

STRATEGY



France's approach to armed violence reduction

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FRANCE'S APPROACH TO ARMED VIOLENCE REDUCTION

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*This is an overview of an interministerial consultation and work with researchers,
led by the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.
It is France's position paper on armed violence reduction.*

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Execution: DGM

Cover photo: Demobilization ceremony near the town of Rumbek, Sudan. © UNICEF / Mann

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FOREWORD

Armed violence reduction is a major issue of the international debate on security and development. This is demonstrated by the ownership of the subject by international development actors such as the World Bank, which has made armed violence a central focus of its 2011 World Development Report (WDR) and identified the issue as one of the impediments to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

In June 2006, Switzerland and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) invited various countries, international agencies and civil society organizations to participate in a Ministerial Summit in Geneva. The Summit led to the signature of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, which recognizes that armed violence is both a cause and a consequence of underdevelopment, and constitutes a major obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Since 2006, 108 States, including France, have signed the Geneva Declaration and pledged to take concrete measures to reduce the causes and effects of armed violence by 2015, alongside the Millennium Development Goals.

Armed violence is a real burden and an impediment to the political, economic and social development of States. In the face of this fact, and in order to better address this complicated phenomenon, France undertook to launch an interministerial debate and draw up an *Approach to Armed Violence Reduction*, with the assistance of international organizations, political decision-makers and researchers. This strategy will serve as a theoretical framework for our cooperation actions in armed violence reduction.

INTRODUCTION

Armed violence is the “intentional and illegitimate use of force with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community, or state that undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development”.¹ Armed violence reduction is today essential to establishing peace and achieving development goals. Specifically mentioned in the 2008 *French White Paper on Defence and National Security*,² non-State armed violence is recognised as a growing threat to the security of individuals and states.

Armed violence is part of a vicious circle of fragility of a State and society: it reflects a State’s weak legitimacy and a breakdown of social systems and is itself a factor of political and socio-economic destabilization. It undermines the operation of public services and creates areas outside State control. Given the complex and multidimensional nature of armed violence, an integrated approach needs to be taken that coordinates all the levels of governance (local, national, regional, global) taking into consideration interactions between development and security and with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including international organizations, States, civil societies, local elites and the economic sector. Armed violence reduction therefore needs to be seen as a way to strengthen democratic governance in order to restore State legitimacy and contribute to sustainable human development.

1- “Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development”, Conflict and Fragility Series, OECD, 2009.

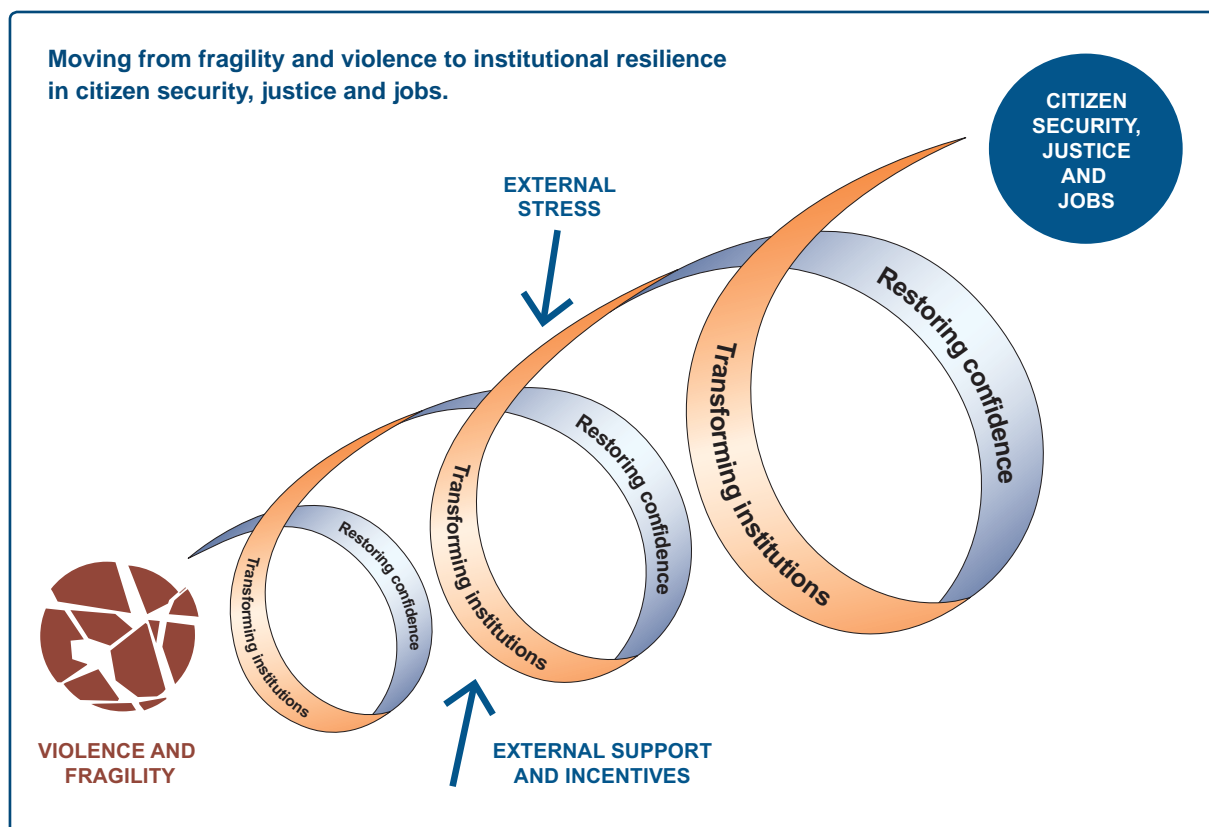
2- *White Paper on Defence and National Security*, p. 28 and 33 (2008).

1. ARMED VIOLENCE: A SERIOUS CAUSE OF CONCERN FOR SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

→ As a major issue in new development models, in particular through the close ties between security and development, the challenge of armed violence reduction is one that the international community must make a priority. Consolidation of the rule of law combining justice and security and support for economic

reintegration of populations, to build their resilience to violence should be the foundations of preventive action which seeks to break the cycle of violence, restore confidence between States and their populations, and establish sustainable peace.

Excerpt from the 2011 World Development Report of the World Bank



Source : WDR team.

Armed violence is the fourth leading cause of death for population aged 15 to 44 years

➔ An estimated 740,000 deaths a year are connected to armed violence, which is the same number of people who die from malaria. It is also notable that most violent deaths are not the result of war but petty and serious crime or politically motivated violence.

Armed violence compromises the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)³

➔ At national level, armed violence seriously undermines the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Some 90% of deaths due to armed violence occur in low- and middle-income countries. The impact of armed violence is particularly devastating in the areas of education, health and poverty eradication. As a result, countries affected by conflict or with a significantly high level of crime have achieved 10% of MDG 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 45% of MDG 2 to ensure universal primary education for all and 14% of MDG 5 to improve maternal health. In this respect, it is unfortunate that armed violence reduction and prevention is not a performance criterion of the MDGs.

Armed violence is growing at the same pace as urbanization

➔ Crime and armed violence have been increasing at the same pace as the extremely rapid urbanization in developing countries. Between now and 2030, these countries will witness a genuine urban explosion (accounting for 95% of global population growth). This urbanization will lead to greater social and spatial fragmentation characterized by growing slums. Some 830 million people currently live in slums (one citizen in three worldwide, but 62% in Africa). This figure is expected to reach 2 billion in 2030. According to UN- Habitat, 60% of people

living in these precarious neighbourhoods have been victims of crime in the last five years (the proportion is 70% in Africa). According to the Small Arms Survey NGO, a person living in a Rio de Janeiro favela is ten times more likely to die from a violent death than a person living somewhere else.

States spend substantial sums attempting to reduce armed conflict

➔ The sums represent the money that is not spent on real and sustainable development of countries. According to the most recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates, the total cost of armed violence in countries that are not affected by a conflict is \$163 billion, which is more than what is spent on official development assistance annually. According to UN-Habitat, overall costs of insecurity on average reach 8-10% of GNP in southern countries.

Armed violence generates a feeling of insecurity and neglect on the part of the government, compounding the socio-economic fears of populations

➔ The development of private security companies, which often have more staff than the security forces in many countries and whose legitimacy in ensuring the rule of law is questionable, raises doubts about the authorities' ability to restore stability. In this case, a State's democratic foundations are challenged to a large extent. To address this problem, it is essential to build State capacity to govern society and establish constructive relations with it.

Armed violence maintains ties with transnational organized crime and often fuels conflict situations

➔ Armed violence creates a basis for challenging government actions that are seen as ineffective because of the insecurity it generates,

3- Millennium Development Goal 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 2: achieve universal primary education; Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women; Goal 4: reduce child mortality; Goal 5: improve maternal health; Goal 6: combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability; Goal 8: develop a global partnership for development.

degradation of infrastructures and basic services, dislocation of social cohesion and damage to conflict resolution mechanisms. In doing so, and in certain cases, **it can become a conflict situation.**

Transnational criminal networks, a symptom of globalization, which take advantage of a State's vulnerabilities and porous borders to organize highly profitable illegal trafficking, worsen pre-conflict situations, contribute to the regionalization of tensions and broaden the dimensions of a potential conflict.

Drug trafficking and violence

1. **Drug trafficking has been accompanied in recent years by an unprecedented increase in violence and crime, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. This can be partly explained by the Mexican cartels' increased control of drug trafficking, which contributes to a significant deterioration of regional security. Over the past few years, narco-violence in the strict sense has peaked in Mexico.**

The increase in violence can be particularly seen in Central America where *maras* – gangs of young criminals involved in drug trafficking and rackets – are destabilizing all the countries in the region.

Lastly, drug trafficking and organized crime are connected to conflicts, from which they make money and grow.

2. **Drug trafficking greatly increases corruption at every State level and creates grey areas that are neglected by central authorities that are not exercising sufficient control and no longer provide security for their citizens. Moreover, a State that is weakened from large-scale corruption often experiences internal fighting, which is accompanied by violence among politicians seeking their share in the proceeds of crime.**

The State and law enforcement forces often seem too weak to deal with the rise in trafficking-related violence. This reflects the governments' difficulties in curbing the extreme violence of local cartels, despite a militarization of the fight against drug trafficking.

3. **Breaking the corruption-drug trafficking-violence link not only requires heightened awareness and involvement on the part of the States affected, but also that tangible signs are given to the populations, who are the hardest hit by armed violence.**

2. UNDERSTANDING THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

The different origins of armed violence

➔ Armed violence is a phenomenon with many causes and dimensions.

Armed violence is not spontaneous. It happens when a State becomes fragile, or fails in extreme cases, and violence and the informal economy serve as substitutes or alternative means to regulate economic and social life in the absence of the State. Violence is often the result of the weakness of a State in its incapacity to provide services throughout the territory and exercise its sovereign duties (homeland security, security of populations and exercise of justice) and to ensure an environment that is conducive to sustainable human development, social cohesion and economic activity focused on growth and job creation. The monopoly of legitimate violence is taken over by groups of stakeholders who share and misuse it to their own advantage. The territory thus becomes the stakes of political and power struggles.

The legitimacy of the State, a factor in armed violence reduction

The legitimacy of the State lies in its capacity to establish mutually constructive and inclusive ties with its people. Conversely, weak relations, or lack thereof, is typical of fragile States: namely “its incapacity to produce or promote common, recognized and shared standards, rules and regulations” with its population. The State is therefore

unable to produce regulations that provide structure for the behaviour of stakeholders. On the contrary, it has to deal with other sources of regulation that populations mobilize effectively. As a result, local stakeholders support armed groups or militia, mainly because they ensure basic services (security, arbitration, social mediation, etc.) that the State does not provide in these areas. This is the case of security, which is a core concern of citizens in armed violence situations. The capacity of the State to address this concern thus has a decisive impact on its legitimacy.

Legitimacy is closely linked to the population’s material and symbolic expectations. It is not defined according to a pre-established model that is consistent with international standards, but pragmatically as the specific quality of social or political entities recognized by those subject to them or part of them, thereby giving it its authority.

The legitimacy of power is therefore dynamic and multi-faceted. It is based on diverse sources that are interdependent and non-hierarchical. More important, it is in the interaction between input legitimacy, output legitimacy, through shared beliefs, that a State’s legitimacy is established in a specific context.

The legitimacy of the State varies considerably according to regions and the groups of stakeholders involved and even more so in fragile situations. Some social groups have a relationship of confidence with the State, whereas others have a weak and even conflictive relationship. What can stimulate the legitimacy of a State on the part of a group in a given field or area, can, on the contrary, undermine it in another. It is therefore

important to be well aware of the context and promote constructive relations for every situation with a global and multi-dimensional approach. In addition, any external intervention, however technical, will have a political impact on the legitimatization of the State and actions of local actors.

Yet the State capacity building to which bilateral donors and international organizations often contribute is not an adequate response to armed violence. The State has the monopoly of legal violence, but societies give it its legitimacy. Therefore it is important to be able to conceive that legitimate violence may be committed by those who oppose the State when it does not address the population's needs and expectations that are material (security, basic services) and symbolic (principle means of establishing confidence between the State and societies). **Also, endemic government corruption can undermine any action in the area of governance, by gradually breaking down the State apparatus and decreasing its legitimacy among the population. Such situations thus require a political response.**

Dealing with institutional violence

Legal anthropology work in France and internationally has highlighted two problems in particular. First, some of the most extreme violence is a response to other types of violence, which are most likely considered legitimate because they take place within government institutions (schools, armed forces, hospitals), but are hidden because of their symbolic "authority". These factors cause anxiety and result at times in criminal activity. Their everyday impact on citizens, particularly on young people, needs to be effectively assessed.

In addition, unlike in other civilizations, the vision of the world of our modern Western societies, with a Christian background, promotes order so fiercely that any disorder is treated as violence that should then be eliminated to re-establish order, which is inevitably mythical, original and too often fantasized. Where other societies can prevent this disruption through mediation and negotiation, we tend to dismiss illegal practices and their perpetrators, shifting the problem without

really addressing it, much less resolving it. That is why, to prevent the implosion of our societies, we shall have to accept the idea of overhauling our government policies on the basis of participatory mediation and intermediation experiences that have taken place since the 1990s. They should become common practice, particularly in cooperation policies with countries that respond to a more negotiated approach to violence. Michel Alliot, the head of the Versailles school district, stated in 1992 that: "When violence becomes a way of life, we need to stop it from escalating, which for some people means increasing violence in society and for others increasing violent outbreaks that may or may not have repercussions in the future. When violence becomes a way of life, we need to learn to live with it and negotiate with it, giving up the essential part of our political philosophy". The challenge is to re-engage with a democracy, which is participatory in a different way.

The socio-economic factors (social justice/ social cohesion) contribute significantly to armed violence. Although poverty is not identified as a direct cause of armed violence, increased awareness of injustice and social inequality causes frustration, increases feelings of humiliation and exclusion and can result in violent behaviour. Income inequalities, unemployment and more generally socio-economic insecurity, combined in some cases with spatial segregation resulting from poorly managed urban growth, create situations that are highly conducive to the use of illegitimate violence.

Social and/or territorial exclusion

The causes of armed violence are numerous, diverse, complex and often interrelated. A detailed analysis of the context must thus be carried out before any action to address this problem is taken. Such analyses frequently identify a same cause that comes into play when violence breaks out.

This cause or, more precisely, this potential basis for violence, is exclusion, whether socio-economic or territorial or both, of a fraction of the population. This is what often happens in big cities in southern countries that are overflowing with people migrating from rural areas. It is clear that the

urban economy is not able to offer enough jobs and incomes to meet the demand of these migrants, which has two consequences. The first is a challenging of the system, which is not providing these populations with the basic minimum, and by extension the legitimacy of the government, whether central or local. The second is the need to seek alternative livelihoods, including criminal activities. As a result, a steering instrument that is only integrated to a small extent or not at all in the legal economy channels, and often new, may become a recruitment pool for mafia networks or militia, possibly manipulated by political stakeholders. Naturally, risks of violence are increased when this exclusion is also “locally concentrated”, especially in slums, where there is a stark contrast between poverty and the opulence of the wealthier classes of the population.

This combination of exclusion and inequalities, which often give rise to violence, can be seen in many places, in Africa and Central and South America alike.

Along with these structural causes for the emergence of violence, a number of recurring factors can trigger or exacerbate this problem:

- the failure of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process;
- the circulation of small arms and light weapons;
- the absence of public services;
- the development of armed groups;
- migration movements (rural exodus, rural urbanization);
- rapid and chaotic urbanization;
- fluctuations in food prices;
- environmental concerns (over-cultivation).

The emergence of hybrid forms of violence and the specific nature of each situation

➔ The **multiple causes** (social, institutional, etc.), **perpetrators** (gangs, political militia, institutional forces abusively using their weapons, private security companies, transnational criminal networks) and the **emergence of hybrid** forms of violence (crime, organized crime, political violence, armed conflict, etc.) blur the traditional ways of understanding conflicts and interpersonal violence.

Distinctions between the labels “militia”, “self-defence groups”, “rebellions”, “traffickers” and “terrorists” are often unclear and shifting. Motives that drive them can change over time along with their ties to the State and society.

Explaining the diverse forms of irregular organized violence

A popular trend in analysing irregular armed violence is to approach collective perpetrators of such violence as one-dimensional bodies. This situation is fuelled by armed groups themselves, especially when they publically state that they are pursuing a political goal. Superficial understanding of armed groups gives rise to vague categories that are above all static, such as rebellions, militia, vigilantes, self-defence groups and organized crime or terrorist networks, without taking the trouble to study the sociological, economic and political content of such groups more extensively or to question the organizational structure or factors of their development.

More and more academic research projects have undertaken to study the local dynamics of collective violence. The themes explored include the recruitment of fighters, behavioural standards, learning effects, forms of violence produced by armed groups, governance methods used in local communities they control and determinants of their organizational evolution. Knowledge of these approaches to action cover concrete challenges and could be used in armed violence prevention and demobilization policies.

Empirical data on these different themes signal an extremely wide tempero-spatial range. Some groups establish rigorous recruitment criteria and impose serious disciplinary constraints on their fighters; others recruit their troops without due care. Some groups commit mass atrocities against civilians; others only target armed enemies. Some groups offer a supply of public goods to populations that they control in genuine “moral economies”; others act like “short-termist” predators of local resources. The real intellectual challenge is therefore not to identify forms of organized violence but rather to explain the differences between them and their transformations.

There is no consensual body of work on armed violence theory. However two major areas have been explored to explain such violence. The first focuses on the access of irregular groups to financial resources: ideas about recruitment, troop maintenance, violence committed and relations with civilians according to whether the groups have substantial financial resources or not and the origin of such resources. Another area of study to discover what determines the path of irregular armed groups concerns State, symbolic, institutionalized or physical violence. For example, it has been shown that indiscriminate State repression can produce the opposite of desired results and increase insurgency initiatives.

These are not all the factors. Cohesion and quality of leadership are likewise being explored. In addition, the scope of such explanations should be measured on a case-by-case basis in the contexts that are being constantly transformed by the contingencies produced by violence itself.

Armed violence covers an extremely wide range of situations, from interpersonal violence to collective political violence, and the specific nature of each situation should be taken into consideration so as not to interfere with its in-depth understanding and not to provide inappropriate solutions.

A varying expression according to geographic scales

➔ To understand the origin of armed violence in all its dimensions, it needs to be analysed from the perspective of four complementary scales:

- the local level, where the recognition of rights, security and the provision of basic services is assessed by the State;
- the national level, that allows for understanding the drafting of government policies and their limits;
- the regional dimension and the role of cross border groups and the involvement of neighbouring States;
- the impact of criminal globalization.

Geographical classification of armed violence helps determine the context of the different instances of such violence more effectively and to understand their cultural impact.

At national level, it has been observed that the risk areas are mainly located in rural and outlying regions where a State’s sovereignty has trouble being exercised and in areas of high urban concentration.

At regional level, non-conflict armed violence is highly concentrated geographically and demographically. It especially affects sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and South America with homicide rates of over 40 per 10,000 people while the global average is 7.6.

At local level, the type of violence is linked to urban- and rural-specific dynamics:

- Rapid and chaotic **urbanization** is often a source of socio-economic disparities conducive to the emergence of armed violence.

UN-Habitat has determined three types of causes of armed violence in urban areas:

- **social causes** (exclusion, dropping out of school, collapse of traditional solidarity mechanisms);

- **institutional causes** (inadequate law enforcement and judicial systems);

- **physical urban environment causes** (lack of urban services, chaotic urbanization creating lawless areas).

Precarious urban neighbourhoods most often combine these multiple causes and are a breeding ground for urban violence that affects young people, particularly with the problem of gangs, but also street children, producing a social disintegration process.

- In **rural areas**, land and natural resource access issues, fluctuating food prices and the importance of traditions and identity standards generalize the use of weapons and are contextual elements and vectors of violence.
- The **rural/urban divide**, in the study of armed violence, is not appropriate when interactions between two areas tend to strengthen one another and create a de facto ground for confrontation that is both informal and shifting. For example, armed violence in a rural setting is often the result of the expansion of southern cities and the shortcomings of public governance of resources. It therefore creates obstacles to local economic development and the sale of agricultural products, and fosters a climate of insecurity. It can then trigger rural exodus that worsens the chaotic organization of cities and spatial segregation, a source of frustrations and potential violence. This vicious circle can only be broken with a multi-dimensional approach combining security, social inclusion and economic development.

To understand armed violence, it is therefore paramount to understand the dynamics of each region.

Lack of State legitimacy at the core of the problem

➔ There is always a political dimension to armed violence. When populations become aware of injustices and their relative insecurity they want to challenge the failing State's position of public authority. If stakeholders join forces to address a violent movement, they can create a political organization that is capable of providing security and basic services to populations who

until that point did not have them. If a State is unable to devolve powers and has allowed a climate of impunity to develop for too long, these movements recreate an environment of solidarity-based interaction in which the use of violence is allowed and even promoted, enabling the social reintegration of its participants.

Although violence is always due to weak government institutions, it may also be caused by incompetent political elites who use institutional security forces or political militia for personal gain. The State can also directly produce violence when it decides to outsource security that it is supposed to provide its populations as it often ends up outside the State's control and the security provider establishes its own security regulations.

As a result, failed administrative and local governance, like the failed rule of law, are factors that trigger or exacerbate armed violence.

The perpetrators of violence reveal the issue of legitimacy

Public actors

➔ **Political elites**, with rare and coveted economic interests, can directly or indirectly cause certain forms of violence. In many cases, they are involved with a manipulation of collective identity references, which generates tension-provoking frustration.

Political militia can also be another pool for violence since they are big users of weapons (pre-election periods are a particularly favourable time for such violence).

Institutional forces seek to maintain domestic order and external security, but they may use their force illegitimately, particularly in the event of democratic governance shortcomings.

Lastly, **judicial systems** that are weak or serving special interests give rise to injustices, sources of violence themselves, and possibly to serious human rights violations.

Private actors

➔ The development of new radical forms of mercenaries and private armed militia can, by eluding all state control, be a factor that spreads violence.

Other private perpetrators of violence are **transnational criminal networks**, which take advantage of a State's fragilities to organize highly profitable illegal trafficking. The State is often the target of these networks but it can likewise alienate populations when it confiscates wealth and does not take steps to implement development policies. In this case, civil society can also use armed violence and move towards criminal networks.

Armed violence among young people, and more specifically **youth gangs**, tends to occur in a context of migration movements, arms and drug trafficking, uncontrolled urbanization and a failure of the State to provide basic services. Young people are witnesses, victims and perpetrators of violence.

Lastly, **banditry**, which criminalizes rural areas and whose objectives generally change over time, can sometimes be part of a politico-military movement. Often the product of decades of war, this type of crime can recruit only outlaws with mainly criminal motivations working in mafia networks, but also reflects the discontent of small farmers with regard to land issues.

Interaction between public and private actors in grey areas and development of armed violence

Fragile States are especially prone to corruption related to drug trafficking in particular. This problem takes place in two phases:

- **it transforms, under this effect of corruption, a fragile corrupt State into a failed State;**
- **it turns this failed State into a “mafia-controlled State” moving from corruption to the penetration of organized crime into government agencies, as can be seen in “narco-States”;**

This “downward spiral” is inevitably accompanied by an increase in armed violence on the part of different stakeholders, to control territories and the most profitable illegal activities.

3.

A NECESSARILY INTEGRATED AND CONTEXT- APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

Adapted responses for specific situations

➔ The specific nature of each armed violence situation warrants a detailed and multi-dimensional analysis of its context and roots. Multiple expert studies, both institutional and academic (anthropology, history, geography, linguistics), must be put into perspective so that it can be fully **understood**. Change can only be predicted and **adapted responses** can only be provided with an in-depth understanding of the specific nature of armed violence.

Integrated responses to multi-dimensional problems

➔ A crosscutting approach was chosen due to the intricate relationship between stakeholders and levels of violence, and the wide range of factors, consequences and motivations of armed groups. It is centred on State capacity building at national level (territorial control, effectively fighting crime, exercising justice) and local level (urban policy, community involvement, local governance, etc.).

Armed violence cooperation should therefore be conducted with a multi-dimensional approach. In order to re-build a constructive connection between States and their populations and enhance their legitimacy, this approach should include capacity building and more extensive interaction between the different governance sectors and between the different actors and regions.

Consistent with the principle “no development without security and no security without development”, it is a good idea to foster the coordination of institutional stakeholders (international, national and local) in the fields of governance, development and security in accordance with their own competencies and duties. It is also a good idea where possible, to associate the private stakeholders involved (NGOs, private companies) and populations with this effort of coherence and synergy.

Combining law enforcement approaches and preventive actions

➔ Although short-term operational actions are needed to eliminate the most dangerous and intolerable violence, **long term-prevention must also play a central role**. Therefore law enforcement action under the rule of law, along with customary and traditional conflict settlement systems, contribute to armed violence prevention and reduction.

A certain level of police and security action in the broad sense is key to reducing armed violence. Without excluding direct intervention in the most serious crisis situations, such action is generally focused on modernizing the security apparatuses of the affected countries, promoting regional military and/or police cooperation and introducing democratic control bodies and mechanisms in the institutions concerned.

Contribution of the French armed forces to international stability

One of the operational goals set by the French armed forces in the *French White Paper on Defence and National Security* is to contribute to stability and peace in the world.⁴ Over 12,000 armed forces are thus constantly engaged outside the national territory in multiple missions, of various sizes and intensity, and in very different international frameworks. Such extremely diverse missions also cover crisis stabilization and prevention operations, through operational military assistance to foreign countries.

Most often, armed forces intervene in external crises with a view to restoring security conditions that are essential to their resolution, i.e. ending armed violence as a means of objection. They are indeed the only ones who have means and expertise to be able to act on such short notice, in a distant location and possibly over a long period of time, in an area of insecurity and chronic and escalated violence. However, most crises take place in fragile States that have structural problems in terms of security, but also governance and development. Maintaining or restoring their stability consequently requires action in the three interdependent areas, which the military forces cannot accomplish alone. That is why military intervention, when required, is systematically conceived and conducted in a complex environment involving a large number of civil and military, institutional and private stakeholders. Military contributions to international stability are almost always conducted in an interagency and multinational framework and are naturally in line with the “inter-ministerial strategy for civilian-military management of external crises⁵”. In accordance with the *French White Paper on Defence and National Security*,⁶ the French Ministry of Defence likewise seeks to promote a “comprehensive approach” in the prevention and resolution of these crises, in order to improve the synergy of stakeholders’ actions, whether they be national, international, regional or local, in order to restore long-term stability as swiftly as possible, based on meeting the legitimate aspirations of the populations concerned.

Preventive actions can be divided into three interdependent but compatible timeframes:

- Short term: arms embargo, security actions, disarmament and demobilization, threat of violence alert levels system.
- Medium term: social and economic actions (reintegration and reinsertion), security system reform (especially law enforcement reform).
- Long term: poverty alleviation, change in mentalities and socio-cultural codes (through education and training), reorganizing the urban fabric.

The importance of the local level and targeted policies

➔ This top-down approach should be accompanied by a local approach, centred on the place where people live and organized around institutional or traditional governance systems. Although the State remains a central player, implementing public policies to address armed violence cannot be conducted at State level alone: coordination of different levels is key. Local government, the place for economic and social development, participation in public life and strengthening democracy, is an appropriate framework for mobilizing partnerships to establish and implement municipal insecurity prevention policies.

The contribution of domestic security services to armed violence prevention and reduction at international level needs to be part of a global approach

In an international context where the need for development of civilian crisis response continues to grow, France has sought to contribute to armed violence prevention and reduction. Through its

4- *French White Paper on Defence and National Security*, page 222.

5- *Stratégie interministérielle pour la gestion civilo-militaire des crises extérieures*, no. 692/MAEE/SG of 23 October 2009.

6- *French White Paper on Defence and National Security*, page 58: “The complexity of international crises requires the establishment of strategies combining diplomatic, financial, civil, cultural and military means, during the crisis prevention and management stages as well as the stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction sequences.”

security cooperation efforts including regional and administrative governance and its deployed personnel in European Union (EU), United Nations (UN) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) missions, France is helping to re-establish security forces in many countries, mainly in Africa and the Middle East. This action is in line with the French cooperation strategy in the area of democratic governance and the restoration of the rule of law. Coordinating and monitoring cooperation security actions conducted by the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, in conjunction with the French Ministry of the Interior, is part of this alignment of France's comprehensive action in the complementary areas of security, justice and governance.

Security must therefore be coordinated with local governance and the role of local authorities following the example of the UN-Habitat Safer Cities approach. The social urban programme being conducted in Medellín, Colombia with the assistance of UN-Habitat has some interesting ideas for action that could be promoted. In 2002, the social fabric sharply deteriorated due to an institutional vacuum (3,700 homicides per year in the city). The government re-established their control of the police and security action to combat paramilitary and guerrilla groups and a programme was set up, in close cooperation with local associations, to relieve isolated neighbourhoods and provide basic services. As a result, confidence in the government and social connections were restored.

The UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme: prevention through sustainable urban development

The UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme has been devoted for fifteen years to violence and crime prevention through sustainable urban development actions with close community involvement. Globally, the Programme aims to add to existing knowledge and expertise on urban crime prevention and raise awareness about social cohesion policies of cities.

To address constant urban development and challenges in the area of security and spatial organization, the Safer Cities Programme works on:

1. Making violent cities less vulnerable

There are several types of vulnerability: local, which basically concerns degraded physical environments and marginalized communities; and social, which specifically concerns sensitive groups that are vulnerable to crime and violence. The main groups that are vulnerable to urban violence are young people, girls and women. The prevention programme strategy therefore aims to prevent their marginalization and social exclusion and also contribute to their independence and improve their place in society.

2. Investing in urban planning, management and governance

Poorly managed urbanization can give rise to social conflicts that could generate urban violence. Prevention strategies therefore require long-term urban development that limits physical and social segregation with the aim of overall improvement of neighbourhoods along with regeneration and re-appropriation of public spaces. Such a process should improve social inclusion.

3. Developing urban security governance

The Safer Cities Programme recommends making municipalities the main stakeholders in urban prevention and building their capacities so that they can come up with comprehensive community-based strategies. At the same time, extensive work is being done on regulatory frameworks and institutionalizing government policies. Managing the feeling of insecurity is at the core of urban prevention policies.

Since the 1980s, international mayors' conferences have been identifying principles to establish local urban violence prevention policies via municipalities. Local policies should ensure the creation of a coalition of representative stakeholders (citizens, professionals, companies, NGOs, schools, traditional authorities) responsible for establishing a diagnosis of insecurity (crime map of municipalities cross-referenced with social variables) and drawing up a local security strategy in partnership with the government departments concerned.

The "Guidelines for French Cooperation in support of Urban Governance" (drawn up by French urban cooperation actors) are a product of the

French democratic governance strategy. They are based on institutional and human capacity building and support for the process of multi-stakeholder consultation.

At the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the democratic governance unit is currently supporting the implementation of a programme on violence prevention in an urban environment in West and Central Africa and aims to strengthen local capacities. With €95,000, the project is currently in the needs identification phase in three cities: Douala (Cameroon), Conakry (Guinea) and Ndjamena (Chad).

More generally, the purpose is to extend this French democratic governance strategy by developing aspects related to violence prevention in an urban environment.

Involvement of populations is vital in preventive action

➔ It is essential to involve all the components of a community (civil society, traditional chiefs, economic players, local elites and inhabitants) in actions to tackle armed violence in order to build the capacity of each person involved in the management of an area. Consolidation of public consultation forums for all those involved in regulation helps define a jointly managed public space and a common political strategy while achieving a basic feeling of equality and social justice.

Fighting impunity is of course essential to ending cycles of violence but a purely repressive policy may stigmatize perpetrators of violence and hinder the restoration of the social fabric. Also, if policies are not implemented in consultation with the populations, it is likely that they will never be considered legitimate and therefore be ineffective. Prevention policies fully coordinated with local political projects can provide a means for participation enabling populations to regain ownership of public spaces. They thus aim to become an instrument for promoting citizenship and building shared values.

Enforcement, coupled with heavy prison sentences, can victimize perpetrators of violence that may have been accepted at some point in the past, which ends up delegitimizing government

action. Conversely, purely preventive actions can be seen as a lack of severity and sign of acceptance of a criminal's violence.

In fact, they aim to restore the social connection, which means promoting joint preparation and population ownership of a process that offers them a chance of restored social peace.

In this respect, the pardon needed for reconciliation can only be considered after the status of the victim is recognized. Therefore, a fair criminal trial may be a pre-requisite.

Essential regional approach to prevent the spread of armed violence

➔ Localized political violence can spread swiftly to neighbouring regions, because of the movements of populations it leads to, most often at borders. This can even end up drawing neighbouring countries into the conflict.

Local and regional violence creates a context that is conducive to transnational crime and its perpetrators collaborate for technical purposes or to gain power through these big networks. As a result, the State enters into a vicious circle of failure in which it is unable to fulfil its sovereign duties, control its territory and provide the economic and social services the populations deserve. It then creates lawless zones that are defended by the use of force and increased by this trafficking.

Along with these different types of transnational trafficking comes corruption, which, in turn, weakens institutions due to citizens' loss of confidence, criminalization of the economy and heightened insecurity.

Cooperation efforts to reduce crosscutting violence should seek to build the capacity of States concerned through:

- the promotion of a regional approach to understand the fundamentals and dynamics of transnational flows and provide a pertinent response to borders that are being challenged;

- the strengthening of the entire security (defence forces), penal (police, justice, prisons) and administrative (customs) system in order to restore the State's legitimate monopoly on violence and strengthen the people's resilience.

The Anti-Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa (ALCAO) Solidarity Funds Project (FSP), the first steps taken under the action plan established at the ministerial conference on the fight against drugs held in Paris under the French G8 Presidency in May 2011, proposes to strengthen anti-cocaine trafficking structures in West Africa by helping the countries concerned organize their penal system and improve international and regional cooperation.

A number of internationally recognized actors likewise have a prominent role to play in the process: international courts, but also international police and customs cooperation instruments. Interpol is taking on a growing and decisive role in this area.

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