

# The Impact of Displaced Persons on US Army Conflict and Stability Operations

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During periods of conflict and instability in nations, there is often an associated flow of displaced populations. This flow can be confined within national boundaries, or move across them. The spatial extent of displaced population migration may be determined by physical, ethnic, or cultural factors instead of (or in addition to) political ones. In all situations, there will be active social networks among the displaced persons created and maintained by physical proximity and the limits of any available communication technology. There will also be active social networks between the migrants and people remaining in their home area. If the entire home area population has been displaced, there will remain networks between the migrants and relatives or friends in other locations. In addition to serving as a communication medium, these networks can function to transfer remittances and other economic services. They can also provide a system for planning and communicating activities designed to impede “enemy” progress in conflict areas.

For the US military, being able to track the displaced populations and understand their ties to others in the new settlement area, to relatives and friends outside both the new area and the home area, and contacts left behind at the point of diaspora origin has a positive impact on operations in both conflict and stability-enhancing environments. Data related to these networks could assist in answering questions in research areas such as:

Migration patterns in conflict areas:

- Who moves in and out?
- How long do displaced populations stay in camps?
- Is it a series of camps on their way “home” or do they stop along the way as opportunity presents itself? If so, what does this mean for tribal ties?
- What kind of movement data can soldiers collect and how can they utilize it in planning?
- How useful are academic migration studies in determining which groups of people are moving?

Migrations patterns in areas with active US military stability operations:

- What kinds of alternative data sources can be used to map or anticipate population movement?
- What is the time lag for displaced populations to recognize positive changes in the home area and begin to consider returning?

- How is this time lag affected by distance? By means of communication among the displaced population and contacts in other areas?

Post-conflict reconstruction operations:

- What percentage of the migrant population can be expected to return to the home area?
- At what rate will they return?
- How far away is “too far” for a return stream?
- If a group chooses to remain outside the home area, how do the tentative social networks developed between the migrant population and the new local population get expanded?
- Over time, does the physical distance from the home area lead to decay of the network between those in the new location and those in the old? If so, at what rate does this decay occur?
- Do these changes occur to a different extent or at a different rate if the “new” settlement location is inside or outside the home area national boundaries?

I am also interested in modifications to the cultural heritage of the displaced population as it relates to physical manifestations of that culture. To what degree is the displaced population tied to the cultural in the area they have left? If a group resettles away from the home area, to what degree does their new settlement replicate the specific architecture and spatial use patterns of their point of origin? What is the role of social networks in maintaining a culture that is spatially removed from its heartland?

I look forward to gaining insight from the other meeting participants that may assist in developing methods for answering these questions.