KIDNAPPING & HOSTAGES
A CHALLENGING NEW DYNAMIC

PLUS: Interoperability; Family support during victim identification; Mass casualty management lessons from Paris incidents; Critical space infrastructure and security; Displacement crisis in Europe; Insider threats to critical national infrastructure
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comment

The geopolitical aspects of the global migration crisis currently appear to be overshadowing those of climate-related issues and human-caused technological disasters.

The world is possibly experiencing its worst refugee crisis ever: around 60 million people around the globe have fled their homes, displaced by conflict, violence or persecution. Predictably, the main – though by no means exclusive – cause of this exodus is conflict, whose attendant effects extend far beyond the communities directly involved. Eighty-six per cent of the world’s refugees are being sheltered by developing countries, says the UNHCR. Mass migration of this scale is an immensely difficult situation to manage with dignity and humanity in any circumstances. The situation in Europe in particular appears to be in danger of spawning far wider consequences, exposing fault lines in European unity and politics, possibly threatening the cohesion of its societies.

This is particularly true with regard to the controversial subject of integration, where public sympathy for refugees has suffered some erosion after incidents of sexual attacks and harassment (page 38).

Our article on page 40 looks at how the European Commission is co-ordinating requests for assistance from those countries at the frontline of the crisis, while possible solutions in terms of border control technology are outlined on page 42.

In case we needed any reminder of why so many people are making the dangerous journey to what they hope will be a safe haven, the article on page 44 reports on the staggering levels of UXO dropped onto civilian communities by airstrikes in Syria, while page 46 looks at the detrimental effect of conflict on urban services. And lest we forget the psychological impacts of war, its effects on mental health are examined in the article on page 32, while sexual violence in conflict is discussed on page 34.

So this is how the narrative of this edition of CRJ has been shaped – we can only present the briefest snapshot into how the trauma of conflict not only causes near-inconceivable suffering to those who are directly caught up in it, but also how its effects inevitably seep across borders into neighbouring countries and far beyond.

Emily Hough
Sexual violence in conflict

Understanding how, why, if and when sexual violence is used, and against who and by who, should be a central part of how we understand and respond to armed conflict, according to Dyan Mazurana and Phoebe Donnelly.

People are increasingly paying attention to sexual violence committed during war – from global advocacy campaigns with celebrity spokespeople, to labelling the Democratic Republic of Congo ‘the worst place in the world to be a woman’, to the horror and revulsion of so-called Islamic State’s practice of selling Yazidi women and girls as sexual slaves and forced wives. Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) is not a side effect of conflict, the so-called ‘unfortunate but inevitable fallout of war’. Rather, understanding how, why, if and when sexual violence is used, and against who and by who, should be a central part of how we understand and respond to armed conflict, from conflict prevention to its aftermath.

It turns out there is a lot of variation in which armed forces and groups perpetrate SGBV; its prevalence and different forms; whether it is carried out by individuals or groups; and how different perpetrators’ use of SGBV changes over the duration of the conflict. Analysts and responders should pay attention to these variations to shape their response.

Sexual violence committed by parties to an armed conflict is prohibited under international law, as specifically outlined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. International courts have ruled that sexual violence can constitute a war crime, crime against humanity, genocide and a violation of the laws and customs of war. Under international law, no person shall be subjected to sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, sexual mutilation, outrages on personal dignity or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity.

Some widely held beliefs about sexual violence during armed violence, and rape in particular, are incorrect according to new research. Cohen, Green and Woods (2013) looked at data from two studies, the first on all 48 conflicts in Africa between 1989 and 2009, including all 236 active organised armed groups and forces, and the second study on all 86 major civil wars in the world between 1980 and 2009. Here are some of their key findings:

- **Myth**: Rape is more common among rebel forces
- **Fact**: State militaries are more likely to perpetrate wartime rape.
- **Myth**: Perpetrators are always men, victims are always females
- **Fact**: Females perpetrate a wide array of SGBV in some conflicts, and in some conflicts significant numbers of victims of SGBV are males.
- **Myth**: Perpetrators of wartime rape are always combatants
- **Fact**: Many perpetrators of wartime rape are civilians;
- **Myth**: Rapists committed at high prevalence indicate rape as a war strategy or tactic
- **Fact**: Frequency does not always indicate purpose; and
- **Myth**: Armies outsource atrocities to militias
- **Fact**: When governments target civilians they usually do so through both regular military and militia forces; when states refrain from targeting civilians, the militias usually hold back as well.

**Hierarchy of attention**

These findings demonstrate that sexual violence against civilians and combatants is preventable, as many parties to conflicts do not engage in these crimes and violations, in part because it may not serve their goals. They show that working with regular armed forces to prevent attacks against civilians can have the carry-over effects of their militias also refraining from such attacks. Additionally, they make clear that we need to broaden our understanding of who needs protection, to help prevent and respond to sexual violence, including attention to men and boy victims of all ages. We also need to focus efforts to prevent sexual violence by state and non-state forces, as well as civilians, who may take advantage of the context of conflict and fragility to commit these crimes.

Recognising the variety of forms and potential victims of sexual violence improves our understanding of, and ability to respond to, sexual violence in conflict. Here’s one example of how this broader view of sexual violence would have been useful to incorporate into conflict analysis and response in Afghanistan. A 2015 article in the New York Times reported that US soldiers witnessed Afghan police (ie agents of the state) sexually abusing boys at military bases, but were told by their superiors to ignore these abuses. A spokesperson for the American command in Afghanistan called this an issue “Of Afghan criminal law,” and noted that US military personnel would only intervene when: “Rape is being used as a weapon of war.”

The subtext of this statement seems to be that only when there are instances of widespread rape against women or
Where women, girls and boys are more likely to be abused by parties to the conflict and civilians, they are also at most risk of abuse by peacekeepers.

Girls by the armed opposition does it become an issue for US forces to address. This example demonstrates that rape of boys in the civilian populations by one of the parties to the conflict does not register to US military personnel or Afghan police as a serious crime (though it could certainly constitute torture).

“Rape as a weapon of war” has become central to the way people understand sexual violence in conflict and plays a part in the creation of a hierarchy of attention and response to different forms of sexual violence. Various experts have grappled with the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ terminology. Scholars of sexual violence have created a more nuanced categorisation to understand cases of sexual violence in conflict, explaining that there can be: Strategic use of sexual violence (or rape as a weapon of war), rape as a practice tolerated by commanders but not ordered, and opportunistic rape (individually motivated instances of sexual violence).

One or all forms of sexual violence may be present in a specific conflict. It is likely easier to identify ‘rape as a weapon of war’ because this form of sexual violence is a tactic and part of strategic military or rebel campaigns and is often combined with forced displacement, deliberate attacks against civilians, or ethnic cleansing. Yet only really paying attention to sexual violence in conflict when rape is strategic, widespread and systematic, and used against women or girls, results in a flawed approach. Even when rape is opportunistic we should still ask questions about: What kind of conditions allow combatants to have opportunities to sexually assault civilians? And, which combatants would be more likely to use rape and against who in conflict environments?

While we know more about the types of sexual violence and reasons it is used, we still struggle to understand what interventions can best help survivors. A comprehensive review of studies (between 1990 through 2011) from
different disciplines and geographical regions looking at aid programmes seeking to address sexual violence in conflict found that most interventions are in post-conflict settings, and few addressed prevention or the conflict context.

Different strategies and interventions were used to try and reduce the impact of the sexual violence, including survivor care, livelihoods initiatives, community mobilisation, legal interventions, programmes to improve understanding of how to ensure women and girls had the resources they needed without being put at risk (such as firewood or fuel), or a combination of these. Yet the review found that most initiatives were quite limited and not particularly successful.

It is not only belligerents to the conflict that commit sexual violence against civilian populations. In 2015, events in the Central African Republic (CAR) highlighted the continued problem of sexual abuse by peacekeepers, including: The rape of a 12-year-old girl by UN peacekeepers; accusations that French peacekeepers acting alongside the UN mission raped six boys; instances of peacekeepers coercing displaced civilians to provide sex in exchange for food at a camp; and reports that African Union peacekeepers sexually and physically abused children.

In reaction, the UN Secretary-General appointed an External Independent Review Panel to investigate these crimes, and in an unusual action, asked the head of the peacekeeping mission to resign (see page 4).

The events in CAR highlight that with the arrival of military, police and civilian peacekeepers, there are among them some who take advantage of their positions of relative power and wealth to sexually exploit and abuse the women, girls and boys they are sent to protect, as well as profiting from participating in war economies.

While shocking reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by military, police and civilian peacekeepers surfaced in earlier UN peacekeeping missions in Cambodia, Haiti, Mozambique and Bosnia, it was not until 2001 that the issue received international attention, with Save the Children and UNHCR reports alleging that several West African peacekeeping missions had peacekeepers engaged in pervasive sexual exploitation and abuse of local women, girls and boys.

To illustrate the scope of the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers in environments where sexual violence is highly prevalent, and sexual abuse by its own staff is not rigorously addressed by the mission, researchers estimate that between 2003 – 2012 UN military, policy and civilian peacekeepers in the capital Monrovia, Liberia, engaged in transactional sex with approximately 58,000 women and girls.

One of the most significant factors that correlates to sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers is if the conflict environment where peacekeepers are present has high levels of SGBV perpetrated by parties to the conflict and by civilians against other civilians. The more that acts of sexual violence in the conflict are at the level of ‘serious’ or ‘widespread,’ the greater the likelihood that peacekeepers will be engaged in sexual abuse and exploitation in those locations.

This fact is particularly disturbing, as it reveals that in situations where women, girls and boys are more likely to be sexually abused by parties to the conflict and civilians, they are also more at risk of abuse by peacekeepers.

A second significant correlation to sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers in is conflicts in which large numbers of people are displaced. Displaced populations are more vulnerable, in large part owing to the significant disruption of their livelihoods and family and community protection networks. They may resort to negative coping strategies, including being coerced into exploitative relations and work to secure resources.

These patterns demonstrate the less obvious ways SGBV can be central to conflict even as they diverge from the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ narrative.

Importantly, factors shown to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers include strong conduct and disciplinary units to address allegations of misconduct, comprehensive and situation based pre-deployment training, zero tolerance policies, and the presence of gender specialists at high levels within the peace mission.

Active representation

It is well recognised that protection against violence is not only physical. Ensuring women’s active representation, participation, and leadership in protection mechanisms is essential, and is a cornerstone of the United Nation’s Women Peace and Security Agenda (comprised of eight Security Council resolutions).

Research finds women’s meaningful participation in political leadership, public administration, military and police, national security institutions, refugee and internally displaced persons camp committee, community protection committees and mechanisms, and accountability bodies, can have a positive outcome in reducing SGBV and improving overall protection.

Bibliography

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