

## **Exposé for a block seminar**

### **Political and economic agendas of armed groups in intrastate conflicts – four approaches and their implications for constructive conflict resolution**

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#### **Introduction to the topic**

The rise of intrastate conflicts in the 1990s encouraged many scholars of peace and conflict studies to examine the motivations and the dynamics of armed groups more closely. A comparative analysis of this research is not merely interesting from an academic point of view. The different conclusions regarding the genesis and dynamics of armed groups ultimately have implications for the resolution of intrastate conflicts.

The spectrum of research can be divided into roughly four categories, each represented by one of the following scholars: Paul Collier<sup>1</sup> regards greed for resources and economic profit as the predominant motivation for initiating and perpetuating armed conflict. William Reno<sup>2</sup> takes a similar approach. However, he suspects a clandestine, international economic dynamic as the driving force behind armed conflict. According to his interpretation, warlords join forces with transnational corporations to gain profit through the exploitation of a country's natural resources. On the other hand, Frances Stewart<sup>3</sup> argues that poverty and social inequality are also important factors that lead to the genesis of armed conflict. Instead of approaching the topic from a “greed perspective”, she suggests that political marginalization and repression, which deprive young men of job opportunities, are very compelling reasons to join armed groups. The debate is enriched by Klaus Schlichte. His thesis is based on the assumption that armed groups can only succeed in the long run if they are able to legitimize their power at home and before the international community.<sup>4</sup> Schlichte's perspective differs from Reno's and Collier's, in that the internal dynamics and the success of an armed group depends on a clear political objective. According to Schlichte, the ultimate goal of an armed group is to gain power or to participate in the political arena. Drawing from a number of examples, Schlichte illustrates that armed groups can transform into political parties, and eventually resolve conflict by more peaceful means.

For mediators of intrastate conflicts it is crucial to understand the diverse motivations of armed groups. The theoretical perspectives discussed here can help to develop an appropriate negotiating strategy based on the specific circumstances of a given conflict. If the armed groups appear to be driven by a “greed agenda” and are only interested in perpetuating a war economy, as described by Reno or Collier, then it may not make sense to negotiate for political participation. However, if the armed groups appear to act along political or ideological lines, as described by Stewart or Schlichte, then it may be more likely to achieve a political solution.

#### **Seminar concept**

The seminar will focus on case studies of intrastate conflicts and will compare the different theoretical approaches outlined above, which attempt to explain the genesis and dynamics of armed groups from different perspectives. The participants will be encouraged to analyze the impact of negotiations in each specific case and will discuss possible reasons for the success or failure of

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1 Collier, P. (2000), p. 95-96

2 Reno, W. (2000), p. 50

3 Stewart, F. (2002)

4 Schlichte, K. (2009), p. 20

negotiations based on conclusions drawn from the four different approaches.

## **Bibliography**

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