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A Quantitative Analysis of the State's Coercive Capacity and Intrastate Violence

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Acknowledgments

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Foreword

At the end of the 20th century, as the Communist system faltered and collapsed, hopes for a peaceful future began to spur. Observers asked for what purposes modern nations needed large and powerful armed forces at all. However, the violent break-up of Yugoslavia amply proved that the demand for military readiness would not disappear any time soon. Western nations felt pressured to once again seriously consider – and eventually apply – military force.

Yet, in the post-Cold War era confrontations between nation-states proved to be the exception rather than the norm. Instead, keeping peace and providing security on foreign soil have become common activities for the militaries of Western nations. In recent missions to Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Mali international forces found themselves unable to pull out of theatre after the main adversaries had been overcome, lest the respective country slips back into turmoil. "Victory" in a symmetrical confrontation was followed by attempts at stabilization.

Many of these endeavors aim at aiding struggling governments incapable of resolving internal conflict and controlling civil strife. Tasks regularly comprise of military cooperation, aid, and training directed at dysfunctional local armed forces. Often forces operate within a comprehensive political framework, with other agencies simultaneously pursuing goals such as development and democratization. However, while there is no shortage of proclamations about the intended effects of externally assisted stabilization, we know little about how successful it actually is.

Julius Hess' study poses a most vital question surrounding all these attempts: Which outcomes can we expect from the various approaches to assist struggling nations in controlling internal violence? Are they likely to work? The study seeks answers at a fundamental level: Why do many states of today's world suffer from widespread internal violence – while other countries experience security on a level unheard of throughout most of human history? How did some societies manage to control the heretofore ever-present violence amongst their midst? Why did others fail to do so? What are the root causes of nations' internal stability? And what do the findings tell us about the likelihood that our current attempts at aiding weak states will succeed?

Since the 1990s the Bundeswehr has been participating in missions aimed at stabilization and related purposes. As of yet, in 2020, German soldiers are deployed to twelve multinational missions. Since 2013 the Operations Survey and Support Division of the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social

Sciences (ZMSBw) has been conducting research on the foreign deployments of the German Armed Forces. Historians and social scientists shed light on how the Bundeswehr has engaged new tasks after the end of the Cold War – and how the involvement in multinational missions itself has shaped the organizational structure, the culture, and the identity of the German Armed Forces. Julius Hess' study adds a further, valuable perspective to our interdisciplinary portfolio: It shifts the focus from intervening military forces to the situation in the recipient countries, and it turns to quantitative evidence and statistical modeling on a grand, cross-national scale. The conclusions, however, are by no means abstract. On the contrary, they directly relate to public discourses concerning whether – and how – the international community and the Bundeswehr should intervene in internal conflicts and assist struggling nations.

The Bundeswehr are parliamentary armed forces. Democratically elected members of the Bundestag bear the burden to send servicemen and -women into military operations and missions abroad. The legitimacy of these endeavors crucially depends upon a broad, open debate about goals, means, and the probability of success. The study contributes to these debates by asking – and answering – fundamental questions about how external intervention in the domestic matters of struggling states can be made to work well as intended.

I would like to thank the author for taking on this thorny question and enriching our understanding of an issue of crucial importance. I wish to extend my thanks to the staff of the ZMSBw for smoothly bringing to fruition this outstanding project: Christian Adam and the editorial office; Christian Hartmann, Director of the Operations Survey and Support Division; Anja Seiffert, Head of the Operations Survey and Documentation Branch; and, last but not least, Michael Epkenhans, Director of Research and Deputy Commander of the ZMSBw.

Dr. Jörg Hillmann
Captain (Navy) and Commander
of the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences

1 Introduction

On January 7, 2015, two armed men stormed the premises of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and killed twelve persons, thus making the incident the deadliest act of terrorism in France since 1961 when 28 were killed in a train bombing. Two days later, after a massive manhunt involving tens of thousands of police, gendarmes, and military troops, the attackers were tracked down and killed in a brief firefight (Le Figaro 2015). Video footage of the operation shows heavily armed special gendarmerie and police forces leading the attack, helicopters circling and descending upon the hideout, as well as armored cars, personnel carriers, and dozens upon dozens of vehicles transporting troops and cordoning off the location.

On the same day of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, in northeastern Nigeria the killing of several hundred civilians by armed group Boko Haram culminated. The attacks had begun on January 3 with Boko Haram capturing the town of Baga from withdrawing Nigerian troops. Baga had been the last major town of the Borno province under the control of Nigerian forces. Reports on fatalities of the ensuing massacres vary widely, ranging from around 150 to more than 2000. This is to be added to the alleged 10,000 killed by Boko Haram before 2015. Satellite imagery shows Baga and surrounding towns torched and devastated (Amnesty International 2015). 35,000 are reported to have been displaced by the attacks. There are no reports of immediate countermeasures (AFP 2015; BBC 2015).

The Problem

Violence is inherent to us. It has been from the beginning. Regardless of whether it happens in broad daylight or is driven to the fringes of society, even the most pacified nations experience the occasional outbreak of lethal violence. Not even powerful, highly centralized France can forestall acts of mass murder, to say nothing of poor, dysfunctional Nigeria. The mere presence of lethal violence among human beings is no enigma. There is never a shortage of people seeking to pursue their goals by violent means.

What begs an explanation, however, is the crass difference in the *intensity* of violence across societies. The incidents on January 7, 2015, expose the diverging ways in which violence unfolds in highly developed nations like France, on the one hand, and in underdeveloped countries like Nigeria on the other. Twelve persons died in France on January 7 due to an isolated event of lethal violence whose

perpetrators were quickly put down. On the same day, hundreds died in Nigeria. Moreover, January 7 is just one snapshot of the collective violence that sub-state groups such as Boko Haram inflict upon Nigeria on a fairly constant basis. In the 25 years preceding the days of the Baga massacre, an average of 5600 persons were killed in Nigeria *each year*. This figure results from summing up the victims of civil war, terrorism, massacres, lethal state violence, gang warfare, criminal violence, and individualized murder. In contrast, regarding the same period and measure, a yearly average of around 800 persons were killed in France.

Consider now that Nigeria and France are not even the most extreme examples of violent and peaceful nations, respectively. To truly compare the intensity of intrastate violence one must put the absolute numbers of victims of violence in relation to the population size of states, thus generating a common yardstick to judge the extent to which societies are affected by lethal internal violence. Measured in this way, countries such as El Salvador, Colombia, Honduras, South Africa, Jamaica, or Swaziland reach the highest levels of violence. In all these nations up to or more than 40 people out of 100,000 population were killed each year on average from 1989 to 2014. Compare this with the most peaceful nations – Spain, Norway, Austria, Bahrain, Singapore, or Japan – where less than one person out of 100,000 population was killed each year on average over the same period. Hence, even after normalizing by population size and averaging over the course of 26 years the number of people getting killed in the most violent nations is more than 40 times that of the most peaceful societies. The global variation of internal violence as measured in this way is depicted in map 1.1.[1] Light and dark coloring indicates low and high fatality rates, respectively.

Why did only twelve persons die in France on January 7, 2015? Why did hundreds die in Nigeria? In a more general sense: What determines the global variation of internal violence? Why is lethal intrastate violence widespread in many places of the world, whereas in others it is virtually absent? That is the question this study is supposed to answer.

1 The method of calculation is discussed in detail in Section 4.2.