THE “ARMED RECONCILER”
The Military Role in the Amnesty, Reconciliation, and Reintegration Process

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The process of reconciling a fractured and fragmented society after any conflict—or better yet before a conflict can erupt—is tortuously complicated. It can take almost Herculean resolve to confront a past in which one or more sectors of a society have suffered at the hands of another, and then move that society forward. Sometimes, it may require military force to make that happen. And so, when the U.S. Government finds itself helping rebuild the social structure of a failed state, a “quasi-state,” or some ungoverned space, it should consider using the military as a “forcing function” to bring aggrieved populations together.¹

It is this function—the military as “armed reconciler,” too often either overlooked or misunderstood—that this article examines. Thus, the article outlines the principles underlying amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration (hereafter “AR2”), a process inevitably nested in national policy and doctrine, and it postulates ways in which the U.S. military, as an instrument of that policy, might act as a reconciler. The discussion here contributes to the already abundant literature on the process of reconciling former enemies and reconstructing a unified society from chaos.² Past experience, outlined in follow-on essays to be published later in Military Review, provides the empirical base for analysis. By proposing a dimensional model that holistically fits the experience, this article points to the dynamic interrelationships among the factors of the AR2 process. It explores how the introduction of an external armed reconciler affects both the societal dimensions of the process and the correlation between amnesty, in some form, and reconciliation. As such, the article assumes the status of a “first cut,” in the hope of generating discussion on the discernible principles involved and the efficacy and the utility of such undertakings by the U.S. military.

AR2 as a Dimensional Model

AR2 is not in and of itself a discrete entity. As a process it comprises three distinct phases of societal reconstruction after a state fractures. These three phases, themselves distinct processes, are not usually grouped together, and each has a substantive literature surrounding it that in many ways throws up conceptual roadblocks to using AR2 as an integrated concept.

Of AR2’s constituent elements, amnesty, usually found in the discussion of “national reconciliation,” is both the most visible and the most problematic to define. Generally centering on the UN and other international organizations as the prime movers in national reconciliation, the literature tends to view amnesty in an instrumental light, as one step necessary to start a societal healing process.³ As defined in the Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military, amnesty is “an official pardon for people who have
been convicted of political offenses.” It is generally held up as the absolute minimum that must be accomplished for any reconciliation to take place. Importantly, amnesty is dependent on the cultural context in which it occurs. Whether or not it is called “amnesty” may also be important. Whatever amnesty is called, how it is carried out, and to what extent it is “full” or “limited,” is a matter of contention that depends a great deal on local circumstances. Regardless, one argument in this discussion is that some sort of societal or political dialog must take place, in most cases leading to a form of amnesty. Generally, amnesty must be in place as a foundation before reconciliation or reintegration can take place.

Reconciliation and reintegration are, depending on the circumstances of the particular case, interchangeable in order but not in achievement. Both have to be accomplished for the full AR2 process to be complete. By way of example, picture a post-civil-war society which is technically re-integrated (in terms of bringing previously “outside the system” actors back inside) but which may not be reconciled, especially if the entire society did not participate in the reintegration process. As empirical case studies show, the idea that the “R2” phases of the AR2 process are any less important than the “A” phase is a complete fiction. The full and complete AR2 process is synthetic and holistic.

For purposes of brevity and clarity, I take it as a given that the elements of amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration form a cohesive process, and that the process is embedded within a specific cultural context. I wholeheartedly accept that cultural differences play a significant role in determining the boundary conditions for societal reintegration (i.e., what the institutions of national reconciliation may look like, or how they may be comprised, or to what extent the society accepts the presence of an international mediator). Moreover, cultural concerns and idiosyncrasies clearly have to be taken into account when attempting to structure any AR2 process from outside, especially in the discovery and understanding of the appropriate cultural narratives through which the aggrieved parties may frame their ability to reconcile. Nonetheless, for the purpose of describing general principles of AR2, the framework developed herein only implicitly uses this anthropological conceptualization of narrative.

It suggests that while culturally significant factors may determine the degree to which each of the constituent elements can be achieved (or even the order in which they occur), the process itself is the unifying factor among all the cases. That is to say, the process is the same across the cultures involved in the studies. Recent work, at both the U.S. Army’s annual “Unified Quest” future warfighter exercise and the School for Advanced Military Studies in Fort Leavenworth, supports this conclusion. That work has also begun to make considerations of particular cultural narratives explicit.

In any general conception, a comprehensive amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration process requires full and wholesale incorporation within a sociocultural context of three interrelated dimensions of a fractured polity: the political, economic, and security. Incomplete assimilation of these three areas will result in at best incomplete reconstruction of a fragmented polity, and at worst will sow the seeds for the reemergence of the conditions that led to the conflict in the first place. This multistage, multidimensional process is common to all empirical experiences of national reconciliation and reintegration of disaffected populations. The Venn diagram in figure 1 below depicts an abstraction of this multi-dimensional process.

In this article I model the AR2 process based on the dimensions laid out above. There was, in fact, a process of AR2 in each of the empirical cases in

![Figure 1. Dimensions of the AR2 process.](image-url)
question. In every case, all of the process’s constituent elements (amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration) were present. I do not, however, examine each constituent element in detail. The more interesting aspect of the cases is how the dynamic relationship of the political, security, and economic dimensions of the society in which the AR2 process was taking place affected the pace, depth, and resilience of the final result. The process as a whole can only be successful when these constituent dimensions of a society are balanced.\textsuperscript{7}

In the simplest terms, the three dimensions of the AR2 model replicate the divisions found within any contemporary society. I define the political dimension as any political activity that takes place within formal governance structures at any level of a society. Examples of political society range from local city councils to state/provincial or national government. Political society is therefore the exact opposite of civil society, which is generally defined in terms of voluntary associations, networks, or other nonpolitical or non-governmental organizations.\textsuperscript{8}

The economic dimension of a society is that in which economic activity takes place; I make no distinction between the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Finally, the security dimension of the society is one where issues facing society are best dealt with using the tools of the police, the judiciary, and/or military force (where appropriate, e.g., support to civil authorities during national disasters).

The AR2 process has occurred in distinct and unrelated places and times, but in each case it has had the same identifying qualities. Each instance also contained elements of the fundamentals that are necessary for a fully formed and successful case of AR2. In some cases, these elements were present in abundance, and the process appears to have been stable and resilient. In others, the elements are harder to locate or have been out of balance, causing doubt about whether or not full reconciliation or reintegration can ever really take place.

To complicate matters, there are multiple levels to the three dimensions in which a society must be reconciled. The first level involves a society’s receptiveness to reconciliation. For a society to reconcile, its constituent actors have to be amenable to reconciliation. A society’s level of receptiveness to reconciliation varies over time and location (shown in the figure as, hypothetically, the size of the “sweet spot” at the center of the political, economic, and security dimensions). One can test levels of receptiveness through metrics arising from the model’s three dimensions. For example, we might call a society politically receptive to reconciliation and reintegration when it has adopted a system of representative government, when it fairly and adequately represents all factions within it, and when it peacefully transitions from one government to the next.\textsuperscript{9}

By the same token, an economically receptive society could be one in which some attempt is made to address the income inequality gap or a land reform process is put into place. Finally, a society receptive to reconciliation in the security dimension might be one that sees the police forces as protectors rather than predators, and where the military forces serve as guardians of representative government rather than arbiters of justice. Increasing receptiveness in any dimension leads to the possibility of increased receptiveness in all dimensions.

Each of the three dimensions of a society undergoing the AR2 process has a key actor involved in balancing that dimension with the other two and expanding the AR2 “sweet spot” at the center. In balance with the political and economic dimensions, there must be an apolitical and impartial actor—an “honest broker”—in the security dimension to prepare the ground politically for some sort of representative government and to improve the economy’s ability to adjust to the post-conflict environment. The police, judiciary, and/or armed forces normally would play the central role in maintaining order and administering justice. Ideally, this role would and should be played by internal security forces, but where that function is impossible (perhaps due to perceived or real difficulties in making the security sector apolitical and impartial), an outside actor must be willing to step in as the armed reconciler.

What is also important is the weight of each dimension relative to the other two. Mapping the
dimensions on a relative scale can give the analyst a better picture, although admittedly a simplified one, of where to expend energy in the AR2 process. This picture becomes of paramount importance when attempting to discern what the armed reconciler’s role should be in instigating change and pushing a society deeper into AR2. If, for example, aggrieved parties see the problem more in economic than security terms, the military’s role as forcing function may well be to provide enough security to empower local economic actors to push through economic changes for the benefit of all. Planners should keep in mind that mapping the dimensions provides a condensed overview, a snapshot in time, of the process, and that a case of national reconciliation may in later stages be weighted differently than when it began.

The Military within a Nested AR2 Process

With its focus on the military as armed reconciler, AR2 nests as a process within U.S. doctrine and policies as well as within the overall level of international practice and experience (see figure 2).

The military has been and continues to be the most visible instrument of U.S. national power. As such, it has the greatest potential not just to make headlines when it carries out lethal operations in support of U.S. policy and strategy, but also to be a valuable actor in stability operations. While operating around the world prosecuting the War on Terrorism, the military by default has become responsible for setting the conditions for stable, viable post-conflict environments. According to U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations, were the military to engage in the process of encouraging societal reconciliation, it would do so only as part of a “stability” operation, where “Army force presence promotes a stable environment.” Although FM 3-0 does not say so explicitly, we can reasonably assume that stability operations carry forward until the society can stand on its own, so by implication the military takes on the role of armed reconciler.

Stability operations play a part in post-conflict reconstruction, especially for international organizations. In the literature on post-conflict reconstruction, and particularly security-sector reform, the role of the military is traditionally viewed purely in terms of internal security; that is, the focus has usually been on what to do with the vestiges of the former regime’s military and security infrastructure. Such a focus, while valuable, is limiting, and does not take into account the absolutely vital role the U.S. military can play as an honest broker in shepherding through a conscientious, well-wrought, and universally applied program of AR2 in a country that desperately needs to reconcile.

A relatively new mission for the military, stability operations are codified by Department of Defense Directive 3000.05. Paragraphs 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 of that directive are especially relevant here:

- 4.1. Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support. They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all Department of Defense (DoD) activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.
- 4.2. Stability operations are conducted to help establish order that advances U.S. interests and values. The immediate goal often is to provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. The long-term goal is to help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society.
- 4.3. Many stability operations tasks are best performed by indigenous, foreign, or U.S. civilian professionals. Nonetheless, U.S. military forces shall be prepared to perform all tasks necessary to
establish or maintain order when civilians cannot do so. Successfully performing such tasks can help secure a lasting peace and facilitate the timely withdrawal of U.S. and foreign forces.\textsuperscript{13}

In this new way of thinking, stability operations become part of a recipient country’s internal development process from conflict through to national reconciliation. Too often, however, statesmen, policymakers, or military executors of policies fixate on that process and fail to appreciate the intricacies of rebuilding a society in which groups may either have been disempowered for long periods of time or completely removed from any governing arrangements. They see national reconciliation in linear and teleological terms, where overall success is determined more by the success of the process itself than by the creation of a unified polity and society. In other words, the means become the end. Failing to recognize that national reconciliation is merely a part of a larger process, and that it must be sought in concert with the two equally important steps of amnesty and reintegration, is a recipe for catastrophe.

Another potential pitfall is failing to understand the role the military can play in helping to make AR2 work. And so, as this article suggests, more explicit dialog should occur on what happens when the military assumes the function of armed reconciler as it devolves from stability operations. What exact role should the military play to move a society forward towards national reconciliation? Should a nation, especially one that has recently used its military to force a change in the country’s regime, even put its military in this difficult position? For the United States, the answer is yes: it can and should employ its military as an armed reconciler because of the crucial need for third-party impartiality in the reconciliation process. Case studies show that an outside military force can perform successfully as an honest broker in social negotiations. Note the phrase “honest broker” as opposed to terms like “neutral referee” or “intermediary”; this conscious choice of words purposefully recognizes the facts on the ground in post-conflict situations. “Impartial” does not mean neutral, and “apolitical” does not mean nonpolitical. Rather, there is an expectation that the military will assist, where and when possible, in helping to bring warring factions together to undertake reconciliation. How it does so can be found in what U.S. military doctrine calls “conflict termination” criteria.

Conflict Termination Criteria

For the military to perform as both honest broker and “forcing function” in a society that needs to be reconciled, commanders must understand the criteria for taking action in transitional situations. Conflict termination criteria are essential to establish a set of measurable benchmarks the military can use to determine the primacy of its effort, and how it should transition from the supported to a supporting role in a conflict.\textsuperscript{14} If developed correctly, conflict termination criteria should also set forth the conditions under which the U.S. military can push a society toward reconciliation.

Conflict termination criteria are developed in campaign planning, and well-defined conflict termination criteria are crucial in determining when and how a combat operation transitions to post-conflict peace or stability operation. U.S. Joint doctrine recognizes this. Specifically, in a section headed “Termination of Operations,” Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations, notes that “military operations normally will continue after the conclusion of sustained combat operations.”\textsuperscript{15} If developed correctly, conflict termination criteria should also set forth the conditions under which the U.S. military can push a society toward reconciliation.

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immediately following major combat operations, or during counterinsurgency operations, it is one of those “posthostilities activities” JP 5-0 stipulates should be planned for during combat operations. In fact, conceptualizing the conditions under which AR2 could be executed should constitute a key element of any conflict termination planning. AR2 needs to be nested within conflict termination, itself nested within campaign planning.

AR2 and DDR

Military-backed AR2 is not just a joint concern. Because AR2 has some clear similarities to the UN’s “disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration” (DDR) process, it might also be considered an alternative in the interagency and multilateral communities. There are, however, some major differences between AR2 and DDR.

As defined by the UN, DDR contributes to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin. The DDR of ex-combatants is a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian, and socioeconomic dimensions. It aims to deal with the security problem that arises when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks, other than their former comrades, during the crucial transition from conflict to peace and development. By removing weapons from the hands of combatants, then taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society, DDR seeks to support ex-combatants so that they can become constructive participants in the peace process.18

The UN DDR process emphasizes the role of impartial international observers in a permissive or semi-permissive post-conflict situation, which is to be expected given the UN’s mandate and mission. Where AR2 differs from DDR is that it recognizes even nonpermissive environments can harbor the seeds of reconciliation. All too often, however, nonpermissive environments have been seen as too dangerous for any application of national power beyond lethal military force, and the opportunities for setting in motion the process of eventual reconciliation have been short-circuited.

Conclusion: Can There Be A Generalizable AR2?

The case studies to follow this overview in future issues of Military Review will show how AR2 worked (or did not work) in distinct, though not unique, instances. Each case sheds light on subtle complexities and variations for which any generalized AR2 process must account, but taken together they reveal core principles of the process as a whole. These principles can be summarized in the following manner:

- Primarily, the AR2 process must create a shared history that all parties accept.
- The AR2 end state must be envisioned during the planning process, as part of a post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization plan.
- Amnesty cannot be seen as a process unto itself, but rather should be considered as a beginning to a process which should end in national reconciliation. In addition, culturally distinct aspects of how that amnesty will be constructed and applied have to be accounted for.
- Any amnesty needs to be mutually recognized; in other words, all parties must be ready to accept it. Amnesty must be applied to and accepted by all parties to the conflict.
- In the reconciliation process, justice must be restorative rather than retributive.
- Retributive (“victors’”) justice serves only to sow the seeds for future protests or objections, whereas restorative justice takes into account the sentiments expressed by all parties (aggrieved or otherwise).
- A full and complete AR2 process must be mediated by a third party that is seen to be impartial, or by some sort of empowered honest broker.
- It may be possible to put a third party in charge of AR2 as a facilitator, but too much power (an enforcer/bully posture) or too little (a monitor posture) can be counterproductive.
- Economic and political reconciliation needs to begin even as the military works to create a secure environment. Setting the long-term conditions for

Developing clear and well-defined conflict termination criteria is likely a necessary but not sufficient condition for a robust AR2 process.
AR2 should ideally be done by civil, rather than military, means. 
- The sooner the process can be turned over to civil authorities (i.e., some normalization of society) the better. 
- The longer it takes to create a totally permissive environment, the less chance there is to stabilize society.

These principles flow deductively from the hypothesis that any post-conflict society will need assistance from an honest broker, and they follow inductively from empirical analysis of six distinct cases. Together with the general tenets outlined in this article of what constitutes AR2, as well as the foundational questions of when American military power can legitimately be employed in the process, one can discern general principles. The question that remains, however, is, at what point does a society need to reconcile on its own? When, in other words, can the forcing function be removed? Answering these questions in a world in which ungoverned spaces proliferate, and where societies are fragmenting rather than reconciling, will likely come from further Herculean commitment of American blood and treasure, albeit in the role of armed reconciler. 

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NOTES


4. In South Africa, for example, there were no convictions for political offenses. The amnesty was to encourage those accused of political crimes to come forward and put into the official record their testimony. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission realized that a non-retributive amnesty had to be in place to make the process of national reconciliation work.

5. There is some debate as to whether a general amnesty is required for reintegration or reconciliation. To square this circle, some have begun to make the distinction between national-level and local-level amnesty, or between “amnesty” and “immunity”: “What has emerged [in Iraq] is what you might call ‘conditional immunity.’”—GEN David Petraeus, testimony to combined House Armed Service and Foreign Affairs Committees, 10 September 2007.

6. Thanks to Dr. Marc Tyrell and COL (R) Tom Odom at Small Wars Journal, <http://www.smallwarjournal.com>, for pointing out the essential and integral nature of culture to the AR2 process.

7. Note that “balance” does not have to mean “equal.” An appropriate way to think of the system in which AR2 takes place is one of equilibrium, in which one or more of the separate dimensions may be larger (more important) than another, but where the system itself is in balance. Each case will have its own unique distribution of the dimensions laid out here as the general AR2 framework.


9. Many of these metrics can be captured under the rubric of “civic culture.” Another way of saying that a society is politically receptive to reconciliation is to say that is has a well-developed civic culture. For the original conception of civic culture, see Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), and its revision as The Civic Culture Revisited: An Analytic Study (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1980).


13. DOD Directive 3000.05, paragraphs 4.1-4.3.


17. JP 3-0, xi.