



Bureau of Conflict
and Stabilization Operations



Stabilisation Unit

**A PATHWAY TO DEFECTIONS:
AN ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR
PROCESSING DEFECTORS AND
DISENGAGED FIGHTERS**



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Joint Analysis of the
Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations,
U.S. Department of State

and the

Stabilisation Unit, UK Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This report is the culmination of a joint project between the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations in the U.S. Department of State and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Stabilisation Unit. Its purpose is to provide planners and practitioners with an analytical and evidence-based framework for building an effective and sustainable defections plan. The report presents optimal conditions for encouraging disengagement but emphasises that not all elements will be present in a given context and that the defections pathway is not linear or static in any way. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for taking calculated steps to encourage voluntary defections even when conditions are not optimal. Successful defection programmes depend on several critical enablers: detailed analysis for understanding fighters' incentives and motivations, lines of communication and political offers built on the analytical and contextual findings, and a defection 'pathway'. The report highlights several critical factors in the analysis—key actors, structural capacities and programmatic provisions, as outlined below—and provides guidance to planners and practitioners for implementing the defection plan.

1. Actor Context:

- Motivations: factors influencing decisions to disengage
- Cultural and societal factors
- Group-specific context
- Key stakeholder identification

2. Structural Context and Requirements:

- Institutional context
- Legal context
- State governance capacity

3. Programme-specific conditions:

- Deconfliction and coordination
- Economic and financial factors
- Human rights (risks and mitigation, transitional justice)
- Psycho-social support, education/training and reintegration provisions
- Security provisions (local and national; physical structures)
- Long-term commitment (delivery time scales and funding commitment)

Once the defection programme is approved, take the following steps:

- Step 1 – Conducting an initial analysis: motivations and context
- Step 2 – Devising an offer: risk assessment and incentives
- Step 3 – Delivering the offer: targeting and outreach
- Step 4 – Crossing the line: reception, processing, and transitioning

I. DEFECTION PATHWAY: SCOPE OF REPORT AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

1. The report briefly highlights key conceptual linkages between defections and other constituent parts of the stabilisation process, such as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) and Transitional Justice. It does not focus overly on terminology and definitions, given that these are likely to differ slightly between departments and agencies.
2. Instead, the scope of this report can be defined as covering the requirements and processes that enable the successful defection of members of non-state armed groups in both conflict and fragile contexts based on a review of lessons learned and best practices across contexts.
3. The objective of the U.S.-UK collaborative effort was outlining a baseline framework for encouraging defections, from the preliminary phase of outreach through the steps in the actual defection pathway in preparation for the transition to reintegration centres and, ultimately, to civilian life. Reconciliation, rehabilitation and reintegration programming and outreach are thus beyond the scope of the report.
4. We assume members of armed groups defect for a range of reasons, including those that are economic, ideological, or opportunistic and represent a diversity of actors, such as leaders, fighters, those providing logistics and support, and family members.
5. The report covers both high-level (i.e. senior) and low-level (i.e. rank and file) defectors. It assesses the likelihood of such actors to defect and discusses the impact of the defection in weakening the operational capacity of the armed group. As such, both *en masse* and individual defector processes are discussed, accepting that large scale group defections may require something more akin to a conventional DDR programme, while acknowledging that we often will not have a formal political settlement and DDR process in place.
6. Diplomatic and programmatic options that serve to encourage defection processes (e.g. influence of key national or sub-national leaders) are included.
7. As alluded to above, the report covers a range of contexts in conflict and fragile- affected states to identify diplomatic and programmatic options that would likely be applicable (once tailored) to a range of contexts and conflict scenarios.

II. PATHWAYS TO DEFECTION

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. The strategic aim of defections is to encourage individuals to voluntarily renounce association with a non-state armed group and cooperate to some degree in actions against it to degrade or defeat it. This objective can be furthered through encouraging either rank-and-file or high level defections. A secondary aim of defections is to reduce support for, and recruitment into, violent non-state armed groups. Direct military action and efforts to encourage defections are mutually reinforcing. Targeted efforts to encourage and facilitate defections can have as great an effect on reducing armed group numbers as kinetic operations. Defections damage the narrative and legitimacy of groups, erode their effectiveness, weaken morale, provide valuable intelligence, and tarnish public perceptions of the group.
2. The report presents optimal conditions for encouraging defections. It outlines essential steps along the defection pathway, from a preliminary analysis of motivations, actors and institutions through targeting and outreach and up to the point of defection. The operational reality is that not all components may be present in a given context, nor is the defections pathway linear or static in any way. Nevertheless, there are elements fundamental to any successful and sustainable defections plan. This report thus makes a case for taking calculated steps to encourage voluntary defections even when conditions are not optimal while closely monitoring and evaluating the effect and impact of the defection plan's progress relative to its stated objectives. Ideally, a comprehensive defections pathway should consist of the following elements:

Step 1 – Conducting an initial analysis: motivations and context

Step 2 – Devising an offer: risk assessment and incentives

Step 3 – Delivering the offer: targeting and outreach

Step 4 – Crossing the line: reception, processing, and transitioning

THE DEFECTIONS PATHWAY

Step 1 – Conducting an initial analysis: motivations and context

3. An understanding of the context and motivations should form the start point of any defection campaign: successful programmes do not come off-the-shelf. The preliminary analysis functions as the road map to develop an effective defections plan. At the very least, the following factors should be considered to inform policy discussions.

Motivations and context

4. Defectors join non-state armed groups for a variety of reasons which vary from context to context and from individual to individual: ideological conviction, economic gain, status, personal or communal grievances, or through forced recruitment. Understanding the reasons for joining in the first place can inform why that individual might decide to leave. Table 1 lays out the ‘push’ factors (aspects related to an individual’s personal experiences that drive them away) and ‘pull’ factors (outside influences that induce individuals to leave the group) that make disengagement more likely. Differences in experience based on gender and vulnerability (e.g. minorities and the disabled) also should be included. It may not be possible to get to the level of individual specificity; in such cases, the analysis would focus on group or sub-group dynamics or demographics with the best information accessible at the time of analysis. Moreover, assessing group-wide vulnerabilities—above and beyond those existing at an individual level—can help uncover entry points for outreach.

Table 1: Examples of Factors Influencing Defections

Push Factors	Pull Factors
Disillusionment with strategy/aims of group, group leaders and members, day-to-day tasks	Changing or competing loyalties
Wartime experiences (violence, risk of physical harm) and negative personal experiences whilst in group	Positive interactions with moderates (ties with mentors, friends who support peaceful behavior)
Difficulty adapting to clandestine lifestyle	Stable employment prospects
Inability to cope with physiological/psychological effects of violence, regret for role in attacks	Desire to marry and establish a family, family demands
Loss of faith in ideology	Family ties, family relationships, development of pro-social ties
Burnout (length of time in group, fatigue)	Amnesty or other policy/legal framework presented by host state
Psychological distress/fear of being caught or killed during military operations	Educational opportunities, vocational training
Unmet expectations (lack of status or advanced rank, no material gain, unfulfilled promises – e.g. marriage)	Financial incentives (stipends, housing)

Adapted from: Altier, Thoroughgood, Horgan, 2014¹

Cultural and societal context

5. Any offer to defectors needs to consider the societal context to which they will be returning. The broader experiences of communities to which defectors will be returning to should be understood to ensure any offer is realistic and sustainable. Key social factors

¹ Mary Beth Altier, Christian N. Thoroughgood, John G. Horgan, “Turning away from terrorism: Lessons from psychology, sociology, and criminology,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 2014, vol. 51(5), 64-661.

here include experiences of communities with respect to *inter alia* insurgent groups and state authorities, which may have included criminal behaviour or human rights abuses, and informal powerbrokers who may have control over communities. Security actors also play an influential role: would government security actors be a threat to defectors? What is the risk to the defector from the insurgent group they left and the community they are re-joining? Other contextual considerations that factor into the analysis include: how people get their information (social media, radio and television), literacy rates, religion, discrimination and familial and gender-related dynamics.

Economic context

6. Programs that provide for basic needs and/or create employment opportunities are key variables in preventing recidivism. Ex-combatants who find relatively formal or informal stable employment and regain some level of status in their community find fewer reasons to reengage in organized violence. Physical infrastructure such as accommodation is important in assessing where defectors can be resettled as part of the offer. This is particularly relevant when returning to one's community is not an option or if the community refuses to permit former fighters to return, necessitating resettling them in other communities.

Institutional context and state capacity

7. A strongly committed host government is one of the most critical components of an effective and sustainable defections campaign. However, government capacity in conflict-affected areas is seldom sufficient. Often, the government has not addressed the grievances of defectors and communities, and former fighters frequently return to the same conditions under which they were first radicalized. One must develop a clear understanding of the ability of the state at the central and local levels to: administer defector programmes, provide funding, ensure security, process transitional justice requirements (seek accountability for perpetrators of crimes, pursue a reconciliation process) and work with communities to accept and reintegrate former fighters.

Legal context

8. In fragile states, many national frameworks do not adequately embrace international humanitarian law, human rights conventions and the rule of law, and yet a clear and predictable legal framework for handling defections is vital. Does the state have the parliamentary, legislative or judicial capacity to build a legal framework? If not, are other mechanisms such as presidential decrees feasible? Is there an amnesty program in place? Needed is an assessment of the types of crimes a justice system could process and whether the system serves the victims of crime. If legal institutions are weak, other alternatives should be explored, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, reparations or application of local customs and practices for conflict resolution purposes. Understanding how international laws and conventions constrain or otherwise affect the

conflict environment is also important, as are legal considerations if the conflict expands into other countries. A trans-border conflict will require coordination of policies among affected states and some agreement on standard procedures, such as the repatriation of fighters. To the extent there may be national or UN sanctions regimes imposing an asset freeze and prohibiting provision of economic resources to parties in conflict, consideration should be given to unwinding those sanctions as needed.

Group context and classification

9. Any given armed group will have its own 'culture' and ethos, and understanding what these are will help identify entry points and creative outreach communication strategies. For example, what roles do men and women play, or what social activities or outside contacts are permissible? In addition, a profile can be built of the *types* of defectors for different outreach campaigns (e.g. leadership, fighters, logistics support and support services such as cooks or drivers). Different offers, moreover, will likely have to be devised for those who are 'high level' (senior leadership/commanders) and 'low level' (rank-and-file members).

Identify stakeholders

10. A defections campaign involves many actors who are directly or indirectly involved. Stakeholder mapping should be produced as a means of assessing potential beneficiaries of an offer. The following is a list of stakeholders to consider for the assessment:
 - a. Beneficiaries of a defection offer:
 - Combatants
 - Dependents (women, children, disabled)
 - Communities where defectors resettle
 - b. National actors:
 - Governments and relevant line ministries
 - State security actors, including intelligence agencies
 - Non-state armed groups
 - Civil society organisations
 - National media
 - Community leaders
 - c. International actors
 - UN mission and agencies
 - Multilaterals (e.g., European Union, African Union, development banks, Intergovernmental Authority on Development)
 - Bilateral partners
 - International NGOs

Deconfliction and Coordination

11. Commonly, any number of donors will be running their own defector programmes in the same country. Programmes addressing CVE and security may also have conceptual linkages to defector programmes and, if not coordinated, could work against each other. Complementarity will maximise the effect of each programme. Care should be taken to keep track of defectors so they do not move between programmes (information sharing between programmes is therefore also important). Where possible, a mapping of defector, CVE and security-related programmes should be undertaken, building as comprehensive a picture as possible of the programmes and diplomatic work of other donors (traditional and non-traditional), the UN (which is often instrumental in coordinating defector programmes), the host government, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Step 2. Devising an offer: risk assessment and incentives

12. An offer should be comprehensively developed before any outreach to defectors begins, and key stakeholders—such as those listed above—must be part of the process from the beginning. Considerations of requirements for further down the defection pathway should be made at this early stage to ensure that an offer is practically implementable and sustainable. Legal and policy considerations are paramount to ensure the status of defectors and for donor support. Defectors and resettling communities need to be clear on what is being offered and to whom to ensure that defections are voluntary and do not turn into detention. For potential defectors, a sense of fair treatment and an offer of personal safety by national or local security providers are important factors in their decision process. In devising an offer, the following criteria should be considered:

Who to target (fighters, members in support roles, and dependents):

13. Any political offer should be clear on who is eligible and how that eligibility will be assessed and hence shape outreach campaigns. The assessments on group cultural context, defector classifications, stakeholder mapping and other donor/government programmes should inform the scope of the targeting. Fighters should be core recipients of the offer; whether to include those in non-combatant support roles will depend on factors including the funding available, the assessment of their numbers and whether they can realistically be reached. In government DDR approaches (usually post-conflict), an offer may extend to dependents, particularly if it is part of a broader peace deal. However, including dependents should be approached carefully and on an exceptional basis since it can be seen by traumatized communities as giving preferential treatment to the perpetrators of the violence.

High level and low level defectors

14. If considered, accepting high level defectors (senior leadership/commanders) requires increased security considerations and scrutiny. They can provide valuable information about group operations and plans and possibly persuade lower ranking group members loyal to them to also defect, thereby bringing over larger numbers of defectors. Therefore, offers to high level defectors can be crucial but often require specific terms negotiated with senior ranking defectors (past examples include relocating with family or taking up a position in government/military) and involve careful, often covert, negotiation. Devising offers for mid-level commanders should also be considered. The perception that they are not important enough to be given a lucrative offer as an incentive to defect can fuel resentment and drive them to continue fighting or join criminal networks to seek the financial gain they feel they deserve.
15. Low-level defectors are rank-and-file members who carry out operational or support roles. Offers to this group should centre on reintegrating and reconciling back into communities. The policy should be clear and offered equally to all low-level defectors to prevent feelings of mistrust vis-à-vis the government (which will likely already be an issue). Low-level defectors must be assessed for potential criminal activities and level of risk—to communities and to themselves. This typically happens at the screening stage (more detail on this in the section on receiving defectors).

What to offer (devising defection offers):

16. What to offer depends on several factors: defector motivations for joining and leaving, contextual analysis, and information-gathering involving political, military, and intelligence support at the local and national levels. Cooperation must involve working with key stakeholders to promote coordinated and cumulative action rather than ad hoc efforts. The goal is to devise an offer for an individual or group, consistent with applicable domestic law and international legal obligations, including any applicable prohibitions on the provision of material support or other benefits to terrorist organizations or targeted sanctions on parties involved in conflict, that has the best chance of minimizing the risk of recidivism and maximizing reintegration into civilian life. The components outlined below have been used in previous defection programs and may not be applicable to all programs. Context matters.
 - a. **Financial offers**—such as cash instalments or material goods—can be useful for initial enticement but often are not enough on their own for defectors to fully settle back into society. Including families and communities in the delivery of assistance packages helps minimize the resentment they may feel regarding the support defectors are receiving and increases the likelihood that the defector will be accepted back into the community. Certain domestic laws and international legal obligations may prohibit the provision of certain such offers, and such legal considerations must be taken into account.

- b. **Legal basis for offer:** As noted, a clear and predictable legal framework in the host country for incentivizing and handling defections is vital and would be based on a comprehensive analysis of relevant international, national and tribal law. For both the donors and the host government, any offer must have a legal basis. The host government should have a clearly established legal and policy framework for handling defectors that addresses, inter alia, defectors legal status in the country, government responsibilities for each stage of the process, and parameters for the involvement of local communities. The initial legal analysis will help answer important questions. Are detainees in military or civilian centres treated humanely? Are there standard procedures for adjudicating high and low risk defectors? Is there an amnesty programme in place that adheres to the state's international legal obligations? Amnesty programmes are a key incentive for defections, though states must still ensure that those defectors suspected of certain serious crimes, including war crimes or crimes against humanity, are held accountable consistent with the state's international obligations. The credibility of an offer to a potential defector will depend on whether government actors adhere to amnesty provisions. Additionally, careful planning and analysis is needed to navigate UN, donor and host government legal authorities. Mapping applicable stakeholder laws and policies—for example, U.S. domestic law prohibitions on providing material support to a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)—can help build a coordinated policy response that could fill gaps, take advantage of comparative advantages and anticipate timing and resource issues.
- c. **Reintegration into government security forces** can also be considered in cases of high level or large numbers of defectors. There are several important points to consider: timing, since a long wait period could allow impatience and discontentment to set in; the capacity to absorb the number of defectors/demobilised fighters; the education level required in some security forces; the need for trust-building between former combatants and government forces; and how this aligns with the stage of the conflict/peace process. Particularly for high level defectors, offering positions of status will be an important consideration.
- d. **Educational and vocational training** is an important tool to help equip former combatants to succeed in civilian life, since lack of job prospects is often cited as the motivation for joining armed groups. Vocational work programs should benefit the community as well and match the needs of the local economy to avoid the risk of unmet expectations and possible recidivism. Additional basic education (literacy, numeracy) is often required as well.
- e. **Emotional needs:** The practical elements of reintegrating are important but must be supplemented with programming that addresses the emotional needs of former combatants, such as trauma healing, social-psychological therapy and religious counselling. The group cultural context and roles should be used to develop

rehabilitation requirements that reflect the needs of defectors based on their experiences (high levels of violence, sexual violence and/or drug dependency).

How to Offer (process and programming considerations):

17. **Funding:** In order to ensure an offer can be realistically implemented, funding must be considered from the outset, including the sources and sustainability of that funding over a medium- to long-term time frame. Enticing defectors without a mechanism for ensuring ongoing programmatic support can lead to higher risk of recidivism or renewed violence. Sources of funding—whether host government or international donors—will depend on the context. Coordination between donor programmes should be discussed and monitored to channel funding more efficiently and avoid unnecessary duplication.
18. **Security:** An essential component of an effective and sustainable defection campaign is a security apparatus with the capacity to process defectors. Ideally, the host government is firmly committed to the process and moves to build political commitment across the security sector ministries early on. It is important to assess whether security institutions can process and integrate defectors—and how former fighters may be received by government forces. Security for defectors should also be considered: can security forces protect defection sites? Can they hold the rule of law in areas where defectors might reintegrate? If not, where and how can defectors be kept safe? Protection at the front line of disengagement should be secured even if there is no formal legal framework in place.
19. **State governance capacity** is an important initial consideration in how a defector programme can be administered. Physical infrastructure may have to be built and, though DDR programs should be civilian-led, national security and military forces may also need to be positioned and prepared to support the programme. This may also require a central coordination and leadership construct. Because of the number of government institutions involved and the highly political nature of DDR, it is usually preferable to have central, senior political ownership of such a programme. If state capacity is low, another organisation will need to work with the government to support the programme. The UN often takes up this responsibility since it is usually well-placed to work side-by-side with the host government and coordinate across donors, though this will depend on the role the UN assumes in country.
20. **Community leadership and sensitisation:** In developing an offer, support from community leaders—elders, religious or clan leaders—must be included in the defection process from the beginning to ensure they accept it and will help in its implementation. This is where the contextual analysis and stakeholder mapping are valuable. There is a balance between local buy-in and ownership, and securing strong national and sub-national commitment remains one of the key factors related to successful defection plans. Part of this process will include reconciliation with communities. Ex-combatants are often stigmatized or rejected; communities often resent the support former fighters

receive—cash payments, education, job training, or medical care. Transitional justice measures can provide accountability and a sense of equity between what is offered to ex-combatants and to the resettling communities. Balanced financial and programmatic support to both former fighters and the communities in which they are to integrate can minimize the risk of retaliation and help build social cohesion and reconciliation in the community at large.

21. **Long-term commitment:** Defector outreach should be viewed as a long-term, ongoing process, since transitioning from war-fighting to a post-conflict life will require a variety of support over a sustained period. Long-term planning among international partners regarding allocation of tasks and resources and an agreed on time frame must be part of the process. The political will of national and sub-national leaders should be sought in advance of outreach and continued and reiterated throughout this sustained period. Civilian and military cooperation is essential; working with local partners, NGOs, CSOs and civilian and military advisors can support outreach efforts to communities and assist in running various reception centres. Civilian-military cooperation is also important in analysing motivations and customising and delivering defection messaging.

Step 3: Delivering the offer: identification, outreach, and approach

22. A comprehensive analysis of the above phases and their components—ranging from motivations and contextual analysis to stakeholder mapping—should ultimately provide an indication of whether a defector programme has any likelihood of success. In many contexts, the risks or challenges may, on balance, simply be too significant to overcome. However, the preliminary decision to proceed with programming will ultimately lead to the first ‘operational’ step of the defector pathway: targeting and outreach. Working with key stakeholders is critical to promote coordinated action.
23. The aim of this step is to approach or ‘reach’ individuals or groups assessed to be already willing to defect or who, for a variety of reasons, may be convinced to do so. Kinetic pressure increases vulnerabilities and creates defection opportunities; thus, kinetic and non-kinetic operational planning should be integrated to take advantage of these opportunities. Once individuals or groups have been identified as potential targets for defection messaging, it is necessary to determine the appropriate message to send, the best means to send it, and the best timing to do so.

Identification

24. The identification of potential defectors will take at least two forms. The first of these consists of prospective defectors **presenting themselves** to government or security installations with a view to defect from any given armed or violent group. Such a dynamic is more likely to occur in the case of lower level, rank-and-file members in contexts where a formal amnesty and demobilisation framework is in place. The second type of

identification is where potential defectors are **actively sought out** through a process of targeted activities and analysis. In some instances, this will take the form of simply broadcasting a defection message, perhaps in advance or in the wake of a government military offensive. In others—typically high level defector programmes—this can consist of developing actor profiles and mapping relationships within groups with a view to more proactively luring individuals away from their groups with targeted strategies.

Outreach

25. Outreach to defectors will be guided by two interconnected variables: capability and access. **Capabilities** present the vehicle through which offers are broadcasted to target groups or individuals. Today this includes anything from leafleting, video productions, television and radio broadcasts and even social media outreach. However, more traditional opportunities to convey proposals through respected or influential community members and personalities should not be ignored. As ever, it is important to remember the age-old strategic communications maxim that the ‘medium is the message’ when aiming to convey offers to potential defectors. Individuals will consider defection packages as being more credible if these are explained to them as well as endorsed by individuals whom they respect. Conversely, broadcasting through channels not seen as credible will decrease their likelihood of resonating with the target audience. **Access** is the extent to which those same offers can be deployed within any geographic and social context and, in turn, reach the intended target audience. This tends to be one of the most difficult barriers to overcome during times of conflict, particularly when violent groups control physical territory (in which case it is easier for them to also monitor information flows and control access to various mediums of communication).

The Approach: senior defectors

26. Programs actively seeking out defectors tend to focus on a small number of senior or influential members of armed groups. Such actions, however, require a great deal of resources, host government leadership and experienced specialists and thus are not easily scalable. Therefore the logic underpinning these approaches is to focus on individuals of strategic value whose defection will undermine the cohesion of their organisation, demoralise remaining members, encourage future defections or cause the fracturing of ‘rank-and-file’ groups loyal to senior defectors. The approach itself will inevitably require entering in contact with individuals directly (a difficult task in conflict-affected contexts) or through intermediaries within the same social circle, family or tribe as the individual who is being targeted for defection. Intermediaries may include former defectors or close relations who can organize negotiations or broker between the government and the individual. Analytical methodologies such as social network analysis may assist in mapping specific entry points and identifying such intermediaries. Authorities should also seek to ensure potential defectors know where, to whom, and how they should turn themselves in (such as a predetermined turn-in site or a military compound).

Step 4 – Crossing the line: screening and debriefing

27. This step constitutes the physical act of defection or ‘crossing over’ to government forces. Where needed, defectors and their dependents would receive medical care and basic needs (food, water and clothing). Again, this phase will tend to differ slightly depending on the specific classification of the defectors, such as senior versus rank-and-file members. A defection plan should be set up to process those ex-combatants and dependents deemed to be low risk. Special provisions and process may have to be put in place for individuals who through the screening and debriefing process are suspected of criminal acts or human rights abuses.
28. **Screening:** The screening process is a systematized method of registration, profiling, and categorization of individuals, along with an evaluation of associated risks. Ideally, screening and debriefing should take place immediately at the turn-in site to collect timely information. Individuals will be assessed in terms of their role, status and responsibilities within the organisation as well as their potential value with respect to intelligence and/or ability to entice other defections. The nature of screening will depend on the context, the armed group and the reach of the security forces. For example, in the event of a military offensive in which government security forces have regained the territory, mobile screening teams may be forward-deployed within newly controlled areas to aid with the screening process. In other contexts, defectors will need to be transported to areas outside of the contested areas so the screening process can take place in a relatively secure manner. Whenever possible, biometrics (fingerprints, iris, face, DNA swabs) should be collected to assist in the screening process.
29. **Debriefing:** The debriefing process should focus on at least two lines of enquiry. **Strategic lines of enquiry** should seek to generate a better understanding of the violent organisation as a whole, including its inner-workings, dynamics and, rather fundamentally, its vulnerabilities. In turn, insights should be generated with respect to a group’s structure, aims, leadership, financial processes, internal tensions and morale levels. Clearly, individuals in positions of influence or seniority will be better placed to answer questions relating to the way in which a group functions. However, even junior members can offer a lens into the strategic logic of an organisation by describing their training, the orders they received and their own perceptions as well as those of their fellow members or combatants. **Tactical lines of enquiry** should instead focus on specific individuals or sub-units who may be convinced to defect in the future. For example, some defectors (as seen above) may act as a conduit or intermediary to approach other disillusioned individuals—‘proof’ that the government has come good on their offer.
30. **Outreach:** The debriefing process must also involve outreach activities by local forces and their partners, such as connecting with the defector’s family and community, for several reasons: family tracing can verify information obtained from the defector; an appropriate

person of contact to liaise between the defector and his/her family and community can be identified; and the important work of community engagement and sensitisation in preparation of reintegration can begin as quickly as possible. In the end, the vetting, screening, and debriefing of defectors must be as reliable as possible to ensure the process of reintegration has the best chance of succeeding.

Beyond the defection pathway: reintegration and reconciliation

31. Reintegration refers to the process by which ex-combatants and their families settle into social, economic, and political life in their communities. Thus, it defines the essential task and ultimate aim of the defection process: assisting former members of non-state armed groups to assume productive and peaceful civilian lives.
32. As highlighted in the offer section above, reconciliation, particularly within host communities, is a key component of reintegration strategies. Reconciliation may include shared trauma or psycho-social counselling and working with the receiving community to minimise stigmatisation of former fighters and their families. Sensitisation sessions and community dialogue can minimise the risk of retaliation and help build social cohesion and reconciliation in the community at large.
33. Communities are often unwilling to accept defectors, but they are much more likely to accept defectors if the grievances of victims also have been addressed and the community benefits as much as the former fighters. Communities must also be sensitised to the needs of women and children victimised or coerced by group members.
34. Stakeholders in the defections process have an interest in assisting with the initial contact and reception of defectors and maintaining ongoing interaction and support for them. Reintegration activities should not be relegated solely to the 'post-rehabilitation' phase; contact between defectors and communities can be encouraged in the rehabilitation phase as well, managing any sensitivity or security concerns that might be present. This can help prepare for smoother reintegration once a defector has completed rehabilitation. When early reintegration activities can begin will depend on a number of factors, including the cultural context, defector motivations, stakeholders and the security situation.
35. In the absence of a long-term commitment beyond the defections pathway, initiatives intended to encourage defections from armed groups will fall short of their objective of reducing violent conflict and building a more enduring peace.

III. Steps for policy or programme development to support defections from armed groups

Stage	Points to Address
Initial Analysis	Undertake the analyses listed in Step 1
	Assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being done by the host country? • What can the implementers do? • What can the country in question do? • What support is needed (funding/programmatic/technical)?
Devise an offer	Using Step 1, decide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who the offer is for? • What are the policy and legal frameworks needed in line with the rule of law situation? • What rehabilitation support is needed? • Are there options for fighters to be integrated into government/existing jobs? • What are social, community and reconciliation needs? • Outreach to community leaders
	Assess practical considerations for implementing the offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much funding (and in what time frame) is available—what is the associated prioritisation of needs within the funding (including consideration of other donor support)? • What are security requirements for defectors and defector centres? Who are the potential security providers? • What are procurement option routes (depending on donor support vs recipient country support)—what is the marketplace for implementing partners (both private sector and NGOs)
Delivery of the offer	Throughout implementation, undertake the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a monitoring system for assessing the performance of the programme on a regular reporting basis, develop indicators to measure successful defector progress through the pathway (e.g. completion of activities, defectors in centre are low risk, and voluntary, community perceptions of defectors, sustained reintegration over time) • Ongoing community engagement to adapt the programme as needed • Set up human rights reporting system and external assessments throughout the defector stages and integrate with monitoring framework • Set up regular co-ordination with other programmes and donors
Longer-term Considerations	Evaluate: what is the long-term vision for ownership of defector programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase or decrease in scale or locations? • If donor programmes and/or funding is used, how is it envisaged that the recipient government will eventually transfer control?



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