars", *Global Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 2 pp. 151-172, (Apr.-June 2001), p.151.

²⁰¹ BUNKER, Robert J., "Changing forms of insurgency: pirates, narco gangs and failed states", in RICH, Paul B., & DUYVESTEYN, Isabelle, eds., *The Routledge handbook of insurgency and counterinsurgency*, (New York, Routledge), 2012., p.50.

²⁰² MITCHELL & TEMPLER, 2013, p.416.

²⁰³ KYNOE, p.175.

²⁰⁴ MANWARING, p.72.

occupation of the territory made a complete sham of the vote.²⁰⁵ PSP violence is therefore not only a threat to the state and to social cohesion, but to the legitimacy of democracy.

Outsourcing and privatisation of state functions thus creates a “feedback loop” of insecurity, increasing the importance of armed men in society, aggravating inequality, and heightening the risk of barbarity.²⁰⁶ DCAF argues that the rule of law can only be just if it serves everybody equally and care is taken to ensure access for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society, which is why that organisation takes such care to promote the reform of security services so as to make the exercise of state power just, equitable, and accountable.²⁰⁷ By contrast, PSP-led security is arbitrary, unfair and inconsistently applied; i.e. no veritable security at all. In the same way that early modern European countries found that strong and just nation states required the absorption of militias and armed bands into unified and disciplined instruments of government control, so must we avoid making the mistake of rolling back the state and permitting pluralities of armed power within national boundaries. Well-established and effective states should find this easier so long as they do not outsource violence for ideological reasons. But the real challenge is creating security in those areas where the state’s reach is weak or nonexistent.

4.1.2 Can PSPs strengthen the state?

Weak states tend to be those that reach for the PSP option most readily, which according to the main thrust of our argument appears counterproductive. These states would not do so if there was not at least some reason to believe that PSPs can be effective in restoring order. There is a certain amount of evidence that PSPs can increase the chances of government success in civil war and thus contribute to the restoration of security. Jentzsch, Kalyvas and Schubiger found that “decisive government victories” were 53% more likely in conflicts where the state deploys a “civil defence force” than in those where it fights alone.²⁰⁸ Sabine, Carey and Mitchell’s database on ‘pro-

²⁰⁵ COUNCIL OF EUROPE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW, “Opinion: Whether the decision taken by the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Ukraine to organise a referendum on becoming a constituent territory of the Russian Federation or restoring Crimea’s 1992 constitution is compatible with constitutional principles.”, 22nd March 2014, Available at [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2014\)002-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2014)002-e) , [Accessed 9th March 2017], p.5.

²⁰⁶ DCAF, 2015, p.21.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.21.

²⁰⁸ JENTZSCH, KALYVAS, SCHUBIGER, 2015, p.760.

government militias’ drew a similar conclusion, finding that government defeats were rarer when their forces were bolstered by “civil defence forces”.²⁰⁹ This might lead one to draw the opposite conclusion to the thesis of this essay. It makes intuitive sense that a well-informed locally recruited army is likely to be more effective than one whose members are from elsewhere and who only have a rudimentary understanding of the situation on the ground. We have seen how in COIN local knowledge and sensitivity to local issues can be crucial in winning wars that are as much about politics and institutions as they are about gaining territory and military infrastructure. A ‘civil defence force’ seems a fantastic asset in these conditions, and when they are well organised they can be. Are then PSPs a necessary first step towards the reconstruction of the state?

4.1.3 PSPs as proto-states?

In its ideal form, paramilitarism can be a kind of grassroots state-building. Today’s nation states, in their embryonic pre-modern form, relied on regional or irregular armed forces to establish and reinforce control over their territory, a phenomenon which is discussed in depth throughout Diane Davis’ and Anthony Pereira’s anthology on the subject, *Irregular Armed Forces and their role in politics and State Formation*.²¹⁰ In 19th Century Greece for example, Achilles Batalas discusses how, in the absence of a clear monopoly on the means of violence, the nascent Greek state developed a series of patron-client relationships with “bandits-irregulars”, enabling the still-emerging kingdom to fight the Ottomans and defend Greek territories (whose fluid borders expanded and shrank in the years 1832 – 1947). Greek irregular forces, as is frequently the case elsewhere, were in of themselves also a *threat* to Greek security as, through competition with rival militias and through rigorous bargaining with the government, they were a significant driver of violence there. Indeed, the state’s relationship with the irregular militias was arguably a contributing factor to Greece’s prolonged internal strife. Nonetheless in the 19th Century, when the newly independent state was unable to create from scratch a European-style army, and the survival

²⁰⁹ CAREY & MITCHELL, 2016, p.4.

²¹⁰ DAVIS, Diane E., ‘Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the study of Militaries, States, and Politics’, in DAVIS, Diane E.; PEREIRA, eds., Anthony W, *Irregular Armed Forces and their role in politics and state formation*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2003, p.18.

of the nascent Greek state was far from assured, the co-option of pre-existing militias permitted a certain level of government control over the limits and direction of violence.²¹¹

Kilcullen, as a prelude to his guide to modern counterinsurgency warfare, discusses the formation of governments in the time of Herodotus as being a process of “local non-state actors gaining influence through the local exercise of law and order, especially dispute resolution and mediation, and then translating that influence into formal political authority through processes of state formation from the bottom up.”²¹² The actions of paramilitary militias in 19th Century Greece could be understood as a modern example of the same process as witnessed by Herodotus.

We can see how this process works theoretically in Colombia. Through the creation of armed organisations, landowners and rural inhabitants in the regions most affected by the FARC and ELN attempted to install or restore order along the lines of the existing or pre-existing authority. They reacted to the insurgents, who sought to transform the existing social order by undermining the government and by proposing their own, rival system of governance. Colombia’s paramilitaries instead tried to enforce the status quo, or at least their vision of it. In theory, paramilitaries are just a spontaneous form of law and order which seeks to restore the monopoly on legitimate violence to the state. In these theoretical best case scenarios, the process resembles a form of non-state COIN; paramilitaries should successfully create a climate of security and order, and are subsequently integrated into the formal military, thus fully restoring the effective control of the state. There are countless examples of states being formed through a rough approximation of this process.

Charles Tilly argues that Europe’s transformation from a region of thousands of political units to one of a few dozen states was dependent upon a process of war, consolidation and absorption, led by ever-more-disciplined shifting coalitions of militias. State building in Europe was founded upon the creation of armed security where before there was only insecurity, and through a process whereby bands of armed men, loyal only to their commander, were gradually absorbed and

²¹¹ BATALAS, Achilles, ‘Irregular military formations in Greece’, DAVID, Diane E.; PEREIRA, eds., Anthony W, *Irregular Armed Forces and their role in politics and state formation*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2003, p.6.

²¹² KILCULLEN, 2010, p.149.

transformed into organised and permanent armies under the firm control of monarchs and parliaments.²¹³ Paramilitaries, at their best and under strict state control, could be a crucial part of state programmes to restore security in civil war. But all too often, paramilitaries fail to restore order and instead end up resembling unsuccessful insurgents, creating a rival system of order which competes with those proposed by the state and by insurgent actors, thus aggravating the underlying drivers of the conflict. As discussed in the third chapter, paramilitaries all too often do not bolster the system proposed by the state, but create an additional challenge for it by further complicating the conflict. Civil wars between two rival systems become byzantine affairs as additional rival systems emerge. The interminable conflict in Colombia is characteristic of this latter model.

4.1.4 PSPs are a poor substitute for the state

Returning to David Kilcullen, he proposes a ‘Theory of Competitive Control’ to explain why states should seek to ‘out-govern’ insurgents as well as outfight them:

“In irregular conflicts, the local armed actor that a given population perceives as most able to establish a normative system for resilient, full-spectrum control over violence, economic activity, and human security is most likely to prevail within the population’s residential area.”²¹⁴

We quickly see how paramilitaries, instead of being simply a proxy actor for the state, might become a third actor in this battle for competitive control. Indeed, Mazzei describes them as the “third force” of civil conflicts.²¹⁵ States should seek to maintain a tight grip on paramilitaries if they do not wish the model of control that their proxies propose to become a competing alternative to the states’ instead of complementary to it. There is nothing revolutionary about this observation: Clausewitz wrote in *On War* about the utility of paramilitary forces, (although he did not describe them as such), but argued that decisive victory could only be won where irregulars are integrated into conventional forces.²¹⁶ Alone, they could only prolong conflict, or as he put it, only gnaw on the nut of the enemy without cracking it.²¹⁷ Achieving success in restoring the state’s monopoly on violence means reversing the model whereby state functions are contracted out at arms length

²¹³ TILLY, p.52.

²¹⁴ KILCULLEN, 2010, p. 152.

²¹⁵ MAZZEI, p.2.

²¹⁶ TOWNSHEND, Charles, “People’s War”, in TOWNSHEND, Charles, ed., *The Oxford History of Modern War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005, p.179.

²¹⁷ CLAUSEWITZ, Carl Von, *On War*, Book 6, Chapter 26: The People in Arms, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007, p.184.

to PSPs as a cut-price attempt to bolster state capacity, and instead expanding the depth and breadth of state capacity itself. In Colombia, President Uribe's 'democratic security' programme began to bear fruit only once collusion with paramilitaries was replaced by a policy of deploying state security forces throughout the conflict regions. In Iraq, the state has belatedly tried to limit the activities of the Hashd militias and made some progress towards integrating them directly into the state's structure.²¹⁸

Yet even in cases where paramilitaries are integrated successfully into regular state forces, the experience of paramilitarism can make the individuals less than ideal candidates for these roles. In Afghanistan the process of turning paramilitaries into police officers has not been entirely successful.²¹⁹ Success in peaceful civilian policing, which emphasises community linkages and crime prevention, may not be best served by a staff which has been combat-hardened in service to a non-state armed group in the context of often brutal civil conflicts. The temptation to ignore the rule of law, revert to counterinsurgency tactics, and to use whichever tactics deemed necessary to achieve results, has in Afghanistan undermined trust in the police and therefore harmed its efficacy.²²⁰ It is not enough to simply put a paramilitary in a uniform. Security institutions must be built on a firm footing and respect the rule of law. States will have achieved nothing if the inherent inequality of justice that paramilitaries mete out becomes rooted in the culture of the state's army and police. But disarmed and integrated into society effectively, former paramilitaries can become productive members of society and facilitate state stability. Marginalised and isolated however, they can become festering sources of armed opposition and re-ignite a pattern of destabilising violence. In the next section we shall briefly analyse pathways to the successful dismantling and reintegration of paramilitary forces, before arriving at the conclusion of this essay.

²¹⁸ AL-JAZEERA NEWS, "Can Shia militias be integrated into the Iraqi army?", Inside Story, 28th July 2016, Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2016/07/shia-militias-integrated-iraqi-army-160728180931271.html>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

²¹⁹ SEDRA, Mark, "The hollowing out of the liberal peace project in Afghanistan: the case of security sector reform", in GOODHAND, Jonathan, & SEDRA, Mark, eds., *The Afghan Conundrum: intervention, statebuilding and resistance*, (Abingdon, Routledge), 2015, p.135.

²²⁰ SEDRA, p.135.

4.2 PSPs from war termination to state building

Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) are two development approaches which have been applied to end-of-conflict situations in order to remove militant groups, including PSPs, from the scene and begin to restore ‘normality’ to the security situation. They are the physical incarnation of state and international efforts to restore the state’s monopoly on the use of legitimate force. Sadly however, the disarmament and integration of PSPs into the state structure does not always necessarily reduce risk for civilians. In some conflicts PSPs emerge, not despite the wishes of government, but *because* the government actively intends to undertake measures that are illegal under national or international law. Very often this implies violence against civilians, since in counterinsurgency warfare the definition of the enemy can stretch to include any group or individual suspected of sympathy with insurgents. Leaked American diplomatic cables printed in *The Guardian* illustrate how this worked in Sri Lanka’s war against the Tamil independence movement. In an echo of similar tactics used in Colombia’s war, one cable describes how government-paramilitary collusion is organised:

“[The source] explained that when the EPDP [Eelam People’s Democratic Party, a pro-government Tamil political party and PSP] intends to kill a target, they first provide notice to the military. The number of soldiers patrolling the streets of Jaffna (40,000 total on the peninsula) is such that there are literally soldiers stationed at every street corner. At an agreed time, all of the soldiers in the designated area take a five to ten minute "break" at once (although the normal practice is to take breaks in shifts). At that point, armed and masked gunmen, often riding on motorcycles, race down the street and assassinate the intended victim. Shortly after the killing, the soldiers' break over, they return to their posts to deal with the aftermath.”²²¹

PSP collusion in Sri Lanka occurred in a context where the country’s official military personnel were also engaged in operations involving massacres of civilians and widespread human rights abuses.²²² The use of paramilitaries was nonetheless justified as a way to maintain a veneer of plausible deniability and protect the government’s international reputation. Sri Lanka’s tight control over the flow of information from the war zone was relatively successful in this, despite the leaked cables demonstrating that the US State Department was aware of the government’s

²²¹ THE GUARDIAN, “US Embassy cables: Sri Lankan government accused of complicity in human rights abuses”, (Cable 15), 16th December 2010, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/108763>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²²² HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, “Sri Lanka: US War Crimes Report Details Extensive Abuses”, 22nd October 2009, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/22/sri-lanka-us-war-crimes-report-details-extensive-abuses>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

involvement in PSP violence.²²³ Sri Lanka suffered little real international criticism however, and although the government was denounced by various NGOs, its actions barely made a dent in its relationships with international partners, and Sri Lanka hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in 2013. As during the massacres of Darfur and Indonesia, the above episode sadly illustrates the fact that, with PSPs or without them, state violence is far from unheard of. Although the genocide in Darfur prompted an ICC warrant for the arrest of Omar al-Bashir, the context of the Cold War meant that Indonesia's killing fields barely prompted a raised eyebrow in the west. The worst atrocities against mankind have been largely the work of states. Therefore, we should not think of successful integration of PSPs into the state structure as being a panacea for violence against civilians. But PSPs create other problems for the state, as we have seen, whether it is ruled by a just or unjust government.

If unshackled violence is the intention of governments then they may initially see little interest in reigning back paramilitary groups, indeed they often encourage them. But even for violent and oppressive regimes, the emergence of PSPs is a dangerous development, as these organisations are hard to stop once unleashed, for all the reasons discussed in previous chapters. The civil war in Sri Lanka was one of very few in recent years to have ended in a decisive victory for one side or the other. The government's actions are considered by some to be a new model for COIN warfare, despite its huge human cost.²²⁴ But even in the context of this 'successful' conclusion of a conflict, pro-state paramilitary groups such as the EPDP continue to maraud around the northern part of the country. The government's objectives in the conflict were decisively achieved, albeit savagely, but the post-conflict programme to reconstruct the state in those areas most affected by the war is nonetheless hampered by the continued activities of paramilitaries, who remain principally loyal to their political factions rather than the state, and who are increasingly active in crime and criminalised violence.²²⁵ This is a pattern of PSP behaviour that we have seen across the globe; PSPs continue to undermine security after conflict.

²²³ THE GUARDIAN, "US Embassy cables: Sri Lankan government accused of complicity in human rights abuses", (Cable 15), 16th December 2010, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/108763>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²²⁴ BEEHNER, Lionel, "What Sri Lanka Can Teach Us About COIN", *Small Wars Journal*, 27th August 2010, p.7.

²²⁵ IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD OF CANADA, "Response to Information Requests", 7th February 2012, Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2014/03/06/LKA103950.E.pdf>, [Accessed 5th March 2017], p.3.

This is a problem because security is at the very foundation of state building. Economic development and social reconciliation in a country will always be at risk for as long as people feel endangered. Although it is possible for countries with relatively high levels of violent crime (such as the US) to remain stable from a state capacity point of view, weak, corrupt, or nonexistent security services are dangerous for societies because they create those very vacuums into which paramilitary power emerges. Although modern approaches to development have tried to broaden the scope of post conflict reconstruction, rightly taking into account all manner of issues such as gender rights, economic inequality, prosperity and so on, Paul Miller, echoing Charles Call, argues that these should be considered secondary to the ‘prime objective’ of state building, which is the “provision of basic security.”²²⁶ The defiance of the state by PSPs put the provision of basic security at risk.

4.2.2 Demobilisation, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR)

The demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of PSPs is one part of the solution to this problem. It seeks to remove the groups from the scene, withdraw their capacity to undertake armed violence (and very often reduce the number of arms circulating in society in general), and ‘reintegrate’ their combatants, either into civilian society or into the formal state security structure. Often undertaken alongside “truth and reconciliation” type projects, DDR offers combatants the chance to safely withdraw from battle and reinvest themselves in something more positive. It gives groups the opportunity to step back from the spiral of violence, and an opportunity for the state to peacefully reclaim its rightful place as the sole possessor of the means of legitimate violence.

DDR can have some astoundingly positive effects. In Northern Ireland a gradual process of tit-for-tat disarmament, whereby Republican and Loyalist forces would put certain quantities of their arms beyond use in managed and verified stages, has lowered tensions, eased the security dilemma, and contributed to a reduction of violence in the province. There were 55 conflict-related deaths in 1998, the year the Good Friday Agreement (which provided for arms decommissioning) was signed, dropping to one in 2010, the year in which the UDA, following on from Republican and

²²⁶ MILLER, p.29.

other Loyalist groups, announced that it was putting its weapons beyond use.^{227 228} In Colombia, conflict related deaths dropped from 3427 in 2002, during the period where paramilitary violence was at its highest, to fewer than 400 in 2007, following on from the government supported DDR programme in 2003-2006, part of Colombia's 'democratic security' framework.²²⁹

But DDR is not a magic bullet, and can be undone without commitment. If the reintegration aspect of DDR programmes (the costliest aspect and therefore least likely to receive sufficient government attention) is not undertaken wholeheartedly then problems can re-arise. Without sufficient guarantees of security and income, paramilitaries may judge the risks of DDR as too great and the benefits as too little.²³⁰ Elected governments can find it politically difficult to offer generous terms to men seen as murderers and worse. Fighters may return to their previous groups if the benefits of demobilisation are disappointing. In the early 2010s, 15% of the 11,500 arrested for being members of extant illegal armed groups in Colombia were found to be previously demobilised combatants.²³¹ Colombia's narcotics trading *bandas criminales* are estimated to be largely composed of former paramilitaries and insurgents.²³² In Ukraine, considerable numbers of foreign paramilitary volunteers now doss listlessly around the country, unwanted by their host government and facing arrest if they return home. These potentially troublesome young men are unlikely to contribute constructively to the Ukrainian national project without help to become citizens or to retrain as soldiers or workers, but the state's reluctance to pay out for foreigners means that they continue to be an additional festering sore, aggravating Ukraine's many wounds.²³³

²²⁷ BBC NEWS, "NI Decommissioning timetable", 27th June 2009, Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8122375.stm, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²²⁸ ROGERS, Simon, "Deaths in Northern Ireland since 1969: Data", *The Guardian*, 10th June 2010, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/jun/10/deaths-in-northern-ireland-conflict-data>, [Accessed 6th March 2017].

²²⁹ UPSALLA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAMME, "Colombia: Number of Deaths", Available at: <http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/100>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²³⁰ SISK, Timothy D., *Statebuilding: Consolidating Peace after Civil War*, (Cambridge, Polity Press), 2013, p.92.

²³¹ THORSELL, Stefan, "Towards People-Centred Economic Reintegration An Analysis of the Economic Reintegration Strategy of Demobilised Combatants in Colombia", *Colombia Internacional*, No77, 177-215 (2013), p.180.

²³² MANWARING, p.68.

²³³ VICE NEWS, "Ukraine's Foreign Fighters Battle Citizenship", 17th May 2016, Available at: <https://news.vice.com/video/ukraines-foreign-fighters-battle-for-citizenship>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

But even when DDR is implemented in good faith it can be ineffective or exploited by PSPs. Social payments to demobilised paramilitary soldiers in Colombia were found to have little impact on their ability to start enterprises; seed capital was squandered and much money was wasted. Money alone was unable to turn militiamen into businessmen, and some of this cash seemed to have helped re-arm paramilitary groups.²³⁴ In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the DDR programme for the various militant groups there encountered many problems, such as combatants registering to disarm multiple times so as to profit from multiple demobilisation payments. It was also suspected that commanders were only offering their lowest quality weapons, barely usable anyway, to the disarmament programme, possibly so as to acquire cash to buy better ones.²³⁵ ²³⁶ DDR funds, like so much well meaning international aid, can end up being misappropriated by PSPs, thus helping to fuel the conflict rather than end it.²³⁷ On the other hand, combatants who participate in good faith but end up being disappointed by a lack of follow through may return to the fight, even less trusting of the government and the international community than before. DDR must be done well and wholeheartedly if it is to maintain the support of the public and its participants.

But DDR is only the modern response to what has always been a classic source of turmoil for states. Wars have long temporarily mobilised large numbers of men, who are then trained, armed, and often brutalised, before being slung back into their peacetime lives. Although we have only begun to understand the ubiquity and the danger of post traumatic stress disorder and other psychological issues that can be triggered by the experience of first hand violence, states were often well aware of the problems that mass demobilisation could cause. Alec Campbell argues that each wave of demobilisation following large scale war has been a moment of potential crisis for

²³⁴ THORSELL, p.190.

²³⁵ HANSON, Stephanie. "Backgrounder: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Feb 2007, Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/world/disarmament-demobilization-reintegration-ddr-africa/p12650> , [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²³⁶ The issue of which arms actually get decommissioned was also a problem in the initial stages of disarmament in Northern Ireland. Initial batches of weapons were already damaged or in disuse, suggesting that the real weapons caches were elsewhere. Nonetheless, this was still a positive first step, and engaged the parties in the process, the significance of which cannot be underestimated considering their mutual fear and distrust. However, the peace process stumbled a few times as the two sides dragged their feet on destroying their most valuable stocks. DDR requires good faith and solid guarantees from all parties to be effective.

²³⁷ THE ECONOMIST, "Conquering Chaos: Why states fail and how to rebuild them", 7th January 2017, Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21713835-fixing-fragile-nations-lessons-afghanistan-and-south-sudan-why-states-fail-and-how> , [Accessed 5th March 2017].

post-conflict countries.²³⁸ The problems that rulers of early modern Europe faced in demobilising their armies, how to pay off soldiers, stand them down, and prevent them from marauding and pillaging, are not dissimilar from the issues which face post-conflict states today. Indeed, Europe's embryonic state structures spent much of their time acting like modern departments of defence, war, and veterans, concerned with feeding and arming active troops, and paying them off afterwards.²³⁹ That armies became gradually more organised and more statist was partly a response to these issues. Modern states have learned that veteran soldiers can hugely shape the destiny of post-war states, and have built an infrastructure to ensure that their energies are directed towards positive activities following demobilisation. But there is rarely a similar structure for non-state actors, nor even for regular soldiers in failing states.²⁴⁰ In 1950s post-war Indonesia, the government promised state employment to members of the various Republican and guerilla groups in order to persuade them to demobilise. Yet, the government's desire to slim down the size of its own armed forces meant that these promises were broken, forcing thousands of armed and angry men to return to their villages to dwell on their betrayal. These groups of men became the core of a simmering insurgency which later erupted into widespread violence and eventually the genocidal response of the government.²⁴¹ DDR has to be made to work for its participants; it cannot simply be a cheap way for the government to persuade PSPs and insurgents to stand down.

Successful DDR depends on real, lasting commitment to the reintegration stage. As historically states have built armies by lashing bands of militias together, so too can DDR construct capable security structures out of former PSPs.²⁴² But to do so, these militants-cum-soldiers must be offered a life that is more prosperous and secure. Weak conflict-ridden states are rarely able to offer good salaries and conditions to their soldiers. This is why reintegration is sometimes called the "Achilles heel" of DDR.²⁴³ In Iraq, the destruction of Saddam Hussein's military forces flooded

²³⁸ CAMPBELL, Alec, "Where do all the soldiers go?", in DAVIS, Diane E.; PEREIRA, eds., Anthony W, eds., *Irregular Armed Forces and their role in politics and state formation*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2003, p.99.

²³⁹ CHILDS, p.35.

²⁴⁰ CAMPBELL, 2003, p.97.

²⁴¹ ROBINSON, Geoffrey, *The Dark Side of paradise: political violence in Bali*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2005, p.224.

²⁴² DAVIS, 2003, p.7.

²⁴³ HANSON, Stephanie. "Backgrounder: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Feb 2007, Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/world/disarmament-demobilization-reintegration-ddr-africa/p12650> , [Accessed 5th March 2017].

the country with aggrieved armed men. The militias that have formed in the years since brought the country to its knees, and now they find themselves fighting alongside the new Iraqi army against Daesh. Yet the Hashd's record of human rights abuses against Sunnis is causing a problem for the Iraqi state, who have sought to control the PSPs by 'integrating' them into their command structure. But the way that this has been done, by maintaining the Hashd as a single, unified unit, putting them under the direct command of the prime minister's office, has led some observers to question whether the state has taken over the militias or whether the militias have taken over the state.²⁴⁴ This is arguably hardly DDR at all, but rather legalised collusion. By maintaining the explicitly Shia nature of these PSPs and by allowing them to continue much as before, the Iraqi government has done little to assure its citizens, nor to build trust in the intentions of its government. Iraq may find it difficult to control the Hashd as and when it decides to bring an end to their participation.

By way of contrast, there has been little attempt to destroy paramilitary structures themselves in Northern Ireland, rather the peace process has relied on them to implement the major points of the Good Friday Agreement. This has both positive and negative impacts. In interviews with UDA commanders, they themselves emphasise the constructive role they have played in guaranteeing the peace, through the maintenance of order in their communities and through the suppression of internal dissent.²⁴⁵ By maintaining their credibility within the community they are able to effectively marginalise those more radical minorities who would return to conflict, using the threat of violent enforcement to limit the radicals' freedom of action. Their continued existence as a hierarchical and disciplined paramilitary force enables groups to enforce the peace in a way that mere community outreach groups might not be able to.²⁴⁶ On the other hand, these groups continue to meet and organise activities, nursing their collective memory and emphasising the importance of Ulster Loyalism, thus maintaining the importance of the ideology within the community. Northern Irish PSPs cannot claim to be entirely peaceful, as their continued involvement in crime demonstrates, and furthermore they maintain a structure that could easily be reactivated for

²⁴⁴ AL-JAZEERA NEWS, "Can Shia militias be integrated into the Iraqi army?", *Inside Story*, 28th July 2016, Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2016/07/shia-militias-integrated-iraqi-army-160728180931271.html>, [Accessed 19th October 2016].

²⁴⁵ MITCHELL & TEMPLER, 2013, p.422.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.425.

violence if and when the leadership decides this to be an appropriate response, or if newer, more radical leaders rise up the ranks. The continued presence of both Republican and Loyalist militant groups within the towns and cities of Northern Ireland is the dangerous backdrop to every political crisis in the province. Although they remain mostly dormant for the time being, peace in Northern Ireland will never be fully assured until they have disappeared completely. There are few if any examples where the approach has been completely successful in removing PSPs from the picture. It would be far better to do everything possible to avoid their emergence in the first place. A good first step towards this goal would be the reform of failing security structures.

4.2.3 Security Sector Reform (SSR)

If state building is founded upon security, and DDR is the attempt to clear up the symptoms of insecurity, then Security Sector Reform (SSR) is designed to address some of the underlying issues within the security apparatus. It is the natural response to the claim that the key to understanding state failure and state success is “institutions, institutions, institutions.”²⁴⁷ It is about rebuilding trust in the police, army, and the intelligence community through a programme of reform in order to make them more effective, trustworthy, and accountable. This is a crucial task in areas where state collusion with PSPs may have undermined public confidence in these institutions. Improving their effectiveness and capacity helps fill those vacuums of state power where paramilitaries tend to emerge. Improving their public image and building public confidence can temper the temptation of people to take the law into their own hands. Albrecht Schnabel puts it succinctly when he says that “SSR is about ensuring that security services to society’s wellbeing and not its’ destruction.”²⁴⁸

Good policing may be as crucial to successful COIN as good soldiering. In the Bosnian conflict, PSPs and bands of armed thugs roamed the country causing havoc and misery, exploiting the political context to target civilians and pillage towns. But despite the level of carnage, the actual numbers of people involved were quite small. As Mueller argues “there was nothing particularly inevitable about the violence, with different people in charge and different policing and

²⁴⁷ THE ECONOMIST, “Conquering Chaos: Why states fail and how to rebuild them”, 7th January 2017, Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21713835-fixing-fragile-nations-lessons-afghanistan-and-south-sudan-why-states-fail-and-how> , [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²⁴⁸ SCHNABEL, Albrecht, & EHRHART, Hans-Georg, *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, (Tokyo; United Nations University Press), 2005, p.1.

accommodation procedures, the savagery could have been avoided [...] policing the situation would probably have been fairly easy for almost any organised, disciplined and sizable army.”²⁴⁹ Had there been a decent security service willing and able to restore order, this conflict might have been much less virulent. The same could be said of Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Ukraine, where the toxic atmosphere created by systematic collusion meant that police were unable or unwilling to enforce the law evenly. In Northern Ireland the catholic communities’ faith in the police was so utterly destroyed by the experience of thirty years of paramilitary and state brutality, that only the complete dissolution of the province’s police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and its replacement by the new, more inclusive, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) could even begin this process. The PSNI was founded on the principle that it should represent the two communities equally and be equally accountable to each. A 50/50 recruitment goal for Catholics and Protestants was instituted, officers from the PSNI and the Irish Garda participate in exchange programmes, and much of the potent symbology of Britain and Ulster was removed from uniforms, badges, and vehicles. Although the heightened risks of policing in Northern Ireland means that officers remain armed, unlike elsewhere in the United Kingdom, efforts were made to ‘demilitarise’ the force and increase the emphasis on community policing.²⁵⁰ This improved the real security situation in Northern Ireland, as the force was now able to police the province in its entirety, not just those (mostly protestant) areas where local communities accepted their presence. It should be said however that the reforms have been far from perfect in achieving their goals, and Catholics continue to be underrepresented in the PSNI’s ranks.²⁵¹ As with DDR, SSR can only really be effective as part of broader changes within the fabric of a society. It is no magic bullet.

In Colombia, building and expanding police and army capacity meant that these organisations were able to ‘take back’ the state functions which the PSPs had assumed, re-inserting themselves into towns and communities as the paramilitaries demobilised, part of Uribe’s democratic security programme.²⁵² Although many areas remain scarred by the violence of the last decades, reforming

²⁴⁹ MUELLER, p.98.

²⁵⁰ INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON POLICING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, “A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland”, (aka ‘The Patten Report’), September 1999, Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/patten/patten99.pdf> , [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²⁵¹ MCALASEE, Deborah, “PSNI orders investigation into low number of Catholic recruits,” *The Belfast Telegraph*, 6th September 2016.

²⁵² SCHNABEL & EHRHART, p.77.

the security and judicial system has been a positive move towards assuring the population that justice will be delivered from now on through the rule of law, and will not be determined by the arbitrary power of a paramilitary's weapon.

In Ukraine a major challenge to the restoration of security is the poor state of the police and army. PSPs retain important security functions, and may continue to do so for the medium term. Employment in the Ukrainian security sector is an unappetising career move: the police and army are underfunded and corrupt, there is little chance for progression due to staid management procedures, and constant cuts and misappropriation mean that recruits are sent into the front line of Ukraine's simmering conflict with ageing and unreliable equipment.²⁵³ In such a state, they can hardly be expected to make a concrete contribution to their 'society's wellbeing', nor is integration into these forces an appealing choice for members of the PSPs. In Ukraine, SSR and DDR may have to go hand in hand if the government wishes to seriously try and dislodge the paramilitaries from their position within the country. For the time being, President Poroshenko's government shows little sign of wishing to do so.²⁵⁴ The government is painfully aware that they helped prevent a complete collapse of state power in the east at a time when the official army was struggling to cope.²⁵⁵ Yet Ukraine is playing a dangerous game. Its right-wing PSPs are a propaganda gift to Putin's regime, they are violent in unpredictable ways, aggravating previously unimportant ethnic differences, and they eat away at the very core of the state, in a country whose stability is already dangerously brittle.²⁵⁶ Paramilitary violence has bled Colombia dry for decades. Bullet holes still pock the walls of Belfast's pubs. Iraq is fighting for its own viability as a state. It remains to be seen what the future holds for Ukraine. Petro Poroshenko would be wise to tread carefully.

²⁵³ MALYARENKO & GALBREATH, p119.

²⁵⁴ STERN, David, "Ukraine Underplays role of far right in conflict", *BBC NEWS*, 13th December 2014, Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30414955>, [Accessed 5th March 2017].

²⁵⁵ DYER, Evan, "Ukraine looks to Canada to help modernize military's 'Soviet mentality'", *CBC NEWS*, 4th March 2017, Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ukraine-russia-canada-forces-1.3982326>, [Accessed 4th March 2017].

²⁵⁶ MALYARENKO & GALBREATH, p. 136.

Conclusion

The experience of the last few decades has taken its toll on the principal western powers, who, following controversial sorties in Iraq and Afghanistan, are increasingly wary of intervening directly in conflict and of getting “sand on soldiers’ boots”. The well-meaning temptation therefore for these countries has been to bolster allied governments with local irregulars. The contracting out of military tasks to non-state groups has become a favoured way of employing armed force at a low cost. Yet our analysis suggests that if we are serious about building stable and fair societies throughout the world, we should be very wary of hollowing out state sovereignty through the empowerment of non-state violence.

Herein lies a puzzle, for institutions such as the ICC, the UN, the EU, and indeed the very principle of R2P, are laudable *because* of the way they limit the absolutist doctrine of *maître chez nous*. We no longer accept that what goes on within the frontiers of a state is an exclusively private affair in which the international community has no right to comment or intervene. By contrast, this essay has consistently argued that we should seek to restore and reinforce state mechanisms of control as a way of maintaining order and preventing spirals of violence. Yet we also acknowledge that the presence of a strong state is no guarantee of justice. The 20th Century was arguably the era of the state as an overbearing dystopian nightmare, with all the human horror that accompanies absolutist demonocracy. Armed struggle has been taken up by movements across the globe, justified by them as a response to unjust governments. Pro-state paramilitarism is the counterpoint to these movements, seeking instead to protect the status quo and oppress those who seek change.

But non-state armed violence is neither the exclusive preserve of the just nor the unjust. The conditions which permit and encourage its use are complex, and each PSP is very much a product of its local context. The dynamics of civil wars are fundamentally complex, something which can lead to strange partnerships that do not initially make sense in the context of the “macro” conflict. We have seen how Loyalists in Northern Ireland can be both criminals and peacekeepers. We have seen how paramilitaries in Bosnia both “robbed and fed” the civilian population in which they were embedded.²⁵⁷ In Sri Lanka, Tamil PSPs engaged in horrific human rights abuses on behalf of

²⁵⁷ ANDREAS, Peter, “The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1), 29–52 (2004), p.6.

a government which sought to oppress Tamil nationalism. Paramilitaries can emerge because of or despite the state's efforts in conflict. They are a potential ally to the state, but often turn against the governments who rule them. PSP groups are governed by rules and priorities which emerge from within their membership, shaped by the context of the conflict but often driven by oddly banal and day to day objectives.

Recent research had advanced our understanding of PSPs, but has tended to build on the idea of the paramilitary as an extension of the state. Jessica Stanton, in a recent study on the subject, argues that militia behaviour tracks government behaviour.²⁵⁸ Meanwhile Carey et al also emphasise the importance of state-paramilitary collusion, pointing to the link between weak governments, dependent on international aid, and the prevalence of informal ties with 'militias'.²⁵⁹ This latter point illustrates a weakness of the international development regime, but it also suggests a potential opportunity. It implies that international actors can have a role to play in diminishing the importance of PSPs. They could make it clear that they are not prepared to have the wool pulled over their eyes; that out-sourced paramilitary violence will be considered the responsibility of the state, even if aware that the state may not be fully in control. International actors can also help through collaborative efforts to improve state military structures, like the partnership the Canadian Army has developed with Ukraine's armed forces. Organisations like the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) aim to help states strengthen oversight and efficacy of armed forces through greater governmental and democratic control. Efforts such as these should be welcomed and expanded. Yet, policy approaches that assume that PSPs are merely the state's rowdy but ultimately subservient partners are unlikely to grasp the full complexity of the state-PSP relationship. PSPs are independent actors, and as such state-led attempts to reign them in may fail to do so. Instead, PSPs may openly oppose the government to become a complicating third actor in the conflict; a kind of conservative-minded pro-state insurgent force.

Further research must address the underlying causes for PSP emergence and address the very real concerns of the populations that support them. This means taking full account of local complexities

²⁵⁸ STANTON, 2015, p.900.

²⁵⁹ CAREY, Sabine C; COLARESI, Michael P.; MITCHELL, Neil J., "Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 59(5), 850-876, (2015), p.851.

and micro-dynamics within conflict. Although we tend to immediately think of Stathis Kalyvas²⁶⁰ when thinking of the importance of local micro conflicts as a driver of violence, the following passage by David Kilcullen, describing the way in which international aid and outside intervention aggravated internecine competition in Afghanistan, could easily describe any number of civil wars:

“Access to foreigners, who have lots of money and firepower but little time or inclination to gain an understanding of local dynamics, can give district power brokers incredibly lucrative opportunities for corruption. A tsunami of illicit cash washes over the society, provoking abuse, raising expectations but then disappointing them, and empowering local armed groups, who pose as clean and incorruptible defenders of the disenfranchised, at least until they themselves gain access to sources of corruption.”²⁶¹

Labels can sometimes cloud our thinking rather than clarify it. The importance of the macro conflict in the international coalition’s thinking meant that “The Taliban” came to describe any number of armed groups present in the country whose objectives little resembled the fervently austere pseudo-religious mission of Mullah Omar’s followers. But classifying them as such gave certain power brokers in Afghanistan an advantage at the expense of others.

Pro-State Paramilitaries have only recently begun to be studied as a distinct category of militant group. This is a welcome development, and further research on the phenomenon should be encouraged. But in doing so, we should try to avoid making the same kind of binary mistakes that characterised western interpretations of insurgency for many years. We have already seen how in Colombia, “paramilitary” became a widely adopted term for any number of groups, both political and apolitical. It gave legitimacy to outfits whose sole interest was drug-running, cloaking their violent activities in a shroud of pseudo-political righteousness. Groups that genuinely began as self-defence organisations muddied the waters by turning to narco-trafficking as a convenient source of income. The FARC and ELN also partook of this easy revenue. Categorising the conflict as a binary struggle between the government/paramilitaries and the leftist FARC and ELN could only produce muddled thinking. American support for the “anti-communists” also gave succour to those narco-traffickers against whom the US was simultaneously battling as part of its ‘War on Drugs’.

²⁶⁰ KALYVAS, 2003, p.476.

²⁶¹ KILCULLEN, 2013, p.14.

A more nuanced understanding of local dynamics may help policy makers and practitioners better parse and deal with the objectives and modus operandi of different types of armed groups. It means taking account of political motivation, social dynamics, economic considerations, religious sensitivities, and crucially the role of historical memory and identity. It should not be merely assumed that PSPs follow resources and wealth, although economic patterns are important. For example, PSPs seem particularly concerned with the restoration of order. Popular support for them was often expressed in terms of their ability to re-establish stability. *Autodefensas* in Colombia claimed to be fighting for security and freedom from insurgent attacks. Northern Irish Loyalists wished to defend their communities from ‘Republican terrorism’ which threatened the established system of protestant domination. The Hashd are no doubt genuine in their desire to extirpate the destabilising presence of Daesh from their land. In this battle for order, it is hardly surprising that PSPs and the state should frequently find themselves working in a similar direction. And some studies show that on a short timescale, PSPs *can* be brutally effective at this task.

But throughout the case studies in this essay, we have seen how in the long term PSPs ultimately threaten the established order. They adopt their own interpretations of justice, which are shaped by their social, political, or identarian priorities rather than the interest of society as a whole. They may ape government or military practises, but they are unconfined by the rule of law. Thus disappearances, assassinations, silencing of dissidents, and terrorism become legitimate tactics in an unofficial and unregulated dirty war against insurgents and civilians. Official prods of encouragement may make them feel untouchable. States see inconvenient members of its society disappear without having to dirty its hands. But the state also loses control over the boundaries of a conflict, and where collusion is suspected, they will be blamed anyway. The states reputation becomes determined by non-state actors. International aid may pour in regardless, but the states’ reputation as a provider of order is further damaged. Alternatives gain ground, be they those who wish to overturn the prevailing order, or as in the case of PSPs, those who claim to ‘defend’ or ‘restore’ it.

States sometimes feel obliged to take extraordinary measures. Defence of liberty, they may argue, justifies its temporary suspension. In such cases, the least bad option for states would be to always keep their hands firmly on the monopoly of force. If state violence is necessary, governments

should proceed with it openly and transparently, maintaining tight control of the limits and nature of these actions. Outsourcing violence to paramilitaries is the worst possible course of action. It is a license to create havoc. It goes without saying that if a state is using violence against its own people, then something has already gone badly wrong. The dynamics of social and political crises and the solutions to civil wars are beyond the scope of this essay. Clearly there is far more to internal war than the existence of PSPs and the relative strengths of police and military forces. SSR would not have saved Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, better policing and soldiering would probably have saved lives. A different approach to security governance in Colombia might have slowed the spiral of violence. Catholics in Northern Ireland might have been less inclined to support the IRA had the security services not treated them so unfairly. In each of these cases paramilitary violence was able to inflict lasting damage on states and communities, aided by the incapacity, disinterest, or active inclination of military and civilian security. Just states should seek to avoid paramilitary violence and instead make it their business to build just security apparatuses.

Good training programmes for soldiers offers the opportunity to make armies professional, disciplined, and sensitive to the social environment in which they operate. DDR and SSR are two ways to energise this process. Western armies have taken a long time to get to the point where respect of human rights and of local sensitivities is considered a key part of their remit. This work is clearly far from done. But by opting for third party violence, such as through paramilitary forces, states risk undoing much of the progress that international humanitarian law has developed for war over the last centuries.

Paramilitaries are unaccountable and difficult to control. They can stoop to the basest instincts of cruel armed men, and may be motivated by little more than greed, vengeance, and anger. States should consider the fact that if an objective is worth going to war about, then it is worth being achieved well. Paramilitaries emerge where the state is unwilling or unable to provide to security. In the first case, states should rethink. In the second, paramilitaries are at best a poor and dangerous stop-gap measure on the path towards decent security provision. Paramilitary violence has caused untold misery in a variety of conflicts across the globe. Their emergence and use should be avoided at all costs.

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