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The Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs) on the Front Lines of Counterterrorism

Commander (Ret.) Gadi Eshed

Abstract

The October 7, 2023 terrorist attack in Israel revealed critical vulnerabilities in national security preparedness and highlighted the pivotal role of Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs) in defending civilian communities. This paper examines the operational structure, recruitment strategies, and motivational dynamics of RRSTs, alongside a comparative analysis of similar volunteer-based security models in five countries. It addresses the strengths and challenges of integrating civilian volunteers into national defense, including issues of training, coordination, command, and the risks of insufficient oversight. Drawing on wartime lessons and global case studies, the paper offers recommendations to enhance recruitment, retention, training, and integration of RRSTs into national security frameworks. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of strengthening civilian defense capacities to bolster national resilience and operational readiness in the face of evolving security threats.

Keywords: Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs); Civilian defense; Volunteer recruitment; Counter-terrorism; Community security.

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Introduction

The terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, was one of the most devastating assaults in Israel's history. This event exposed critical deficiencies in security preparedness, intelligence gathering, and rapid response mechanisms. The failure raised profound concerns regarding the security establishment's ability to effectively protect civilian communities. However, amidst the unfolding crisis, the decisive and courageous response of the Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs) emerged as a crucial factor in containing the threat. The personal sacrifices and the heavy toll borne by these volunteers underscored their essential role and the strategic value they offer in safeguarding civilian populations.

The escalation of terrorist threats underscores the need to reinforce defense frameworks and acknowledge the prolonged nature of this security challenge. The October 7 attack and the subsequent "The Swords of Iron War" have shaped a complex operational landscape, necessitating a reassessment of the civilian defense system.

This article is structured as follows: The first section focuses on RRSTs, outlining their operational doctrine. The second section examines the motivations behind volunteer

recruitment and retention. The third section presents a comparative analysis of five countries employing citizen-based security models to counter terrorism and security threats. The final section provides recommendations for enhancing civilian defense frameworks in coordination with national security forces.

Section One: Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs)

In Israel, multiple emergency response units operate under national security authorities and are structured according to operational requirements. Military-administered RRSTs are stationed in communities along the Seam Line and near-border settlements, playing a pivotal role in territorial defense. These teams are strategically positioned in communities within a 4-kilometer radius from the border (referred to as “fence-adjacent”) and in those within 4–9 kilometers (“fence-proximate” settlements).¹

The Territorial Defense System (HAGMAR) comprises Military Security Coordinators (Ravshatz) and RRSTs, composed of local residents trained to provide immediate defense during crises such as hostile infiltrations or mass-casualty incidents. To enhance their effectiveness, the Ministry of Defense has developed specialized infrastructure in frontline settlements, including fortified facilities, security roads, Infrastructure, facilities, roads, equipment, and self-defense measures designed for both everyday security and emergency response.

Security oversight in other communities falls under police jurisdiction. Certain RRSTs operate under the Border Police (MAGAV) and focus on safeguarding rural areas and regional councils.

Additionally, urban RRSTs function under police authority, with members volunteering through the Civil Guard for security-specific roles. Recruitment follows stringent police criteria, and operational control is managed through the local police station commander or operations officer via a dedicated volunteer coordinator.²

A report by the State Comptroller emphasized the operational significance of RRSTs, citing the Army Central Command’s Territorial Defense Officer:³

“Community infiltration incidents unfold rapidly, often lasting less than ten minutes, necessitating the presence of an immediate response force within the settlement. Security forces, due to their geographical positioning, cannot respond as swiftly as local RRSTs.”

As of October 7, 2023, approximately 400 RRSTs operated under military jurisdiction, supported by 418 Military Security Coordinators (Ravshatz) employed by the Ministry

1 Mirit Lavi & Yael Litmanovitz “Explainer: Civilian Defense Squads in Urban Settings” The Israel Democracy institute, December 05, 2023

2 State Comptroller, Annual Report 68G, 2018, p. 1865.

3 State Comptroller, Annual Report 68G, Security Components in Conflict Area Settlements in Regional Commands, May 8, 2018, p. 1886.

of Defense. In response to the war's outbreak, a new reserve framework, "Locals" (Bnei HaMakom), was established. This unit, recruited, equipped, and trained by the military, was deployed via the police and Border Police for counter-terrorism operations and security enforcement in affected communities. Unlike traditional volunteer RRSTs, "Bnei HaMakom" personnel were mobilized under active reserve duty.

Parallel to military-affiliated RRSTs, council-based RRSTs operate under regional councils in coordination with municipal security divisions.⁴

Prior to the war, police volunteer forces included approximately 24,000 personnel, supplementing 30,000 full-time police officers. By January 2024, volunteer numbers surged to 36,000, distributed across specialized units handling patrols, counter-terrorism, traffic control, maritime security, mounted policing, investigations, RRSTs, and emergency rescue operations.⁵

Before the war, 66 RRSTs operated under Border Police command, alongside four urban RRSTs under direct police supervision. Since the war's onset, the Ministry of National Security initiated the formation of hundreds of additional RRSTs, enlisting over 10,500 new volunteers. The objective is to establish 1,200 RRSTs nationwide, including approximately 200 urban units.⁶

As of April 2024, 906 police-supervised RRSTs were fully operational and integrated into national security frameworks. According to Israel Police regulations, these teams serve as:⁷

"An operational reserve force composed of Civil Guard volunteers, available to support police units in security incidents during both routine and emergency scenarios, thereby enhancing operational preparedness and response."

The New Police Protocol for Emergency Response Teams

The new police protocol stipulates that volunteers are authorized to operate upon activation, even without the presence of a police officer, both during routine situations and emergencies. The teams will rely on volunteers' immediate availability, with weapons and designated equipment stored at their homes.

The recruitment age has been expanded from 21 to 64, with exceptions for individuals aged 64–68 requiring special approval from the District Volunteer Officer and the Police

4 Roni Hershkovitz, "Information on (RRSTs)," Knesset, Research and Information Center, May, 2024.

5 "The National Security Committee: 50% Increase in the Number of Police Volunteers since the Start of the War," Knesset - National Security Committee, January 22, 2024.

6 Mirit Lavi and Yael Litmanovich, "The Boundaries of Urban Readiness Classes (RRSTs)," The Israel Democracy Institute, April 17, 2024.

7 Israel Police, Operations Division, Policing Division, Volunteers Department, Protocol for Operating RRSTs in the Civil Guard, updated on January 3, 2024.

Medical Officer.⁸

Significant Easing of Military Background Requirements

Additional relaxations were implemented regarding military background requirements:⁹

- The qualification threshold for combat roles was lowered from Rifleman 05 to Rifleman 03 or higher.
- Rifleman 02 exemptions were approved based on operational needs, subject to the approval of the Volunteer Division Head or the Volunteer Department.

These changes enabled the rapid establishment and efficient operation of a vast number of teams, comprising thousands of volunteers. However, despite these successes, serious concerns arise regarding command and control effectiveness, particularly in emergencies and under fire. The risks of accidents, malfunctions, and friendly fire incidents (FFIs) are considerable.

A comparison with findings published by the IDF approximately two months after the outbreak of the “Swords of Iron War” illustrates the potential dangers. Although the military data primarily referenced soldiers with combat and operational backgrounds, it provides insight into possible ramifications for emergency response teams, which recruited thousands of volunteers with minimal combat experience.

Alarming Military Findings Highlight Risks

According to military reports, 105 soldiers were killed in the initial phase of the ground maneuver, of whom 20 (approximately one-fifth) died in various accidents¹⁰.

- Thirteen soldiers were killed by friendly fire (FFIs).
- One soldier was killed by a stray bullet.
- Six additional soldiers were killed in accidents related to weaponry, firearms, or vehicular incidents.

These findings indicate a significant potential for mishaps and a lack of professionalism, which could undermine the effectiveness of emergency response teams.

Beyond these operational concerns, the “Swords of Iron War” also exposed, on a

8 Protocol 220.70.62: Establishment and Operation of a Civil Guard Readiness Class (RRSTs) at a Station, Operations Division, Israel Police, April 12, 2022.

9 Update to Protocol 220.70.62: Establishment and Operation of Civil Guard Readiness Classes (RRSTs) in the Israel Police, Operations Division, Israel Police, March 7, 2024.

10 Tal Lev-Ram, “By Our Own Fire: About a Fifth of the Casualties in the Maneuver Were Killed in Accidents or Friendly Fire,” *Maariv*, December 12, 2023.

strategic level, the dangers of excluding internal security from the national security framework. The ease with which terrorists infiltrated communities, coupled with the shortage of available weapons and equipment for volunteers, exacted a heavy toll. However, despite the challenges and gaps, the emergency response teams made a significant contribution during the battles.¹¹

Enhancing Training and Integration into National Security

Improving and upgrading the selection and training of combat volunteers could yield a more efficient force that integrates seamlessly into the national security framework. Rapidly establishing hundreds of emergency response teams is a crucial step, providing an essential initial response in emergency events until professional forces arrive.

However, a comprehensive lessons-learned process is required, drawing from wartime experience as well as models implemented in other countries. Alongside routine maintenance of these teams, investment is needed in recruiting volunteers with suitable backgrounds, ongoing training, exercises, equipment, infrastructure, and force cohesion.

A critical component of the team's success is maintaining the quality of volunteer fighters while preserving and fostering their motivation. Effective collaboration with security forces: IDF, The Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet), police, and emergency responders, will maximize the potential of emergency response teams as a formidable defensive force in the evolving security landscape.

Section Two: Recruiting and Maintaining Motivation

Volunteer Motivation: Understanding Recruitment and Retention

Effectively recruiting and retaining volunteers requires a deep understanding of their motivations. Research highlights several key factors that influence an individual's willingness to volunteer, with one of the most significant being a sense of civic duty and a commitment to contributing to the greater good. Volunteers with a strong civic awareness view their service as a fundamental responsibility to their community. This group forms a highly valuable recruitment pool, as they are more inclined to join organizations whose missions and values align with their personal beliefs. Ensuring that their roles provide a sense of fulfillment and personal satisfaction is essential for long-term retention¹².

Aligning Roles with Personal Motivations

Identifying and understanding individual motivations is crucial for successful recruitment

11 Kobi Michael and Gabi Siboni, "The Settlement Security System in Light of the "Swords of Iron War" Maariv, December 24, 2023.

12 Kimberly Wiley, Chelsea DeMasters, Colin Dobbins, and Caroline Casola "Five Motivations to Volunteer: Tips for Volunteer Managers" UF University of Florida, May 15, 2023

and sustained volunteer engagement. The functional approach suggests that while volunteers may participate in similar activities, their underlying motivations can vary. Moreover, multiple motivations often coexist within a single volunteer. Assigning tasks that align with an individual's intrinsic motivations enhances satisfaction and fosters continued involvement in volunteer service.

Research indicates that as volunteers age, social motivations become increasingly significant. This evolution underscores the importance of regularly reassessing volunteers' motivations and adjusting their roles accordingly. For example, reassigning volunteers to new positions that better reflect their evolving interests and motivations can strengthen their long-term commitment.¹³

Lessons from Research on Army Reserve Duty Personnel

Studies on the motivations of older reserve duty personnel who continue serving beyond the official military retirement age offer valuable insights for recruiting and retaining volunteers in Rapid Response Security Teams. These findings can refine selection, recruitment, and retention strategies, even during periods of relative security and stability.

The research indicates that the decision to continue volunteering stems from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Key factors include personal satisfaction, a sense of duty, and fulfilling a deeper purpose, in addition to contributing to national security and community well-being. For many, volunteering represents "answering a call"—an opportunity to defend their country and positively impact society. Additionally, the sense of belonging to a collective security force fosters sustained engagement and dedication.¹⁴

Key Factors Reinforcing Motivation

- **Recognition and Support from Family and Community** – Volunteers whose service is acknowledged and supported by their families and social circles experience an enhanced social identity and status, reinforcing their commitment to continued service.
- **Investment in Organizational and Personal Development** – Continuous training, education, and skill enhancement improve volunteers' capabilities, enable adaptation to evolving security challenges, and contribute to their personal growth and fulfillment.
- **Cohesion and Camaraderie** – Building strong bonds among volunteers fosters a sense of brotherhood and mutual support. These social connections strengthen team

13 Arthur Stukas and Sarah Wilson "Understanding Motivations to Volunteer" Volunteering Australia, National strategy for volunteering, September 2022

14 Rachel L. Saladaga "Beyond the Call of Duty: Exploring the Motivations, Challenges and Contributions of Aging Volunteers in Military Reserves" Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science (RIELS) Journal Vol. 4, No. 4, December 2023 | Page 980-994

cohesion and reinforce the commitment to serving alongside peers.

- Respect and Appreciation from Leadership and the Organization – Mutual respect and recognition, expressed through positive feedback, appreciation, and acknowledgment from commanders and colleagues, enhance volunteers' sense of self-worth and motivation to continue their service.

Beyond the fundamental desire to contribute to society, volunteers' motivations are shaped by personal, social, and organizational factors. Recognizing these motivations, developing targeted support mechanisms, and investing in team cohesion can significantly enhance recruitment and retention efforts. By implementing these strategies, Rapid Response Security Teams can maintain operational readiness and effectiveness over time, even in periods of relative stability.

Study on the U.S. Civil Air Patrol (CAP)

A recent study in the United States examined the motivations of volunteers in the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), an organization specializing in search and rescue operations, disaster response, and homeland security support. Operating under a structured framework modeled after the United States Air Force (USAF), CAP volunteers wear uniforms akin to those of Air Force personnel, reinforcing the organization's disciplined and mission-oriented culture.

One of the key findings of the study was CAP's high attrition rate: nearly one-third of volunteers did not remain beyond their first year of service. To assess the root causes of this turnover, researchers conducted a comprehensive survey among CAP members, examining their initial motivations, retention factors, and reasons for departure. The data indicated that the factors attracting individuals to the organization differed significantly from those that influenced their long-term commitment or eventual exit.¹⁵

Satisfaction and Its Role in Volunteer Retention

The study established a strong link between volunteer satisfaction and length of service. The data revealed that less than one-third of participants reported high satisfaction with their experience in CAP. When analyzed by tenure, the following trends emerged:

- Volunteers with over 20 years of service reported the highest satisfaction levels.
- Those serving between 11 and 20 years exhibited moderate satisfaction.
- Members with 3 to 10 years of experience demonstrated lower satisfaction levels.
- The least satisfied group consisted of new recruits (0–2 years of service).

15 Diane T. Lambert "Examination of Volunteer Motivations in a Civilian Auxiliary of a Military Branch" Abraham S. Fischer College of Education and School of Criminal Justice, Nova Southeastern University, 2023

The dominant motivation among volunteers was value-based, reflecting a strong commitment to service, excellence, honor, and integrity. Given CAP's emphasis on these core principles, it is unsurprising that many volunteers aligned their motivations with the organization's mission.

Operational Considerations and Retention Strategies

The study underscored dissatisfaction as a primary contributor to volunteer attrition. Despite the significance of volunteer retention, CAP had not sufficiently addressed the evolving needs of its members. The research suggested employing a functional approach—one that recognizes volunteers engage in service to fulfill personal motivations and psychological needs.

Findings indicated that volunteers who felt CAP provided opportunities to meet their intrinsic motivations experienced higher satisfaction and remained engaged for longer durations. Consequently, refining recruitment and retention strategies based on an understanding of volunteer motivations is essential for CAP's operational sustainability.

The functional model demonstrated that fostering volunteer engagement requires proactive leadership commitment. CAP must adapt to evolving volunteer expectations, offer meaningful and challenging roles, and cultivate a culture of recognition and appreciation to sustain long-term service.

Study on Sheriff's Office Volunteers in the U.S.

A separate study conducted at the Clearfield County Sheriff's Office in Pennsylvania explored the motivations of civilians volunteering in community policing initiatives and assessed how these motivations influenced their decision to join. The objective was to identify key drivers compelling individuals to dedicate their time to law enforcement assistance.¹⁶

Understanding these dynamics is critical for enhancing the resilience and operational effectiveness of volunteer security forces. Similar to Israel's Civil Guard program, U.S. volunteer organizations engage in various security activities, including:

- Neighborhood patrols
- Emergency response coordination
- Event and infrastructure security
- Roadblock establishment
- Search and rescue operations

16 Michael McSkimming, Ahmet Guler, and Scott E. Miller "Understanding the Motivations of Citizens to Join a Community Posse Initiative: A Qualitative Analysis" *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology* • 2020 | Volume 9, Issue 1a

Following the September 11 attacks, the establishment of the Citizen Corps in 2002, under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), further reinforced the role of volunteer involvement in national emergency preparedness and security.

Key Motivational Drivers

The study identified three primary motivations behind civilian participation in law enforcement support roles:

- **Sense of Duty and Community Affiliation** – Volunteers were driven by a desire to enhance public safety and contribute to their community's security.
- **Commitment to Law Enforcement Support** – Many volunteers viewed their involvement as an opportunity to actively uphold public order.
- **Perceived Security Threats** – A heightened awareness of security risks increased civic engagement in volunteer security programs.

Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion

During times of crisis or heightened security threats, civic participation in security initiatives tends to rise. The study highlighted that the degree of volunteer engagement is influenced by contextual factors such as time, location, and prevailing security conditions.

Community policing volunteers demonstrated high levels of altruistic commitment,¹⁷, assisting others without expecting compensation or recognition. This form of social activism fosters a sense of belonging and reinforces community trust, ultimately mobilizing citizens to address threats and prevent criminal activity.

Trust in Law Enforcement as a Volunteering Catalyst

One of the most influential factors affecting engagement was the relationship between citizens and law enforcement agencies. Higher levels of trust in police institutions correlated with greater participation in volunteer security initiatives. Conversely, diminished trust resulted in reduced willingness to engage in community policing efforts.

The Impact of Crime Perception on Volunteerism

Another significant motivator for citizen involvement was the perception of rising crime rates. As crime levels increased, community members became more inclined to take an active role in ensuring local security.

17 Rachel T.A. Croson " Theories of Commitment, Altruism and Reciprocity: Evidence from Linear Public Goods Games", April, 1998

In the Clearfield County Sheriff's Office study, it was also noted that concerns over escalating terrorist activity contributed to a rise in volunteer enlistment, demonstrating a direct link between perceived external threats and civilian mobilization.

Comparative Insights from Other Studies

When juxtaposing these findings with similar studies, common motivational themes among volunteers in security organizations emerged. A study conducted in Israel found that the majority of volunteers were driven by altruistic motives, seeking to make a tangible impact and fortify their communities.

However, an interesting contrast was identified: only 5.6% of Israeli volunteers engaged in security, emergency, and rescue efforts, indicating significant untapped potential for recruitment in these sectors.¹⁸

The studies underscore the necessity of aligning organizational strategies with volunteer motivations to enhance retention and operational effectiveness. Addressing the evolving needs of volunteers, fostering strong leadership, and ensuring community trust in security agencies are crucial for sustaining long-term engagement in critical homeland security and public safety initiatives.

Section Three: Comparative Research

Models of Volunteer Force Recruitment and Deployment Worldwide

In an era of escalating security threats, the mobilization of armed civilian volunteer forces has become a critical component of national security strategies. Their participation offers both operational and societal advantages, strengthening national resilience, bolstering security presence, and providing essential support to state forces during crises. However, this comparative study examining Ukraine, Burkina Faso, India, Mozambique, and Nigeria highlights the complex challenges associated with recruiting and deploying civilians as combat forces.

A primary concern arises when these volunteer forces operate in environments characterized by weak governance. In such settings, the risk of autonomous militias forming with independent agendas is significant, leading to the establishment of "ungoverned spaces" where their alignment with national security interests becomes uncertain.

Additionally, volunteer organizations often serve as political support bases for ruling authorities. This dynamic can result in unchecked or even covertly supported activities that may violate legal frameworks, target ethnic groups, or be weaponized against political opponents. If left unregulated, these factors pose a serious threat to social

18 Ronit Bar, Michal Almog-Bar, Liora Arnon, and Anna Rosenfeld, *Patterns of Giving in Israeli Society: The Annual Report on Volunteering, Social Involvement, and Activism for 2022*, p. 22.

stability and national security.

Ukraine

The Role of Volunteers in National Defense

A study by the RAND Corporation assessed the role of Ukrainian civilians in national defense during the first four months of Russia's invasion. It analyzed key variables such as mass mobilization efficiency, training effectiveness, and societal engagement in resistance efforts.¹⁹

Structure and Function of Civilian Resistance

The study identified a wide range of actors involved in Ukraine's civilian resistance, including government institutions, political leadership, private enterprises, and organized civic groups. Some initiatives emerged spontaneously through informal community networks, while others were systematically integrated into pre-existing civil defense frameworks. These efforts spanned military operations, humanitarian aid, cyber defense, and strategic communications.

Civil Society Contribution and Public Involvement

One of the key findings was that Ukraine's history of civic activism significantly bolstered its ability to organize effective civilian resistance. Ukrainian lawmaker Maryan Zablotsky noted that, in the early days of the war, soldiers heavily depended on civilian volunteers for basic survival needs. Approximately 60% of material support, including commercial drones, vehicles, heating equipment, medical supplies, and personal body armor, came from volunteer-driven initiatives²⁰.

For comparative analysis, we examine Israel's experience with civil society volunteerism in national security crises.

Israeli Civil Society Volunteerism

With the onset of "The Swords of Iron War", Israel witnessed an extraordinary surge in civilian mobilization. Social media platforms played a pivotal role in facilitating rapid organization and resource allocation. Many initiatives leveraged existing networks formed during the COVID-19 pandemic and previous political protests, enabling swift identification of needs, volunteer recruitment, equipment collection, and operational management.

These grassroots initiatives proved instrumental during the first two weeks of the war, providing crucial assistance in rescue operations, evacuations, temporary shelter

19 MARTA KEPE, ALYSSA DEMUS "Resisting Russia, Insight into Ukraine's civilian based action during the first four month of the war in 2022" Rand, August 15, 2023

20 Jake Steckler "Why Ukraine's Civilian Volunteers Are the Unsung Heroes of the War" TIME, August 2, 2023

establishment, and distribution of food and medical supplies. Volunteers collaborated with NGOs, municipal authorities, and national security agencies to support war-related efforts.

Preliminary findings indicated that nearly half (48.6%) of the Israeli population engaged in volunteer activities during the first two weeks of the war.²¹

The primary volunteer activities included:

- Collecting, packaging, and distributing food and essential equipment, involving 50% of volunteers.
- Supporting security forces, including the IDF, police, Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs), community security, and MDA (national emergency medical service), with 22% of volunteers engaged in this effort.
- Providing transportation for people, food, and equipment, accounting for 22% of volunteers.

Security Considerations: Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces

Beyond logistical and humanitarian support, civilian volunteers in Ukraine actively participated in combat roles through the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF). Established after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, the TDF was designed to train civilians as a reserve force, drawing strategic insights from the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and Poland. Similar volunteer defense units have since gained traction in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and the Czech Republic.²² In 2021, Ukraine expanded the eligibility for all citizens to join the defense forces as part of a strategic defense plan in anticipation of a potential invasion. The training included guerrilla tactics and the use of small arms.²³

TDF Contributions to Military Operations

On February 24, 2022—the day of Russia's full-scale invasion—TDF rapid-response units engaged in combat within hours. To expedite mobilization, the Ukrainian military-political leadership streamlined recruitment procedures, allowing volunteers to enlist with only an ID card. As a result, 50,000 volunteers joined within days, growing to 110,000 within three months, alongside an additional 70,000 operating in 700 localized defense units.²⁴

21 Michal Almog-Bar, Ronit Bar, Ron Barkai, Hila Marmus, Neta Shar-Hadar, and Hila Yerushalmi, *The Activity of Civil Society in Israel During the Iron Swords War: Trends and Initial Insights*, The Center for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy in Israel, 2024, pp. 6–7

22 Magdalena Kowalska-Sendek, Robert Sendek "Lesson Right from the Front" POLSKA ZBROJNA, 15.07.22

23 Eleanor Beardsley "Thousands of Ukrainians are training to protect their cities in case Russia invades" NPR January 19, 2022

24 Mykola Bielieskov "Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces: The War So Far and Future Prospects" RUSI, 11 May 2023

During the first month of the war, TDF deployment facilitated widespread resistance, particularly in border regions where volunteers fought alongside regular army units. In interior areas, TDF members played critical roles in security operations and public order maintenance.

Major Achievements

TDF units played a decisive role in the defense of Kyiv during March-April 2022, delaying Russian advances and disrupting enemy maneuvers. Armed with Man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS or MPADS), they effectively countered elite Russian airborne units attempting to seize Antonov Airport. TDF units also targeted Russian supply routes, at times successfully intercepting logistical convoys. Even in occupied territories, guerrilla operations persisted against Russian forces.²⁵

Adaptation of Russian Military Tactics

By mid-April 2022, the effectiveness of TDF units began to decline as Russian forces adjusted their strategy. Transitioning to a heavy artillery-based approach reduced the impact of Ukraine's light-armed volunteer fighters. In response, many TDF personnel were reassigned to defensive operations in reclaimed territories, adapting to the evolving battlefield landscape.

Burkina Faso

A Model of Civilian Integration in National Defense Efforts

The concept of integrating civilians into national defense strategies is not unique to Ukraine. A prominent example is Burkina Faso, where armed volunteer groups play a pivotal role in countering terrorist threats across the nation.

The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP)²⁶, which annually publishes the Global Terrorism Index, identified the ten countries most affected by terrorism in 2023. The index is based on a comprehensive analysis of incidents, fatalities, injuries, and hostage situations, weighted over a five-year period to evaluate the long-term impact of terrorist activity. For the first time, Israel ranked second, while Burkina Faso topped the list, marking the nation as having experienced the most significant deterioration in security since 2011.

The scale of the crisis is underscored by casualty figures. Since 2016, over 26,000 people have lost their lives in Burkina Faso, with approximately 15,500 deaths occurring after the military coup in September 2022. Additionally, more than 6,000 casualties were recorded since January 2024 alone. Between January and August 2024, jihadist groups were responsible for 1,004 civilian deaths in 259 attacks, a reduction from 1,185 deaths

25 Ismail Khan "Ukraine's Territorial Defense Force War Creates Defiance" FOI Memo: 8248, Project No: A12311, RUFS Briefing No. 55, October, 2023

26 "Global Terrorism Index 2024" Institute for Economics & Peace, Measuring the impact of terrorism pp.18-19

in 413 attacks during the same period in 2023.²⁷

Deteriorating Security Situation

The country faces threats from ISIS-Sahel and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a militant group affiliated with al-Qaeda. These jihadist organizations utilize a wide array of tactics, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ambushes, targeted assassinations, and attacks on critical infrastructure such as cell towers, water supplies, bridges, and government offices.

The ongoing wave of terrorism has forced millions of civilians to flee their homes, precipitating a severe humanitarian crisis. By the end of 2023, nearly three million people were displaced within the country.²⁸

A Model for Civilian Recruitment in Counterterrorism

In response to this escalating security crisis, Burkina Faso has embraced a model of recruiting armed civilians to support national defense forces. Armed volunteer groups, known as Koglweogo ("Bush Guardians"), have been active in Burkina Faso since 2013. Originally formed to combat local crime, these groups began confronting jihadist organizations starting in 2017.

In January 2020, President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré enacted a law establishing the Homeland Defense Volunteers (VDPs), a volunteer combat force aimed at combating jihadist threats. This law authorized the recruitment of volunteers aged 18 and older for one-year terms, renewable for up to five years. The VDPs fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense, with recruitment open to civilians willing to "voluntarily serve the security interests of their village or residential area."

Upon enlistment, volunteers undergo a two-week firearms training program and are provided with personal weaponry. Their roles encompass intelligence gathering, conducting patrols, escorting convoys, and surveillance operations. Functioning as a localized rapid response unit, the VDPs are authorized to engage hostile forces until national military units arrive, effectively serving as the first line of defense.²⁹

Regime Changes and the War on Terror

Burkina Faso experienced two military coups in 2022. On September 30, Captain Ibrahim Traoré ousted the former junta leader, Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, citing his failure to address the growing terrorist threat. Following his ascent to power, Traoré significantly expanded the recruitment and arming of tens of thousands of civilians,

27 "Burkina Faso: Massacre Shows Need to Protect Civilians" OCHA, Relifeweb, 29 Oct 2024

28 "Country Reports on Terrorism 2023: Burkina Faso" U.S Department of state

29 Méryl Demuynck, "Civilians on the Front Lines of (Counter-) Terrorism: Lessons from the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland in Burkina Faso" The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), November 2021

further integrating them into the nation's counterterrorism efforts.³⁰

Challenges and Outcomes

The operations of the VDPs present a mixed picture. On one hand, these groups play a crucial role in defending civilian areas from jihadist incursions. On the other hand, their limited training and lack of oversight have resulted in high casualty rates and, in some instances, friendly fire incidents. Despite these shortcomings, the VDPs have become a cornerstone of Burkina Faso's counterterrorism strategy.

However, as time progresses, these groups have been linked to criminal activities, particularly targeting ethnic minorities they suspect of collaborating with extremist groups. For instance, after a nighttime attack on a local VDP headquarters in December 2022, militia members retaliated by launching a raid on the Fulani ethnic community in Nouna, Boucle du Mouhoun region, killing 28 civilians. The government acknowledged the incident and promised an investigation, but by the end of 2023, no substantial progress had been made.³¹

The VDPs have also been implicated in severe human rights violations, primarily along ethnic lines, including extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, disappearances, looting, and sexual violence. In the 15 months under Traoré's rule, around 80 VDP attacks on civilians occurred, compared to approximately 60 during Kaboré's tenure.³²

Political and Social Implications

Beyond security concerns, the mass recruitment of civilians into the VDPs has raised significant political and social issues.³³ By early 2024, around 90,000 civilians had enlisted in the VDPs, with some later accused of criminal activities and exploiting the weaponry they were provided. Furthermore, many VDP members have become a critical political support base for the president, raising concerns about the potential impact on governance stability and the risk of using these forces to suppress opposition groups.³⁴

A Double-Edged Sword

Burkina Faso finds itself in the midst of an intense humanitarian and security crisis, with terrorism continuing to escalate. While civilian recruitment has become a central

30 Understanding Burkina Faso's Latest Coup, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, By the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, October 28, 2022

31 Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person. a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burkina Faso. U.S. Department of State

32 Hédi Nsaibia "Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP)" ACLED, 26 March 2024

33 Tanguy Quidelleur "Arming Civilians in Burkina Faso. The State, the War on Terror and the Militarization of Society" Megatrends, Africa. 22, FEB 2024

34 Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion? International Crisis Group, Africa Report N°313 | 15 December 2023

element of the government's response, it has also exposed profound challenges, including the loss of control, threats to the rule of law, and growing political influence. The effectiveness of this model remains uncertain as the state continues to combat extremist elements.

Looking ahead, these militias may pose a significant risk to Burkina Faso's political stability. There is a growing fear that, instead of resolving conflicts, they could exacerbate tensions, deepen mistrust, and fuel intercommunal violence, potentially pushing the country toward civil war.

In the long term, disbanding these militias will be a formidable challenge, as their mission has already expanded far beyond its original scope. The groups' sponsors may lose control over them, posing a grave risk to national security. Burkina Faso risks cultivating powerful, uncontrollable militias with substantial social and political influence.

Armed groups of this nature often shift their focus over time, redefining their 'enemies' and potentially intensifying violence. This dynamic could spiral out of control as militias use fear to cement their power, further destabilizing the region.

India

Terror Threats and the Civil Defense Framework

India faces significant security challenges, especially in regions like Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), northeastern states, and parts of central and southern India, where terrorist organizations are actively operating. These include ISIS, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the Communist Party of India (Maoist), and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh. Terrorist attacks in these areas have targeted civilians, government officials, and security forces, using tactics such as attacks on security installations, ambushes on convoys, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).³⁵

Evolution of Civil Defense Forces: From VDC to VDG

In response to these threats, India established a civil defense model resembling Israel's rapid response security teams. This evolved into the Village Defense Committees (VDCs) during the 1990s. These volunteer militias were armed to combat terrorist infiltrations, particularly those from Pakistan. By 1995, over 26,000 volunteers were recruited across 10 districts in Jammu to protect local communities. However, as violence subsided, the VDCs were gradually disbanded, and their members were required to return their weapons to police stations. The involvement of some volunteers in criminal activities led to a reduction in the distribution of civilian firearms.

With the resurgence of terror attacks in 2020, the VDCs were replaced by the Village Defense Guards (VDGs), a new force consisting of up to 15 volunteers per unit. These

³⁵ Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 – India, USDOS – US Department of State, Document #2118959.

units are commanded by retired military or police officers and are primarily tasked with protecting critical infrastructure and community facilities in Jammu and Kashmir, operating under the supervision of district police. The strategy focuses on organizing small, armed volunteer groups in border villages to act as first responders against terrorist threats, enhancing local security.³⁶

Civilian Armament Following Terror Attacks

After a terror attack in Dangri village, Rajouri district, on January 1, 2023, which resulted in seven civilian deaths, the Jammu and Kashmir government began arming and training additional civilian groups for village defense. In Dangri alone, 70 volunteers were equipped with firearms for self-defense, and many local residents began purchasing private handguns. The village head, Dheeraj Sharma, emphasized that widespread weapon distribution can save lives and deter terrorism, as security forces cannot be stationed at every home.³⁷

VDG members receive training from security forces, and some areas provide them with a monthly stipend of 4,000–4,500 Indian Rupees (\$48–\$54 USD). However, not all volunteers are armed, in practice, the armament is minimal, and some are equipped with outdated Lee-Enfield .303 bolt-action rifles, which served as the primary service rifle for the infantry forces of the British Empire and Commonwealth nations.³⁸ Despite these limitations, VDG volunteers operate in high-risk conditions, often risking their lives. For example, on April 28, 2024, a 48-year-old VDG member was killed during a joint operation with police forces in Udhampur, Jammu.³⁹

Terrorist groups have targeted VDG members specifically to deter civilian defense efforts. On July 22, 2024, a terror attack was launched on the home of Parshotam Lal, a farmer and VDG squad commander in Gundha village, Rajouri. One of his family members was injured in the attack. Just 17 days earlier, Lal had received a presidential bravery award for leading a successful operation against terrorists.⁴⁰

Security Challenges and Governance Concerns

India's security situation continues to deteriorate, with civil defense forces playing a crucial role in counterterrorism efforts. Despite the operational challenges and risks, the Indian government and local communities are working together to protect villages from

36 Village Defence Guards Scheme, Vajiram & Ravi. Institute for IAS (the Indian Administrative Service) examination, 26-08-2023

37 Nazir Massodi "After Jammu Terror Attacks, Civilian Village Guards Get Weapons" NDTV India News, January 10, 2023

38 Yuvraj Tyagi "What Are VDGs and How Are They Equipped to Combat Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir" REPUBLIC, July 22nd 2024

39 Peerzada Ashiq "Village defense guard member killed in shootout with militants in Jammu's Udhampur: Police" April 28, 2024, TH, India

40 Sumit Bhargav "Major terror attack on VDG's house, army picket in Rajouri foiled: Army" Greater Kashmir, July 23, 2024

extremist threats. However, the widespread distribution of weapons raises concerns about potential misuse, making it an ongoing issue.

Criticism of India's VDG program mirrors concerns raised about volunteer militias in other regions, such as Burkina Faso. Both systems lack clear command structures and compliance mechanisms, which can result in chaos rather than solving security problems. Additionally, the involvement of VDG members in law enforcement has raised doubts about the credibility of the government, especially given past human rights abuses. Official records reveal that 221 criminal cases were filed against VDC members, including charges of murder, rape, and rioting. Despite this, the conviction rate remains low, with only six cases resulting in convictions, suggesting that the central government may be downplaying the severity of the threat.⁴¹

Mozambique

Combating Terrorism through Local Militias

Mozambique has been facing an escalating wave of violent attacks from the jihadist group ISIS-Ansar al-Sunna, commonly referred to as "Al-Shabaab" in local contexts. This group seeks to overthrow the government, expel foreign influences, and impose Sharia law across the country. Its ideological roots can be traced back to the Ansar al-Sunna Islamic movement of the 1990s, which advocated for the abolition of secular education.

The Rise of Terrorism and Its Expansion

The Islamist insurgency in Mozambique erupted in 2017 when small militant cells began targeting security forces in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. By 2019, ISIS officially recognized the group as its affiliate, and it has since expanded its operations, including carrying out cross-border attacks in southern Tanzania.

The instability in northern Mozambique, one of the country's poorest regions despite its rich natural resources, poses a significant challenge to national development. The region not only suffers from terrorism but also from rampant criminal activities, as criminal networks exploit the area as a corridor for the illegal trade of timber, wildlife, diamonds, and narcotics.⁴² Over the years, terrorists have launched deadly attacks on civilians, security forces, and foreign workers, utilizing small arms, machine guns, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mortars, and shoulder anti-tank weapons (RPGs). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the conflict has resulted in approximately 5,000 deaths and displaced over a million people in the past five years.⁴³

41 Samaan Lateef " Kashmir authorities bolster 'village defense committees'," DW, 03/18/2022

42 Political situation- Rigid power structures hamper good governance," Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ.

43 FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS: ISIS-Mozambique, Counter terrorism guide U.S National Counterterrorism Center NCTC

Military Failures and the Establishment of Militias

Due to the shortcomings of the military and law enforcement agencies, the Mozambican government approved the formation of local militias as auxiliary forces in the fight against terrorism on April 5, 2023. Parliament granted these militias legal backing, and Defense Minister Cristóvão Chume acknowledged that Mozambique's military alone could not adequately address the jihadist threat.⁴⁴

These militias mainly consist of civilian volunteers and former combatants, supporting the Mozambican armed forces, which are also aided by military reinforcements from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). According to Chume, the militias were established to "enhance the operational capacity of the defense and security forces in preventing and containing the spread of terrorism, protecting local communities, and safeguarding public and private infrastructure." The new law provides a structured framework, organization, and logistical support for these local self-defense militias.

Concerns over Lack of Control

However, the formation of these militias raises concerns, especially due to local political dynamics and power struggles. The new legislation overlooks the Naparamas, peasant militia that operates independently of state security forces. The Naparamas gained prominence during Mozambique's civil war in the 1980s when they fought alongside the military against rebel factions. With the rise of jihadist terrorism in Cabo Delgado, they resumed their activities.⁴⁵

These militias, while essential for immediate defense, have the potential to shift towards criminal activities or even establish zones of autonomous control. The risk of inter-ethnic conflicts between militias or confrontations with state security forces adds to the instability. Furthermore, relying on non-state actors for roles traditionally held by governmental forces, such as law enforcement, raises serious concerns regarding long-term stability and the risk of civil war.⁴⁶

These fears materialized in a violent incident in which militia fighters killed three election officials in the village of Catapua, Chiure district, mistaking them for ISIS members. Investigations later revealed militia involvement in other violent acts, including attacks on healthcare workers, the arson of medical facilities, and accusations of medical staff spreading cholera.⁴⁷

Achievements vs. Future Challenges

44 Mozambique Legalizes Local Militias to Fight Insurgents" Africa Today By ADF Sep 22, 2023

45 Mozambique to legalize village militias to fight terrorists, RLI January 5, 2023

46 Matthew Goncalves O'Kelly "Old habits die hard" Mozambique Politics ,06.21.2023

47 Tom Gould "Naparama militia beat three election officials to death in Cabo Delgado" Zitamar news, March 11, 2024

Since July 2021, with the support of Rwandan forces and SADC, the Mozambican military, alongside local militias, has successfully reclaimed several areas that were previously under the control of ISIS-Mozambique. As a result, SADC announced its intention to withdraw its forces and not extend its military mandate in Mozambique.

However, this decision was made despite the central government's failure to improve governance in the liberated areas. The governance gap created by this absence could enable the terrorist organization to regroup and regain strength, thus increasing the government's reliance on militias and potentially leading to instability and civil war.⁴⁸

A violent outbreak that occurred in the country at the end of 2024 may indicate the extent to which the security and social stability of the country are fragile. 1,534 prisoners escaped from a detention facility located about 15 kilometers from the capital, including around 30 prisoners from terrorist groups responsible for the attacks in the Cabo Delgado province.

The escapees exploited the unrest and violent riots that broke out in the country following the controversial approval of the ruling party as the winner of the last elections. The Minister of the Interior, Pascoal Ronda, confirmed that 236 serious violent incidents occurred nationwide, with armed groups carrying out attacks against police stations, correctional institutions, and other critical infrastructure. The unrest that ensued claimed the lives of at least 150 people.⁴⁹

Mozambique continues to face, alongside internal challenges, the threat of terrorism against its citizens. Despite certain military successes, the establishment of local militias as a significant force raises serious concerns regarding the future of governance in the country. The key question remains whether Mozambique will be able to establish stable governance, or whether it will find itself confronting the dangerous and threatening challenge of uncontrolled, armed militias.

Nigeria

Governance Deficiency and Local Forces

The Challenge of Governance in a Fragile Security Landscape

Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, after years of military governance, the country has faced an escalating wave of violence and deep-seated insecurity. A major threat has emerged from the terrorist group Boko Haram and its affiliate, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). These groups primarily operate in northeastern Nigeria, the southern Lake Chad region, and border areas with Niger and Cameroon. Terrorist activities began in 2002 and have persisted, exacerbating the nation's security challenges.

48 Intel Brief: Islamic State Resurging in Mozambique. The Soufan Center, March 21, 2024

49 "Mass jailbreak in Mozambique amid post-election unrest" France 24, 25/12/2024

Terrorism Statistics

In 2023, Nigeria experienced a sharp increase in fatalities due to terrorist attacks. This uptick is largely attributed to the escalating conflict between ISWAP and Boko Haram, which has led to a significant rise in terrorism, especially in Borno State. The number of terrorism-related deaths surged by 63% compared to 2022. Between 2012 and 2022, nearly 41,000 individuals lost their lives due to terrorist violence. While terrorist activities have been largely concentrated in the northeast, the spread of attacks to southern states, such as Ondo, suggests a growing national threat.⁵⁰

Military Failures and Reliance on Local Forces

The Nigerian military's efforts against Boko Haram in Borno State and the broader northeast have been plagued by numerous failures. Since 2009, Boko Haram has intensified its attacks, leading to a severe security, humanitarian, and governance crisis. Thousands of civilians have been killed, and hundreds of thousands displaced. Vast areas of Borno State have fallen under terrorist control, posing a significant risk to Nigeria's political, economic, and social stability.

In response to this security crisis, the government has expanded its security apparatus by incorporating private security contractors and civilian volunteers. One significant model has been the establishment of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno State. The CJTF played a vital role in countering Boko Haram, and its volunteers were instrumental in apprehending senior terrorist figures.⁵¹

Farmer-Herder Clashes – Another Sign of Governance Deficiency

Nigeria is also grappling with an ongoing conflict between nomadic herders and farmers across various regions of the country. Between 2007 and 2011, there were 67 recorded armed clashes between these groups. However, from 2012 to 2018, this number escalated to 716. The root causes include climate change, drought, and diminishing water sources, which have driven herders, often accompanied by armed groups, southward into more fertile farming regions. In response, farmers have formed armed militias for self-defense, further escalating the violence and highlighting the governance deficit in the country.⁵²

Violence and Organized Crime

In addition to terrorist threats, Nigeria suffers from widespread violent crime, including

50 "Global Terrorism Index 2024" Nigeria, Institute for Economics & Peace, pp. 26

51 Christopher Godwin, & PIUS Victor Ularju " Volunteer Security Outfit and the Fight against Terrorism in Nigeria: A Study of Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State" ISSN 2522-9400 European Modern Studies Journal, Vol 8 No 1, 2024

52 Olayinka Ajala & Joe Murphy, "Countering Terrorism in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin: Reassessing the Role of Vigilantism as a Counterterrorism Initiative" African Security, Taylor & Francis, 29 Jan 2025

kidnappings, armed robberies, and ethnic-religious conflicts. The convergence of these threats has eroded public trust in the government. In response, local self-defense groups have emerged to combat these issues, including the CJTF, as well as the notorious Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group in southeastern Nigeria. With governmental support, the Bakassi Boys became infamous for their brutal tactics, extrajudicial executions, and the practice of “jungle justice”. Although they successfully curbed crime, their actions drew severe international criticism due to human rights abuses.

Uncontrolled Territories

While the armed militias have managed to provide partial solutions to security challenges, their existence reflects a troubling process of central government weakening and the rise of non-state actors. In the absence of proper oversight, these groups may evolve into autonomous forces with their own priorities and could even pose a threat to the central government.

Certain regions in Nigeria have already become “ungoverned spaces,” where militant groups operate with relative impunity. This has fostered religious extremism, militia activities, and further destabilization of public order. The ambiguous relationship between volunteer militias, such as the Bakassi Boys, and state authorities highlights the risks these groups pose to Nigeria’s security, society, and politics. The growing reliance on non-state armed actors mirrors the dangers of outsourcing security functions to groups with their own ambitions of power.⁵³

The Power Struggle between militias and the State

The Bakassi Boys’ interactions with government officials have led to prolonged instability. When local officials embraced the group, federal police opposed them, resulting in violent confrontations over authority and control. In 2000, Nigeria’s federal police minister called for the disbandment of the Bakassi Boys, citing their lawless actions. President Olusegun Obasanjo also opposed their rise, ordering the military to dismantle them. However, this mission failed, as the army retreated in the face of militia resistance, emboldening the Bakassi Boys and their political supporters.

Given their political significance, local governors publicly supported the Bakassi Boys, organizing mass demonstrations against the federal government. Despite temporary setbacks, international pressure and the assassination of Nigerian Bar Association President Barnabas Igwe, who publicly condemned their human rights abuses, led to a policy shift. This shift resulted in violent clashes between the federal police and the militia, resulting in numerous deaths in Abia State.

The political and financial backing of the Bakassi Boys ensured their survival despite federal crackdowns. Although the group was forced to operate more covertly, they

53 Nigeria: The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture” Document source: Human Rights Watch (HRW), UNHCR, 20 May 2002

continued their extrajudicial killings. Over the past two decades, local governments have largely continued supporting them. Despite criticism directed at these militias, Governor Okezie Victor Ikpeazu publicly announced the re-establishment of the “Bakassi Boys” in 2019, asserting that they would be tasked with addressing the surge in crime, unlike in northeastern Nigeria, where militias are designated to combat the Boko Haram terrorist organization.⁵⁴

The Governance Challenge

Nigeria’s struggle with terrorism, organized crime, and governance failures presents a serious challenge. The government will need to restore control over violence-prone areas, closely regulate volunteer militias, and strengthen formal security mechanisms. Failure to take significant action could lead to a collapse in state authority, where non-state actors begin to assume the role of state institutions.

In many respects, the success of volunteer militias reflects a broader trend, the rise of non-state actors in regions where formal state security structures are ineffective. This analysis highlights the risks of legitimizing or ignoring the operations of armed militias in areas with weak governance. The price of inaction is high, and states that fail to assert firm governance and law enforcement may find themselves overrun by unregulated armed groups, whose growing autonomy could ultimately threaten national stability.

Section Four: Summary and Recommendations

This paper has focused on three critical areas: the role of emergency response units as civilian forces in counterterrorism and addressing security threats, the strategies for recruiting, retaining, and developing volunteer human capital, and a comparative study of five countries with experience in deploying civilian combatants. These areas provide essential insights, conclusions, and recommendations for optimizing the effectiveness of volunteer-based security organizations.

Rapid Response Security Teams (RRSTs)

The RRSTs units demonstrated remarkable effectiveness during the surprise attack on October 7, 2023. However, their deployment exposed significant gaps in preparedness. While acts of bravery were evident, issues such as the lack of sufficient weapons, ammunition, and equipment impaired the defense of communities. The operational framework revealed a lack of transparency between internal security and the national security apparatus, resulting in a lack of coordination between the military, The Israeli Security Agency (ISA or Shin Bet), and the police, thereby reducing the RRSTs’ overall effectiveness.

The rapid recruitment of thousands of volunteers and the establishment of hundreds of new emergency response units is commendable. However, it also highlighted challenges,

54 Vanda Felbab-Brown “Vigilante Groups & Militias in Southern Nigeria” United Nations University, 2021 pp.18-27

such as the relaxation of enlistment criteria, which allowed inexperienced volunteers without combat backgrounds. While the need for rapid deployment was undeniable, this posed operational risks, including potential friendly fire incidents, compounded by minimal training and preparation. While highly motivated, the new recruits had substantial gaps in combat skills, which could lead to operational inefficiencies.

Several conclusions and recommendations are drawn to optimize the potential of these units:

1. **Raising Recruitment Standards** – It is recommended to revert to a recruitment model prioritizing military veterans with a better basic combat experience (e.g., Rifleman 5 level). This ensures operational readiness while maintaining volunteer motivation and availability. While this may reduce the overall number of recruits, it will foster a more skilled and effective volunteer force.
2. **Enhancing Training and Readiness** – Comprehensive and frequent training programs should be implemented, including high-pressure simulations that replicate real combat scenarios to prepare volunteers for the demands of the field.
3. **Joint drills-** Participation in joint drills with all operational security forces and regional emergency response units will enhance overall operational readiness.
4. **Scenario-Based Drills** – Training should incorporate combat scenarios drawn from past incidents, allowing volunteers to learn from previous attacks and be better prepared for potential future threats.
5. **Mental Preparedness** – Volunteers, along with their families, should be mentally prepared for the demands of duty, including the possibility of leaving their families to protect the community in times of crisis.
6. **Weapon Availability** – A rotational duty system should be implemented, ensuring that a minimum number of armed volunteers, equipped with necessary weapons and ammunition, are consistently available in or near the community.
7. **Governance, Supervision, and Guidance** – A designated police-appointed commander should oversee each emergency response unit (or groups of adjacent units). This commander would ensure the formal integration of the units into routine security operations and enforce maximum oversight to prevent lawlessness, unauthorized actions, and encroachment on law enforcement duties.
8. **Strengthening Coordination Between Security Agencies** – A clear coordination mechanism should be established, defining the authority and responsibilities between emergency response units, the military, The Israeli Security Agency

(ISA or Shin Bet), police, and Border Police, ensuring seamless cooperation.

9. **Equipment Supply and Infrastructure Development** – Adequate procurement of weapons, protective gear, and advanced communication equipment is crucial, along with the construction of fortified combat positions to support operational readiness.
10. **Nationwide Maintenance and Development Plan** – A national training framework should be established, with localized adaptations, conducting periodic inspections of weapons, ammunition, and equipment, along with regular emergency exercises to simulate different scenarios and ensure coordination between all regional operational forces.
11. **Learning from Global Models** – International case studies should be examined to draw lessons on community defense and volunteer emergency response units, adapting relevant methodologies to local needs.

Recruitment and Retention in Volunteer-Based Security Organizations

In the context of volunteer-based security organizations, the focus shifts to fostering and maintaining motivation. Research reveals that volunteerism is driven by a combination of civic duty, personal values, the desire to achieve intrinsic goals, and social support. The success of volunteer security organizations relies on sustaining this motivation by adapting to volunteers' evolving needs and providing continuous professional and social support.

The following phases outline a strategic approach to recruitment and retention:

Phase 1 – Volunteer Recruitment: Creating a Strong and Focused Message

1. **Civic Duty and Community Values** – The recruitment framework should appeal to individuals driven by a sense of civic responsibility and the belief that their service contributes to society. Volunteers should be made to feel that their role is essential to the community's security.
2. **Personal Fulfillment and Satisfaction** – Recruitment campaigns should emphasize how volunteering enhances local security, improves the quality of life, and fosters mutual responsibility. Volunteers should see their service as a source of personal fulfillment.
3. **"Call to Duty"** – Recruitment efforts should stress that volunteering is a mission, a critical response to national and community security needs, reinforcing the importance of individual contribution to a larger cause.
4. **Enhancing a Sense of Belonging** – Volunteering should be presented as an integral part of the community, emphasizing social connection, commitment, and the value of collective action.

Phase 2 – Volunteer Retention: Sustaining Motivation and Adapting to Needs

5. **Collective Belonging** – Commanders and supervisors should foster a strong sense of belonging among volunteers, ensuring they feel integral to a professional, value-driven, and committed organization.
6. **Personal and Professional Growth** – Implementing structured and comprehensive training programs will allow volunteers to enhance their skills and gain both professional and personal development, ensuring long-term engagement.
7. **Social Recognition and Family Support** – Collaboration with community leaders, educational institutions, businesses, and workplaces can increase the visibility of volunteers and foster public support. Recognition from the community and families strengthens volunteers' sense of worth and commitment.
8. **Camaraderie and Team Spirit** – Building internal cohesion within security response units and between volunteers and permanent personnel fosters a sense of unity, which enhances long-term motivation and retention.
9. **Appreciation and Recognition** – Institutionalizing a culture of acknowledgment through formal recognition, awards, and ceremonies for excellence, dedication, and exceptional contributions will maintain morale and encourage continued service.
10. **Periodic Professional Reviews** – Regular briefings and updates with operational commanders, regional intelligence officers, and experts from various fields (e.g., medical emergency first aid, firefighting) will strengthen volunteers' sense of involvement and ensure they are fully prepared for the challenges ahead.
11. **Personal Interviews and Satisfaction Surveys** – Conducting systematic assessments of volunteer satisfaction, morale, and reasons for attrition or continued commitment will inform strategies for improving retention.
12. **Promotion and Career Development** – Offering volunteers opportunities to advance into various roles, such as command positions or mentoring new recruits, fosters leadership and encourages long-term commitment.
13. **Distinctive Identity and Unit Pride** – Allocating unique insignia, tactical gear, and resources helps cultivate a sense of pride in the unit and reinforces organizational loyalty.
14. **Emotional Support and Personal Guidance** – Providing emotional support and personal guidance to help volunteers manage the stress and challenges of their roles will ensure their well-being and sustain their commitment.

By implementing these recommendations, volunteer enlistment rates can be maximized,

and long-term commitment can be strengthened. Volunteer retention is not only dependent on effective recruitment but also on the continuous nurturing of a volunteer's sense of belonging, purpose, and value derived from their service.

Comparative Study on Volunteer Combat Forces

This study analyzes the experiences of five countries with volunteer combat forces, highlighting both the advantages and the associated risks of utilizing civilians in security roles. The comparative findings reveal recurring themes that provide valuable insights for integrating volunteer combatants effectively while managing the potential threats that may arise. Key observations include:

1. **International Model for Volunteer Force Oversight** – Comparative research offers crucial lessons on integrating volunteers into security forces, with a focus on mitigating the risks of these groups evolving into uncontrollable or rogue elements. Effective oversight and governance frameworks are essential to prevent such outcomes.
2. **Monitoring and Supervision of Volunteer Activities** – Establishing transparent and stringent oversight mechanisms reduces the potential for abuse of power among volunteer forces, ensuring their actions align with legal and ethical standards.
3. **Rapid Reinforcement of Security Forces** – Volunteer forces enable the swift mobilization of additional security personnel in regions where conventional security agencies may lack sufficient presence, enhancing the overall security posture.
4. **Enhanced Local Security Perception** – Communities experience a heightened sense of security when local residents are involved in defense efforts, contributing to stronger community trust and resilience in the face of security threats.
5. **Relatively Low Costs** – Volunteers typically undergo basic training, with maintenance costs being far lower compared to regular, professionally trained security forces. This cost-effectiveness makes volunteer forces an attractive option for bolstering security without significant financial strain.
6. **Familiarity with Terrain and Community** – Volunteers, being local residents, possess an inherent advantage in terms of familiarity with the terrain and community dynamics. This local knowledge aids in real-time intelligence gathering and allows for faster and more effective responses to emerging threats.
7. **A Strong Civil Society as a Reactive Force** – In countries with a tradition of civilian enlistment, the population can be rapidly mobilized for both combat

and logistical support, making it easier to adapt to shifting security challenges.

8. **Deterrence Effect** – The visible presence of well-equipped, armed volunteers patrolling vulnerable areas can serve as a deterrent to potential attackers, dissuading terrorist or criminal activity in regions with strong volunteer forces.
9. **Rapid Recruitment and Operational Flexibility** – Lowering enlistment thresholds allows for the swift recruitment of large numbers of volunteers, enabling the rapid expansion of combat units. However, to maximize operational effectiveness, strategic allocation based on volunteers' backgrounds and skill sets is critical. Those with limited combat experience should be assigned to roles such as logistics to avoid operational inefficiencies.
10. **Coordination with Security Forces** – When volunteers operate under military or police supervision, they can serve as a significant auxiliary force in combat operations, logistics, and routine security activities.
11. **Enhancing Long-Term Security Preparedness** – The implementation of strict discipline, professional oversight, and optimal training is crucial for establishing a sustainable, effective long-term defense framework. Volunteers must be integrated into a robust security infrastructure to maintain operational readiness over time.
12. **Insufficient Training** – One of the primary risks of rapid volunteer recruitment is the potential for insufficient training. Volunteers with minimal combat experience may make operational errors, lack discipline, and be prone to incidents such as friendly fire or unnecessary casualties. Comprehensive training programs are essential to address this risk.
13. **Loss of Control and Weak Supervision** – Expanding volunteers' responsibilities beyond routine security tasks to include law enforcement duties can lead to unregulated actions. In extreme cases, this may result in volunteers engaging in harmful or illegal activities, potentially endangering civilians and eroding public trust in the security apparatus.
14. **Disruption of Social Cohesion** – Unregulated use of volunteers may trigger ethnic, religious, and political tensions.
15. **Political Exploitation** – If authorities exploit volunteer forces as a political support base, there is a risk that these groups could evolve into autonomous militias, operating outside state control and undermining national unity and stability.
16. **Legal and Humanitarian Implications** – Volunteer combatants, particularly in high-stress environments, may be at risk of committing human rights violations or misusing force. Proper legal frameworks, training, and oversight mechanisms are essential to prevent such outcomes.

17. Risk of Anarchy and Crime – Armed volunteers, if not properly supervised, may misuse their authority or become involved in criminal activities, further destabilizing the areas they are intended to protect. Clear governance structures are required to mitigate these risks.
18. Strengthening Governance – The use of volunteers is merely a complementary solution that fills the state's security gaps. Top priority must be given to reinforcing security forces and governance, as their absence risks turning entire regions into "ungoverned spaces."

Enhancing emergency response units (RRSTs) is a crucial component of the security framework, particularly in border regions and vulnerable areas across the nation. The ability to recruit, retain, and develop volunteer combat forces provides a force multiplier, offering significant security and social benefits. By implementing lessons learned from the October 7, 2023, attack, and drawing from international experience in deploying volunteer forces for security missions, the overall defense and security mechanisms of communities can be significantly improved.