

# EDA WORKING PAPER

## Executive Summary

## Non-State Armed Actors and Transitions from Conflict to Peace: Lessons from Peace Processes and Implications for Stabilisation

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- Most conflicts today take place within the borders of a state, and they often involve at least one Non- State Armed Actor (NSAA) fighting another armed group or state security forces.
- Engaging with NSAAs is risky and highly political, and the international community is therefore understandably cautious. But when managed properly, the potential benefits can outweigh the costs of not engaging.
- Non-state armed actors encompass a broad range of armed groups with different organisational structures, objectives, strategies and ideologies. Their differences reflect their relationships with the societies around them, and therefore call for different approaches to engagement.
- NSAAs are commonly perceived as scavengers of a 'fragile' state—perpetuating its fragility and spoiling peace and stability efforts. This perception often overlooks their existing governance functions. The reality is that NSAAs are often both spoilers and governance actors—very often at the same time.
- NSAAs are often highly controversial actors. Despite legitimate concerns of other actors, if NSAAs are politically relevant, they will need to be dealt with through political means. Not engaging with them in some way during a peace process risks inviting them to work against any negotiations.
- There are situations where exclusion of NSAAs from political processes can be justified, such as when they have little support, or are irrelevant to the agreement being negotiated. However, the exclusion of particular NSAAs, or factions of NSAAs, from peace processes is not a panacea.
- NSAAs can be engaged with to different degrees, ranging from informal conversations to having them represented as a party at the negotiation table, and can even include building their capacity to take part in negotiations.
- Official missions have leverage that private actors do not. However, private diplomacy actors' informal status affords them manoeuvrability and tends not to 'legitimise' NSAAs' status in the way that official engagement with them can.
- It is important to understand NSAAs' capacities and their potential contributions both to ending violence and supporting stability in the post-conflict period.
- In the pre-negotiation period international actors should map NSAAs and interact through carefully designed entry points, seek to build trust with the parties, and then try to facilitate the flow of information between all relevant parties as much as possible, before deliberately deciding on a strategy of engagement or disengagement.
- In the negotiation period, international actors should seek to engage with NSAAs pragmatically and contextually; where relevant, assist NSAAs to engage effectively through capacity-building and advice on constructive engagement; facilitate informal dialogue throughout the process; as well as be sure to engage NSAAs on the full range of issues that relate to them.
- In the negotiation period, international actors should understand that NSAAs can play important roles in the implementation phase of a peace agreement; that they can provide administrative or governance services; and that an NSAAs' relationship with the communities around them is likely to evolve.