

First Annual

OUT OF WAR CONFERENCE

ON FORMERLY ARMED ACTORS

“Out of War: Global Insights on Reintegration to Support Strategies for Ukraine’s Front-Line Returnees”

London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE)

October 13th -14th, 2023

An initiative of:

[Trust After Betrayal](#)

&

[The Corioli Institute](#)

Conference Contact:

Jonathan Röders

j.rodgers@lse.ac.uk



About Trust After Betrayal and the Corioli Institute

Trust After Betrayal (TAB) is a UK Research and Innovation funded project led by Principal Investigator Dr Erin McFee and Research Associate Jonathan Röders that is hosted by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The project explores the dynamics of interpersonal trust in settings of organized violence with a particular focus on enabling sustainable (re)integration pathways for formerly armed actors (FAAs). It applies a combined theoretical lens from anthropology, organizational sciences, peacebuilding, security studies, and feminist studies.

TAB seeks to understand how (dis)trust influences the foundations for all social, political, and economic life in violence-affected communities in which individuals from every side of sectarian and armed group-civilian divides live together. By explicitly addressing this essential but often neglected “soft” component of security, TAB is at the forefront of designing interventions to transform conflicts, enhance reconciliation and rebuild the social fabric in fragile contexts. Moreover, the project advocates for a permanent move to participatory approaches to measuring and evaluating development interventions. Trust After Betrayal suggests a shift from regarding these aspects as an afterthought, designed to appease donors based on predefined metrics. Instead, the project advocates for integrating measurement and evaluation into the initial stages of the development process, using participatory methods to accurately capture the genuine and sometimes less tangible effects of these interventions.

TAB integrates research through multi-sited ethnographies into development interventions in collaboration with local grassroots initiatives, NGOs, IOs, philanthropic, religious, and public organizations and violence-affected populations in Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador, United States, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan. These interventions have analyzed and addressed, among other things, FAA transitions and (re)integration challenges, addiction and trauma treatment, community development and the dynamics of the climate change, conflict, and migration (CCM) nexus. Though ethnography constitutes the bedrock of Trust After Betrayal’s research, it also employs mixed and participatory methods, including community surveys, field experiments, semi-structured and life history interviews, multi-media data sources, and archival research.

The Corioli Institute is an emergent Research and Action organisation based on the social change-driven and community-oriented approach to knowledge co-creation that TAB pioneered. Building on the expertise and networks gained through TAB, Corioli further institutionalizes international partnerships to (re)integrate formerly armed actors and build trust and cohesion among violence-affected communities.



The Institute leverages the insights gained from engaging with local populations and their collective action in peacebuilding and development interventions to be the vanguard of research in this field.

Corioli's pathbreaking Research and Action mission is to make the grassroots initiatives it works with on the ground legible to international donor streams by transferring administrative and communicative expertise. Contextualized, bottom-up practices of peacebuilding and (re)integration tend to be highly efficient but remain obscure to many crucial benefactors or incompatible with their formal expectations. Enabling grassroots initiatives to access these funds will thus ensure that needs will be better aligned with provision in the realm of international development. On the other end, Corioli will offer international donors much needed consulting services to identify fund recipients in the interest of need-provision alignment and to revise their existing measurement and evaluation regimes to render them more participatory and contextually adequate.

Antecedents

In May 2023, Trust After Betrayal, jointly with its partners from the Violence Security and Peace (VSP) Network, organized a multi-disciplinary summit at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia, bringing together academics, practitioners, formerly armed actors, and violence-affected populations. Over the course of 11 events, invited guests from Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador and Venezuela and the general public discussed existing challenges and future approaches relating to the issues of violence and insecurity, with a focus on fostering trust and democracy in Latin America. Despite the vastness of the topic, the divergence of opinions and the limited time available, attendees generated a range of elaborate strategies to enhance the current policy landscape in the region.

The methodology, structure, objectives, and outcomes of this summit, including the feedback received by its participants, have served as the guiding blueprint for "Out of War": the upcoming conference also aims to bring together diverse professions, viewpoints, and backgrounds but with a more streamlined topical and regional focus, specifically revolving around the (re)integration of formerly armed actors in Ukraine. Attendees in Bogotá stressed that the loosely moderated exchanges in breakout rooms during the first day, which determined the prompts and questions for the summit's panel-based events, were extremely valuable to their immersive learning experience. Hence, "Out of War" will employ a predominantly horizontal, dialogue-driven design by which invited academics and practitioners can take particular advantage of this rare peer-to-peer encounter. This format will facilitate a deeper reflection on the themes discussed during the sessions. The feedback and



evaluations gathered will be used to refine TAB's generative and exchange-stimulating conference methodology, shaping the approach for the next event of this kind in 2024.

Conference Rationale

The term “formerly armed actor” (FAA) refers to all individuals who previously participated in the production of organized armed violence, including members of militias, gangs, criminal organizations, guerrillas, insurgents, and state militaries, among others. The conceptualization of FAAs expands beyond limited labels such as "ex-insurgent", "ex-cartel member", or "military veteran", allowing for a meta-level analysis of *shared* experiences among FAAs in different armed group categories.

This comprehensive analytical category helps foster a consolidated and intentional approach to researching the lived experience of life after the production of organized violence. It also facilitates better engagement with policymakers, practitioners, and the FAAs themselves: dispersed disciplines and siloed research on former armed group members dampen cross-case comparisons and dilute the potency of more concerted theorizing and policymaking across geography, organized violent groups, and other dimensions. Furthermore, analysing these actor groups in the aggregate potentiates novel insights into increasingly complex problems of organized violence worldwide.

“Out of War” is convened with the spirit of a global comparative perspective guided by the overarching, cross-boundary FAA terminology. The framework enables invited academics and practitioners working with distinct agents and settings of organized violence to have a common conceptual denominator that grounds conference discussions. Conceiving the diverse array of ex-fighters in Ukraine as formerly armed actors whose social, economic and psychological challenges are akin to many other contexts facilitates a synthesis of expertise and epistemes from many walks of organized violence research.

This conceptual framing also makes the debate accessible to those less familiar with the war in Ukraine and synchronises all participants’ generative reasoning along a unifying theme. Instead of losing time and repeatedly diverting the direction of the conversation by having participants explain the "ex-" categories they specialise in, the sessions can develop much more organically and efficiently on the premise that all are describable as formerly armed actors. The categorial and contextual differences are, of course, legion. The starting point for this conference, however, is where it becomes generative to consider similarities. The result will be a consolidated plan of action combining a multitude of global perspectives, ideas



and experiences relating to FAA (re)integration while retaining the necessary topical focus and methodical precision.

The conference acknowledges the importance of involving both research and practice actors to deliberate on what is a phenomenon of acute global urgency. Formerly armed actor (re)integration is a fateful task for societies in the process of (regionally) recovering from large-scale violence and undergoing post-conflict political, social and economic transitions. Examples like the recent Rapid Support Forces (RSF) insurgency against the Sudanese government demonstrate how neglecting (re)integration strategies of armed masses having previously fought for a particular purpose perpetuates the danger of continued insecurity.

Improving (re)integration regimes and countering FAAs' lack of perspective to neutralise this pernicious potential is a pressing issue faced by countless social settings around the world - from gang violence-affected zones in Chicago to areas of limited statehood in Colombia and the newly autonomous ex-rebel administration in Bangsamoro, Philippines. Moreover, cases like Ukraine, in particular, emphasise the state's and (inter)national civil society's special responsibility to provide formerly armed actors with appropriate health care and counselling, ample post-conflict opportunities and a dignified transition to civilian life. All the normative and pragmatic dimensions of FAA (re)integration are best addressed if academics, practitioners, and the formerly armed actors themselves collaborate in their efforts to understand these phenomena and jointly support continuously evolving interventions that transform lives on the ground. The "Out of War" conference provides such a space for multi-sectoral dialogue and allows invitees to infer many valuable lessons learned from in-depth discussions of the Ukrainian case for their respective engagements with formerly armed actors and their communities.

Spotlight: Formerly Armed Actor (Re)Integration in Ukraine

The Russia-Ukraine war is characterised by an intricate fabric of state and non-state actors, simultaneous conventional and asymmetric approaches alongside foreign internal defence and support operations. Both regular (state) and irregular (radical factions, armed civilians, paramilitary fighters, and foreign fighters) combatants fight alongside each other, particularly in the Ukrainian camp, in what can be referred to as a "hybrid defence". As a result, (inter)national (re)integration efforts for demobilised fighters during the ongoing war and in the longer-term post-conflict perspective need to account for a wide range of fighters that will require support when they lay down their arms. This endeavour implicates not only the country's government agencies, defence and security sectors, but also many humanitarian, international development, and NGO programmes – not least because



of the unparalleled global attention the conflict receives. Ukraine’s mixed warfare and state of prolonged conflict challenge more conventional reintegration and development processes that are designed for the aftermath of violence rather than the ongoing backdrop of it as well as for specific kinds of (ir)regular FAAs rather than the dynamic entanglement of both. This is further complicated by the presence of pro-Russian non-state armed actors and Russian prisoners of war who may remain in Ukraine upon being released in the future. Their elevated sense of frustration and betrayal coupled with the general stigma against them could be a grave source of radicalisation and insecurity. Yet, drawing attention and funds to the needs of these particular groups is politically awkward for the multiple stakeholders and benefactors of FAA (re)integration regimes in Ukraine. This issue simultaneously reflects the necessity to address the broader dimensions of trust, reconciliation and peacebuilding between the pro-Western majority and pro-Russian minority of the Ukrainian population, which is critical for the country’s security architecture throughout and after the war.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine showcases the extent to which contemporary conflict “battlegrounds” host a dizzying array of local, national, and international actors and interests, including FAAs from all over the world: United States military veterans, Russian contracted mercenaries, 2014 Donbas veterans, Russian separatists, Syrian fighters – both former soldiers and rebels – and more, lay bare the absolute necessity of interdisciplinary approaches with global scope to analysing the role of FAAs across time, geography, and group. The sheer quantity and variety of formerly armed actor profiles in a likely protracted war with spatial disparities of fighting highlight the urgency to prepare flexible and locally adapted solutions for FAA (re)integration. The situation in Ukraine will significantly challenge conference attendees as it demands the formulation of comprehensive responses, addressing both short-term and long-term aspects relevant during and after the conflict, within a structurally complex warfare environment. Therefore, it is a highly relevant and paradigmatic case that will stimulate enriching discussions on the empirical pitfalls of FAA (re)integration theory and practice and prompt sophisticated reflections on the versatile policies required to address them. Ukraine’s call for a holistic (re)integration approach galvanizes the multi-sectoral, cross-boundary collaboration “Out of War” seeks to promote under the auspices of the formerly armed actor category. While the work with FAAs in every location and cultural context is undoubtedly unique, the repercussions of violence production and armed group membership give rise to certain parallel dynamics, allowing for a fruitful convergence and mutual complementation of the multi-sited expertise gathered at the conference.

Conference Structure and Objectives



To set the tone and structure for “Out of War”, the organizers are drawing on an advisory committee of eminent academics, international development practitioners, and Ukrainian policymakers that deliberate on themes vital for supporting the (re)integration of Ukrainian fighters. Through their expertise combined with insights derived from comparative global case studies, eight prompts will be determined to drive the discussions in each of the conference’s breakout sessions. The participation of world-leading academics, practitioners, policymakers, and FAAs in these sessions will ensure well-prepared and productive conversations nurturing high-quality proposals relating to these themes, which are informed directly by experiences with fragile settings in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Plenary report backs after both session blocks will ensure that the different breakout rooms are able to briefly share their findings with each other. The book panel between the breakout sessions and the keynote presentation at the end serve to situate the understandings gained during the generative exchange on Ukraine with further comparative perspectives on FAA (re)integration.

The ultimate goal of this conference is to identify policy, practice, and research priorities, encompassing crucial organizational aspects such as sustainable funding, innovative measurement and evaluation, and the application of bottom-up and participatory methodologies. These priorities will be established by discussing FAA (re)integration in Ukraine, but will be formulated in more general terms, making them applicable to other fragile contexts as well. Moreover, the emergent strategies will be sensitive to the many axes of differentiation that characterize local empirical realities and individual positionalities, such as gender, class and ethnic differences, rural and urban divides, the qualitatively distinct experiences of *returning* and *rebuilding* (i.e., when the towns are wholly destroyed) and the nuanced trajectories of each combatant type.

Conference Methodology

October 13th

Registration, Welcome Dinner & Book Panel, and Networking Reception: Invitees will be hosted at a welcome dinner and networking reception. The dinner will feature a panel of leading scholars on peacebuilding in Colombia to inform and inspire us as we move ahead into the next day’s work.

October 14th

Registration & Breakfast briefing 8.00-9.30: The breakfast will serve to orient all participants with detailed instructions on the methodologies and epistemic objectives of the day as well as the expected outcomes from the conference.



Breakout sessions: Two blocks of breakout sessions in the morning and afternoon embody the methodological core of the day. Each block has four breakout rooms where a prompt of heightened importance for the Ukrainian (re)integration context, determined by the aforementioned advisory committee, will be discussed among participants. The breakout rooms will be assigned in a balanced manner, ensuring a mix of academics, practitioners, and formerly armed actors, among them invitees possessing special expertise on Ukraine and a diverse selection of those with knowledge from other global FAA contexts or about the respective prompt. Participants will discuss the prompts, drawing from their diverse range of knowledge while integrating comparative outlooks to the case at hand. The aim is to collaboratively devise and implement a fitting policy or program recommendation relating to the prompt that addresses the identified challenges and sets adequate priorities. These are discussion groups rather than panel presentations.

The moderators will let the conversation develop organically but may ensure equitable participation of all attendees across areas of regional expertise to fully engage the diversity in the room. To realize this, moderators can leverage the formerly armed actor terminology by highlighting its relevance as a unifying and overarching concept that everyone in the room can relate to their work – the mechanisms and the process matter more than precise awareness about the events in Ukraine. While the sessions operate under strict Chatham House rules, and critique of the current state of affairs is explicitly encouraged to stimulate a thought-provoking exchange, the sensitive nature of certain aspects of the topic may inhibit the raising of specific points. In anticipation of concerns about speaking to sensitive or lesser-known contexts, a digital forum will be set up where participants can leave real-time comments and remarks they do not feel comfortable saying out loud but that will nevertheless be integrated into the final outputs of the conference.

Breakout Session Block 1: 9.45-11.45. The first set of breakout sessions will consider prompts on the temporal aspects and common (psycho)social challenges of the war in Ukraine and beyond, which prepares participants for the concluding discussions on four dimensions of (re)integration in the afternoon.

- **Identity-Based Challenges.** Ukraine’s diverse profiles of fighters transitioning from the front lines raise considerable identity-related issues that need to be acknowledged by policy and program designers. Each FAA group bears distinct self-images, political alignments (some of which are radical), war-related experiences and resulting expectations towards their (re)integration. Ukraine’s policy response can benefit from the best-practice of international (re)integration initiatives embedded in similarly complex conflict



settings. Participants' professional involvement with various categories of combatants, including former tribal warriors, ethnic minority fighters, and international volunteers, allows this breakout session to identify the unique challenges and support mechanisms required for each group present in Ukraine. In the same way, this session will shed light on the individual-level properties that call for adjusted treatments of some FAAs, regardless of their group origin. Through this comprehensive understanding synthesized during the discussion, more effective strategies and interventions that cater to the specific needs of individuals coming out of conflict can be developed, fostering a successful and sustainable reintegration process for all types of FAAs.

- **The Long Shadow of War:** Ukraine will likely suffer from a protracted war that already commenced seven years prior to the full-scale invasion. Therefore, the policy and program debate need to move away from presupposing the “after” toward embracing the special intricacies of (re)integration in a continuously unstable and insecure environment. Transitions to civilian life against the backdrop of prolonged violence are a shared fate among many country contexts, in which interventions had to adapt with varying degrees of success. Analyzing the benefits and shortcomings of these global responses yields valuable insights for (re)integration in Ukraine's spatially differential states of (in)security. Moreover, protracted war means that individuals who already demobilized at some point may be suddenly reinvolved in fighting, like veterans from the 2014 conflict in Donbas participating in current combats – a considerable complication for renewed reincorporation attempts. Experiences from other prolonged conflicts can help develop proactive strategies to address issues such as post-traumatic stress, social integration, economic stability, and community support in the face of uninterrupted organized violence and FAAs' repeated engagement in it. Through this comprehensive comparative understanding, the unique needs and experiences of contemporary veterans in Ukraine can be better addressed.
- **The Invisible Wounds of War:** In the aftermath of the exceptionally brutal war in Ukraine, it is anticipated that veterans' issues pertaining to psychosocial reintegration, including PTSD and moral injury, will emerge as the second greatest concern after basic livelihood considerations. If these struggles do not receive adequate attention, they can lead to violent or self-harming behaviors, radicalization and substance abuse issues among other risks. Recognizing the gravity of these challenges, it becomes imperative to explore the cutting-edge



developments pertaining to mental health in the field of (re)integration. Examining the state of the art in this continuously evolving domain and recognizing the universal nature of these traumas across conflict settings are of utmost importance to design and implement programs that are sensitive to the invisible wounds of Ukraine's veterans, including the stigma and sense of shame they may experience as a result.

- **The Women of War:** With an estimated number of over 50,000 women actively engaged in the conflict in Ukraine, it is imperative to recognize and address the distinct needs of women in the (re)integration process. Women face very distinct (psycho)social challenges to men both before and after laying down arms, creating pronounced experiential vulnerabilities. Traditionally, these concerns have been under-conceptualized and under-differentiated in policy and program design, leading to intensified marginalization or even victimization of female FAAs. To effectively support this significant body of female fighters in the current war, it is crucial to draw on global experiences and lessons learned from (re)integrating female veterans, which have played a seminal role in countless conflicts like those in Colombia and Aceh, Indonesia. By understanding and implementing best practices tailored to the specific challenges faced by women, we can ensure that their (re)integration is inclusive, equitable and gender sensitive. Only through this approach can we guarantee the successful and sustainable integration of female combat veterans into Ukraine's post-conflict society.

- **Plenary Report back: 12:00-13.00**

- **Lunch: 13.00-14.00**

- **Breakout sessions: 14.15-16.15.** After having explored some broader themes of the war in the morning, participants will concretize action four dimensions of (re)integration relevant to Ukraine.

- **The (Inter)National Politics of (Re)integration:** While policies and program designs are essential foundations for successful reintegration, their efficacy can only be fully realized with strong political will, leadership, and unwavering popular and elite commitment to sustainable implementation – both at the national and international levels. Often, beautifully written peace accords and policies fall short when lacking the necessary political power and dedication to long-term processes of FAA reintegration. This breakout session aims to shed light on comparative strategies employable to obtain and sustain the political backing and governmental diligence required for the comprehensive and enduring (re)integration of FAAs. By exploring



political configurations, initiatives and compromises from other local, national, and international contexts, key factors that contribute to widespread political support, effective leadership, and the longevity of reintegration programs can be identified. Ultimately, this knowledge enables the development of an overview of the (inter)national political framework required to embed sustainable and successful FAA reintegration in Ukraine.

- **Social (Re)integration:** The diverse nature of (re)integration challenges faced by returning fighters in Ukraine necessitates nuanced planning and policy considerations in the social dimension. Distinctions must be made based on whether the fighters are returning to rural or urban communities, to cities with destroyed infrastructure or those that remain intact, and to families and friends deeply impacted by war or those who have suffered the loss of loved ones. To avoid territorially unequal outcomes, these situations require tailored approaches to effectively address the unique needs of the individuals and communities involved. This discussion group aims to examine global experiences and best practices along each of these lines, offering valuable insights to inform recommendations for the myriad (re)integration environments underlying Ukraine’s long road to recovery.
- **Economic (Re)integration:** The diverse body of fighters in the Ukraine war is characterized by a multitude of skills and professional backgrounds acquired from their civilian lives or gained within the armed groups. This reality calls for a multi-tiered approach to economic (re)integration that takes into account post-demobilization opportunities suitable to different individuals. To firmly anchor FAAs in a dignified civilian life, it is crucial to design economic program components that accommodate this variety of capabilities into viable financial and occupational options. This also needs to be contextualized with the broader war-time economic situation: While industries such as construction experience growth, many local businesses face the devastation of their assets and supply chains beyond salvage, impacting the potential labour market prospects for FAAs. Through examples of skill-integrating job creation for FAAs worldwide and within Ukraine since 2014, this breakout session aims to develop approaches to promote inclusive economic (re)integration, reduce the risk of re-recruitment into armed groups, and foster sustainable livelihoods for each combatant involved in the Ukrainian war while also benefiting local and national economic recovery.



- **Participatory Program and Policy Design:** The Trust After Betrayal project and the emergent Corioli Foundation are rooted in the fundamental principle of "nothing for them without them", emphasizing the importance of direct and immediate participatory engagement with Ukrainian soldiers and veterans in their transition to civilian life. In order to effectively consider their situational needs and priorities, it is crucial to involve them in the decision-making process behind program and policy design and ensure their contextualized experiences are captured by ensuing measurement and evaluation mechanisms. This breakout room aims to explore innovative trends in participatory (re)integration initiatives, uncovering responsive methods empowering FAAs to shape their own reintegration processes. Through this collaborative and inclusive approach, we can ensure that the support provided is accountable to their necessities and grounded in their lived realities, fostering a sense of ownership, trust, and sustainable progress as they transition to civilian life.

- **Plenary Report back: 16.30-17.30**
- **Closing Remarks: 17.30-18.00**
- **Dinner & Keynote Speaker: 18.30-20.30**

Conference Outcomes

The conference will culminate in an end-of-day synthesis of a comprehensive research and action plan aimed at fostering continued consolidated multi-sectoral action both in the specific context of Ukraine and contributing to advancements in the scientific field of formerly armed actor (re)integration on a broader scale. The Corioli Institute will also derive a concept note from the conference discussions, outlining strategies and proposals to propel on-the-ground efforts in this critical area. This note will serve as a guiding document for the Institute's future related to FAA reintegration and benefit the real-world impact of its operations for the years to come.

Furthermore, the conference will produce a policy paper intended to guide international development agencies and policymakers active in the field. The paper will emphasize funding priorities and present concrete recommendations for data-driven, measurable, and participatory program designs. Moreover, by providing practical guidelines, this policy paper seeks to inspire and materialize impactful and sustainable interventions relating to FAA (re)integration. In addition, a comprehensive final conference report will be compiled, complete with a DOI (Digital Object Identifier), ensuring formal recognition of all participants as contributors. This report will encapsulate the key insights, outcomes, and findings from the conference, preserving them for future



reference and dissemination. Finally, the conference will set the groundwork for a seminar series commencing in January of the following year. This seminar series will revolve around the eight prompts explored during the conference, fostering continued dialogues and knowledge exchange among experts and stakeholders in the field of FAA reintegration.

