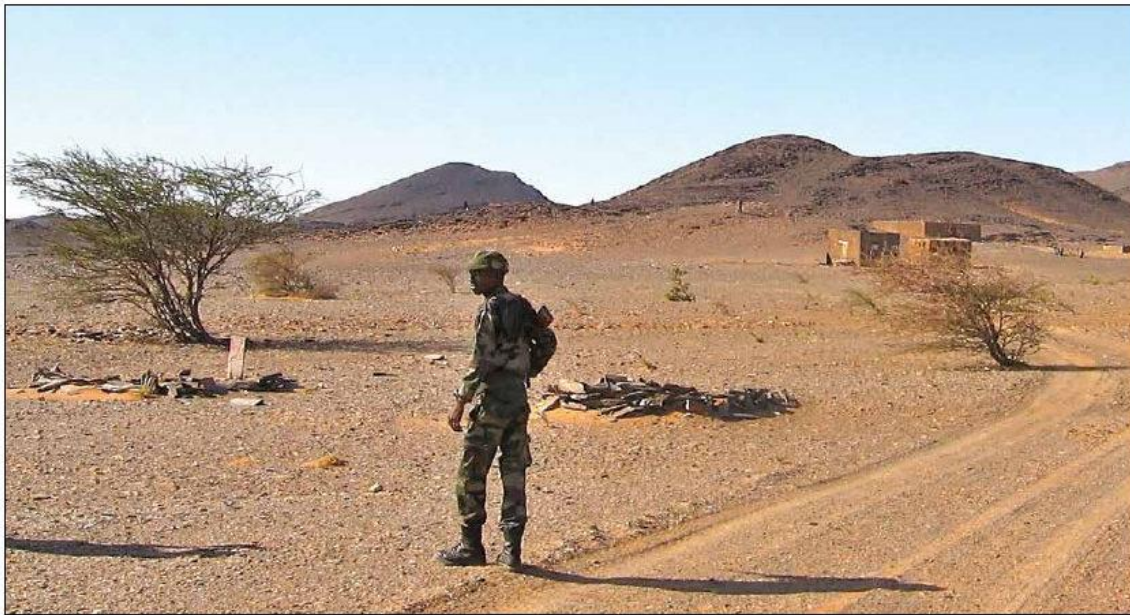

CASE STUDY – SCIENCE ADVICE WORKSHOP

MIDGAZE

Armed rebellion and reintegration of ex-combatants

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Note: The elements presented in this case study are fictitious and must not be interpreted as real people, locations or events.

Background

A largely desert nation, Midgaze extends over one million km². It is home to 25 million people, whose median age is 23 years old and who live mostly in the south, in a savannah and forest zone. Two million members of sedentary and nomadic peoples also live in the semi-desert and vast desert regions of northern Midgaze. The desert constitutes a natural border with neighbouring countries. Because state involvement can be arbitrary, opposition groups tend to develop in the area.

In recent years, Midgaze has been diversifying its economy by exporting cotton, sugar, precious metals and rare earths. Despite the inflow of foreign currency, GDP per capita remains at a standstill, never exceeding \$700/year. Some 80% of Midgazians continue to rely on crops and livestock on agricultural land that mainly lies to the south. The livestock farmers are generally members of nomadic groups that depend on rainfall to feed their animals. Over the past few years, climate change has led to an increase in droughts. In the most affected northern areas, the impacts of the droughts give rise to clashes between the sedentary farmers and nomadic herders.

The nation's economic development is especially felt in the south, near the capital. The populations in the desert and semi-desert northern areas feel ignored and pushed to the sidelines of life in Midgaze. Indeed, compared to the south, quality jobs are rare and unemployment is higher, especially among young people. Infrastructures are outdated or inexistent. In addition, successive droughts have depleted the land, syphoned the water table and killed livestock. Hostility against the government simmers, to the benefit of a number of armed groups that engage in abuses and abductions on roads. As the region becomes increasingly unsafe, some farmers have chosen to take up arms against the criminals.

In neighbouring countries, which are equally unstable, young people are joining radical movements that provide the livelihood activities and relative security that governments seem unable to ensure. Five years ago, Midgaze led a military campaign in the northern regions to quell an emerging coup—an intervention that did not have the unanimous backing of the population and was rather seen as a means to muzzle the opposition. From major southern cities to northern villages, young people openly criticized the operation. Since then, several isolated incidents in Midgaze bear witness to an emerging radicalization, including the arrest of young people seeking to join armed groups and a religious leader with presumed ties to the radicals.

The government of Midgaze is facing armed rebellion in the north. The populations have lost faith in the country's ability to keep them safe, revolting and erecting barricades to defend their farms and

villages. What is more, several armed groups are crossing the region, setting up roadblocks to steal goods and seek ransoms from merchants and villagers and raiding unprotected villages. Finally, a group of religious extremists has moved into the area to capitalize on the instability, attracting growing numbers of young people from Midgaze and neighbouring countries with promises of better lives.

Issue

Under national and international pressure, the government is seeking to resolve the situation. Amid growing dissatisfaction in the north and south, citizens are looking for ways to support their families. Rumours are circulating and calling into question the aging president's reputation as a wise reconciler. The countries in the sub-region are accusing the Midgazian government of being soft in the face of violent extremism. In response to the criticism, the president intends to announce a series of concrete measures to stabilize northern areas and demonstrate to all that Midgaze is and always has been an example of peace and harmony in the region. He mandates his minister of the armed forces and public security to negotiate a plan to exit the crisis with the various factions and his minister of employment and social solidarity to set out a three-year action plan to reintegrate ex-combatants into civil society.

To secure the zone and its access routes, the army sets up control posts along the main roads and plans to establish an additional post near a community forest. The project is not well received by the population, since it prevents villagers from reaching the area where they harvest tekri, a plant with known medicinal virtues from which they draw an income

To finalize its plan to support the reintegration of former combatants, the minister of employment and social solidarity calls a meeting of experts from a range of fields: education, political science, sociology, psychology and economics. Their plan hinges on several strategies: training, education on civic-mindedness and wealth creation. While the proposals garner positive feedback from the public and academia, they are disputed by northern Midgazian communities. Mediators report that citizens feel doubly prejudiced since the financial resources support only thieves and combatants. Community workers and psychologists in whom the communities trust affirm that idleness and drug consumption run rampant among young people. A number of stakeholders, including international experts, are of the opinion that the ministry's plan is not ambitious enough and should also account for economic revitalization across northern Midgaze. For the plan to be effective, it must account for the claims voiced by local communities and their need for reparation.

Tensions rise as the date of the signing of the peace agreement between the Midgazian government and armed groups approaches. Knowing that the president wants the process to be successful, the minister of employment and social solidarity assembles a panel of experts led by her senior science advisor to assess current scientific knowledge on armed conflict management, ex-combatant reintegration, the risk of trauma exacerbation and risk perception.

Photo credit: Soldier on duty in the Sahara Desert ([United States Department of State](#))



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