



THE THREAT OF SPOILERS TO PEACE AND STABILITY

The threat of spoilers to Peace and stability – challenges and opportunities

by David Ellero

On 8 October 2019, in Vicenza (Italy), the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence (NATO SP CoE), organized an international conference on the evaluation of the so-called “spoilers”, that are, according to the definition given by the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines, those individuals or groups of individuals who believe that a peace process could threaten their power and interests, and therefore will try to sabotage it.

The conference was attended, among others, by the four major international organizations NATO, the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union, represented by their interlocutors, together with the NATO SP CoE’s Sponsoring Nations, the representatives of Italy, which is the Framework Nation of the Centre, and prestigious organizations such as the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). The purpose of the conference was to identify whether or not there is a common approach in evaluating the spoilers and possibly analyse its contents in order to propose a shared methodology useful to prevent their actions and thus to make the peace missions more ef-

fective. The latter was the subject of a dedicated two-day workshop that followed the conference. SUMMARY: 1. Introduction: what are the so-called “spoilers”? - 2. First session: opening speeches and definition of the problem. - 3. Second session: lessons learned from previous NATO missions. - 4. Third session: the evaluation of the spoilers by NATO, the United Nations and the African Union. - 5. Conclusions: the proposal for an effective methodology to be adopted within NATO.

1. Introduction: what are the so-called “spoilers”?

Stephen Stedman first defined the concept of “spoilers” in 1996, based on the experience gained



by the United Nations in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique and Rwanda. He defined the spoilers as “leaders and groups of individuals who believe that the peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, their worldview and their interests, and, to avoid this, they use violence to undermine the processes that try to reach it”. The definition subordinates the concept of “spoilers” to the presence or absence of a peace agreement, and not to activities that are carried out in a period prior to the agreement. Subsequently, in 2008, the United Nations incorporated the concept of “spoiler” into their peacekeeping doctrine, which defines “spoilers” as individuals or groups of individuals who believe that a peace process could threaten their power and interests, therefore they will try to sabotage it. This definition omits the use of violence as an essential element of the spoiler, therefore in 2015 a report by the High Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations defined the “spoilers” as those who stand outside the peace process and try to sabotage it, even by adopting violent methods.

By specifying that “also” violent methods exist, the Panel actually stated that the adoption of non-violent methods can also constitute a spoiler behavior. A more pragmatic view on the “spoilers” is provided by Jock Covey , who

concluded that “belligerent parties generally enter the peacekeeping phase while keeping their grievances and war goals intact. Each one of them tries to achieve in the shadow of the peace process what it failed to achieve in the phase of armed conflict. (...) For them peace is nothing more than the continuation of the war carried out by other means”. Being war conducted by definition by violent means, and being spoilers often non-violent, the central question is whether the definition of “spoilers” can explicitly recognize and include non-violent behavior: indeed, if there is a general consensus on the definition that identifies “spoilers” as leaders, individuals or groups of individuals who believe that peace threatens their power and interest and therefore act to sabotage it, the use or not of violent behavior is the subject of

IN ORDER TO FINANCE SO-CALLED “VIOLENT” BEHAVIORS, LIKE INSURRECTIONS, PROTESTS, TERRORIST ATTACKS, ETC. “SPOILERS” OFTEN HAVE TO FINANCE THEMSELVES BY USING NON-VIOLENT BEHAVIORS, SUCH AS THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC ECONOMIC RESOURCES BY UNFAITHFUL OFFICIALS, EMPHASIZING ONCE AGAIN THAT IN THE AREAS OF CONFLICT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT BEHAVIORS REMAINS VERY BLURRED AND SUBJECTIVE.

a heated debate among the parties. For example, Stedman recognizes the importance of non-violent behavior by “spoilers”, like in Afghanistan and Iraq, where corruption and misappropriation of funds by corrupt public officials

has undermined the confidence in the government and has helped to plunge these areas back into chaos and conflict; however, he says that premeditated inaction and malicious slowness in carrying out the commitments taken in the peace agreements, are often nothing more than a way of doing politics. As a result, including non-violent behavior in the definition of “spoilers” would widen the scope of the definition to such an extent as to include all subjects who behave in a certain manner for political convenience. In addition to this, legitimate disputes on points reached in the course of a peace processes do not constitute a behavior of “spoilers” but may simply represent the pursuit of a legitimate interest. In order to finance so-called “violent” behaviors, like insurrections, protests, terrorist attacks, etc. “spoilers” often have to fund

themselves by using non-violent behaviors, such as the misappropriation of public economic resources by unfaithful officials, emphasizing once again that in the areas of conflict the boundary between violent and non-violent behaviors remains very blurred

and subjective. The definition of “spoiler” is the basis of any methodology that can be developed, and the lack of a common definition of “spoiler” by the organizations attending the conference was a recur-



ring theme. This was discussed in detail during the two-day workshop that followed the conference, which results have been summarized in a Report published on the NATO SP CoE website . The conference was structured in three sessions and, at the end of each, there was an interactive discussion between the speakers and the participants. The outcomes of the speeches and the conclusions are presented below.



2. First session: opening speeches and scoping the problem.

The agenda of the event was characterized by the variety of speeches both in terms of provenance and content. In advance, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire on the subject to have a view on their knowledge of the problem. The results of the questionnaire were used both to guide the work and as a starting point for the workshop itself. As a preliminary point, it should be noted that about 75% of respondents adopted the definition of “spoilers” provided by the United Nations, which appears wider than the one provided by Stedman or others, recognizing also the possibility for non-violent behaviors. The percentage drops to 50% when re-

quested on the existence of some form of methodology to identify and evaluate the “spoilers”, and only two respondents (25%) reported the existence of a specific and well-defined methodology adopted during the planning phase. The audience unanimously shared the opinion to integrate the results of the evaluations of the “spoilers” formulated by several international organizations by combining them, and about 90% of respondents hi-

ghlighted that the lack of a designed methodology to identify and evaluate the “spoilers” can cause the failure of a peace mission. The conference was introduced by the at the time Director of the NATO SP CoE, Col. Andrea Paris, who welcomed the guests with a brief overview on the conference and the post-event workshop, and LTC Alessandro Di Stefano, representative of the NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT), in place of Major General Sefik Atak (NATO ACT Deputy Chief of Staff Resource and Management). The latter highlighted that 80% of the 25 internal conflicts in which the United Nations has intervened since 1980 have been severely afflicted by “spoilers” in the form of Criminalized Power

Structures (CPS) . When NATO was directly involved, for example in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, the percentage dramatically rose to 100%, leading the Atlantic Alliance to consider “spoilers” as a serious risk for the immediate future of peace missions. Dr. Michael Dzedzic, a professor at George Mason University in the United States, and a researcher of the subject, then provided the participants with a set of basic notions about “spoilers” for the work that would follow during the conference, fully in line with the previous Chapter 1.

3. Second session: lessons learned from previous NATO missions.

Dr. Sarah Chayes, former special adviser to two ISAF commanders, focused her speech on corruption, a behavior often used by “spoilers” with deleterious effects on the peace process, because of its impact on the credibility of the legitimate government and, consequently, mission. As a concrete example, Dr. Chayes talked about the corruption of former President Karzai’s regime in Afghanistan, which - she claimed - brought the country back into the hands of the Taliban. Corruption, in fact, despite common thought, does not belong to any culture and therefore it is not socially accepted by people, who consider it unacceptable and are often led to empathize more willingly with “rebel” movements rather than with the legitimate government. Examples of kleptocracy given by Dr. Chayes also highlighted how corruption often embraces not only state structures (politics, judiciary, police forces, etc.) but also private organizations, such as banks, which obviously may play a



key role in money-laundering, and private security firms, which may become the operational branch of corrupt officials. All this needs to be studied as a part of the modus operandi of the “spoilers”, ensuring that the international community, in supporting certain factions, at the end will not sponsor de facto groups that are interested in keeping the chaos alive for utilitarian purposes. In some cases even the so-called “non-profit” organizations have been mentioned as a part of the problem, as they may be involved in frauds aimed at obtaining funds for projects financed by the international community. For these reasons, Dr. Chayes concluded her speech emphasizing the importance of strategic analysis, which is necessary in order to identify the contacts among the key figures in the operational scenario and their influences and implications: indeed only through a detailed picture of the situation, measures to mitigate the negative effect of “spoilers” can be put in place. Dr. Gene Aloise, Deputy Inspector General of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), an independent agency created in 2008 by the United States Congress to monitor the reconstruction of Afghanistan, opened his speech with a brief overview of his organization, consisting of more than 200 investigators and auditors. Similarly to Dr. Chayes, he pointed out that for 71% of Afghans corruption is a big problem, a risk for the success of a future peace process, even larger than the one represented by the Taliban. Corruption as a risk factor has been underestimated and it hasn't been strongly fought, as efforts have been mostly focused on Al Qaeda's defeat. The funds inve-



sted in Afghanistan to date amount to USD 132 billion, it is therefore easy to understand the importance of this phenomenon. Since 2014, the funds have been allocated in a “conditional” manner, differently from what happened before, and this has been a useful tool to fight corruption, despite the fact that many billions have already been lost. A report published by Asia Foundation showed that 39% of Afghans had to give money to the police: Afghan anti-corruption units are undersized and underpaid, and government benchmarks are not a measure of the effectiveness of the fight against corruption. The SIGAR is going to publish a report on corruption in Afghanistan, and it will soon be available on the agency's website. Dr. Aloise then highlighted the possible role of gendarmerie type forces in the theater, to train Afghan police forces and to support them in building their integrity. He concluded by inviting the audience to read the reports published by the SIGAR, downloadable from the website www.sigar.mil.

4. Third session: the evalua-

tion of “spoilers” by NATO, the United Nations and the African Union.

Major General Andrew Harrison, a British Royal Marines officer and Deputy Adviser to the Afghan Interior Minister, opened his speech by providing an overview of the situation in Afghanistan, a country in the midst of a civil war which, however, is slowly on the way of reaching a peace agreement. This clearly implies that there is a need to put in place a strategy for the future of the country, which otherwise would immediately return to chaos. To give a dimension of the problems and extreme differences in theater, Maj. Gen. Harrison gave the example of a checkpoint in a rural area, which operates isolated without the necessary logistical support and has great difficulties even to communicate with its department, in contrast to the special forces operating in Kabul, which are fully qualified and equipped to carry out their duties. If one day the Atlantic Alliance should leave the country without fully completing its mission, the situation could dangerously resemble what hap-



pened in Iraq and revert to chaos. Fortunately, 18 years of international support have created a new generation of young and motivated Afghan leaders, who are working with NATO to reform the country. Within the Ministry of Interior there are numerous reforms in place ranging from the competencies of the police and its leadership, to the development of special forces, gender and logistics. Progress is, however, very fragmented and characterized by a rapid turnover of staff in top positions. As an example, the 14 Interior Ministers the country had over the past 18 years: this clearly has an impact on the continuity of the work done. The NATO mission in Afghanistan, called “Resolute Support”, is dealing currently with two projects, Future Force, funded by the United States for the next 5 years, and Post Peace Policing, which aims to design a stable and lasting police force which could be operational after a possible peace agreement. The Afghan Government, NATO and the international community have to work together for this second project, which must surely provide a broad vision to the future of the country and its police. Brigadier General Robert Gichangi Kabage, Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at the African Union Peacekeeping Operations Division, opened his presentation illustrating the African Union’s experience in Somalia. Support has been developed on five pillars: the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, the Committee of Wise Men, the Peace Fund and the African Reserve Force. The latter includes Members of Parliament and citizens, and the police component

deployed in Somalia is part of it. The problem of the “spoilers” was analyzed by BG Kabage, highlighting the importance of understanding their capabilities and their possible impact on police operations. The definition of “spoilers” adopted by the African Union follows the one previously provided by the United Nations and includes terrorist groups and so-called “warlords”. The analysis methodology of “spoilers” takes into account information obtained from



police investigations, intelligence services and open sources such as social media, and also deals with the means used by “spoilers” to negatively affect peace processes, such as the internal dynamics of the various clans on the territory, the fear of being persecuted, ideological fundamentalism, corruption, the use of asymmetrical war and contacts to international terrorist networks. BG Kabage also highlighted the key role played by corruption, which in fact encourages all the parts involved in the peace process to maintain the status quo instead of working to create a secure environment. Moreover the “spoilers” often enjoy a close contact with the population because they provide that safety function that the State has not been able to supply in the course of the years,

and therefore the analysis cannot avoid examining this aspect. Instead, with regard to the management of the “spoilers”, the importance of the possible use of force to target top elements of criminal and terrorist organizations has been highlighted, but also the use of dialogue and deradicalization programmes, and, where appropriate, amnesties. Analyzing the “spoilers” therefore becomes not only a collective responsibility of all those organizations that participate in the missions of peace, but also an essential requirement for their success: it certainly cannot be the result of the effort of a single organization. Chief Superintendent Jaime Cuenca, Senior Police Officer of the United Nations and Team Leader within the UN Standing Police Capacity, highlighted the importance of conflict prevention, a concept also underlined by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It is part of prevention to create incentives to encourage a peaceful resolution of disputes. The problem is particularly important, given that more countries had conflicts during 2016 than in the last 30 years. This has affected not only developing countries, but also countries with an intermediate economy and developed institutions. It is estimated that by 2030 half of the world’s population will live in countries afflicted by violence, highlighting the key role played by prevention. The latter, which is still difficult to quantify and measure, should be developed with particular emphasis on the structural causes of conflicts such as governance,



the rule of law and security sector reforms: police forces can play a leading role in all these activities. Fair societies, which provide opportunities for their young people, tend to be less violent, so do those ones which guarantee universal access to basic goods and services. Chief Superintendent Cuenca then pointed to a number of risk factors for the emergence of conflicts, such as sudden demographic growth, with its impact on the labour market, climate change, with

which were subsequently used as a starting point for the post-event workshop, namely: the importance of the identification and evaluation of "spoilers" in the planning phase of international missions, the importance of having a common and shared methodology to assess their threat, the central role of local and international police forces in this evaluation process and finally the possibility of bringing together in a single approach the different methodologies that existed

and were presented at the conference. NATO plays a central role in the global geostrategic scenario with the declared aim of "projecting stability": in this context, the document produced by the NATO SP CoE at the end of the post-conference workshop will



the desertification of large areas historically dedicated to agriculture, corruption and conflicts related to gender inequalities: all these factors should be clearly taken into account for the analysis of the "spoilers". The United Nations Security Council has so far been concerned about conflicts and not about prevention. The latter requires a long-term strategic vision and a careful look at the possible causes, already included in the planning stages of a possible peacekeeping mission.

5. Conclusions: the proposal for an effective methodology to be adopted within NATO. At the end of the conference, four conclusions, which resulted from the speeches and the following discussions, were formulated ,

lay the doctrinal foundations for dealing with it in a more structured, coherent and systematic way, as well as in a holistic way, the planning of peace missions. With this perspective in mind, it is of utmost importance to highlight the operational dimension of "Stability Policing", which has the NATO SP CoE as its main Ambassador.

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PICTURES:
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1. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf
2. Agenzia creata dal Congresso degli Stati Uniti per avere una visione obiettiva ed indipendente sull'impiego dei fondi destinati all'Afghanistan (<https://www.sigar.mil/>)
3. S. J. Stedman, 'Negotiation and Mediation in Internal Conflicts', in M. E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) pp. 369-71
4. Principal deputy special representative of the UN secretary-general for the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and senior deputy high representative in Bosnia.
5. Criminalized power structures (CPS) are illicit networks that profit from transactions in black markets and from criminalized state institutions while perpetuating a culture of impunity.
6. International Security Assistance Force – NATO Mission in Afghanistan
7. During the NATO summit, held in Warsaw on 8 and 9 July 2016, the project called "Projecting Stability" was approved, as a tool to increase global security also through the protection of civilian populations, with a clear reference to the concept of Stability Policing.
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