A STUDY GUIDE SERIES ON PEACE AND CONFLICT FOR INDEPENDENT LEARNERS AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTORS

Security Sector Reform, Political Transition, and Sustainable Peace

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Changing the Culture for Security Sector Reform

Introduction

In 2011, the Arab Spring spread through the Middle East, forcing leaders who had ruled for decades out of power. Almost three years later many of the countries, including Egypt and Tunisia, that experienced the Arab Spring continue to struggle with the transition from an autocratic government to a democracy. One of the major complaints of those who stood up to authoritarian regimes was the contention that the security forces, particularly the police, were the primary instruments of repression. A key motivation for those demanding change was a desire to be protected not by the security forces but from the security forces. Yet today, a sense of security remains elusive in most of these societies in transition. In the summer of 2013, the democratically elected president of Egypt was ousted by the military, while in Tunisia, two opposition leaders were assassinated within five months. These are just two examples which show that security remains one of the most critical questions faced by countries in transition, as does the issue of how to define the role of the security sector.

The United Nations refers to the security sector as a “broad term used to describe the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management, provision and oversight of security in a country.” The security sector includes police forces, armed services and intelligence services. When a government is in transition, reforming the security sector must be one of the top priorities in order to advance the transition from war to peace. According to many experts, democracy cannot even be established unless security sector reform is undertaken.

This Study Guide concerns itself with the ways that diverse actors have attempted to replace the violence of war and conflict with professional security systems that are accountable to representative governments. These processes are more broadly called “Security Sector Reform.” The United Nations defines security sector reform as “a process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the security sector, led by national authorities, and that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples, without discrimination and with full respect of human rights and the rule of law.”

PART I: UNDERSTANDING SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The Context for SSR

Societies moving from war to peace, or from repressive governments to representative ones, face a host of economic, social, and political challenges. Having a secure environment is,
however, a primary need because it is the basis for further development. Economic activity of almost any sort, for example, is unrealistic when chaos and looting reigns on the streets.

Creating the security that people need to go about their lives, however, can be very difficult. It is particularly challenging when rebel forces or warlords have terrorized a population, or when repressive security forces acting with impunity may have been significant sources of conflict in the first place. The state itself may have been complicit in atrocities and, as a result, citizens may have very little trust in any uniformed services—either the remnants of what remains, or forces being built from scratch. “A central problem confronting countries that have experienced ... major political violence is precisely that the state security bodies have contributed to that loss of legitimacy by their inability to protect people from violence, through their role as perpetrators of that violence, or as defenders of an unjust, repressive, and corrupt political system,” says Nicole Ball, a noted thinker on security sector reform.

In a post-conflict environment, any number of actors may be to blame for perpetrating atrocities, but it is often devastated civilians who are left to pick up the pieces. Take Sierra Leone, where survivors saw an estimated 50,000 of their loved ones die during a brutal, decade-long civil war. The reasons for the conflict were diverse, but can largely be attributed to warlords fighting in a quest for power and the profits of the diamond industry. Infrastructure such as schools and hospitals were reduced to rubble and citizens (including young people who were used as child soldiers) were traumatized. Ultimately, the situation was so dire that UN peacekeepers, and then British troops, had to step in to restore order and disarm rebel factions. Although it was not part of their original mandate, the British also stayed to help reform the security sector and to help get the country’s governing institutions functioning again.

A peace deal that either ends outright hostilities between armed groups, or that paves the way for political transitions, is generally a welcome development. However, such a deal usually only represents the beginning of a long road towards recreating a stable and functioning society. This rebuilding process can take decades and, at least initially, it usually requires substantial financial support from bilateral donors or multilateral institutions. Getting the security system up and running—consisting of professional military and police forces, as well as the institutions that manage them—is a critical component of peacebuilding.

There are, however, many questions related to this process and many of them have no easy answers. For example, is it possible, or even effective to transform once-armed thugs into a professional police or military force that respects human rights and a rule of law? How does one build fair governing institutions when government ministers themselves may have been complicit in the abuses or are engaged in corruption? Should international donors work with existing armed forces—some of whom may have committed human rights abuses—or just start from scratch? Can these security forces and institutions be changed in an environment that is characterized by significant political divisions and tensions? And, when outside donors are involved, is it their place to “reform” anything in another sovereign state?
Defining the Security Sector

Scholars and practitioners have not always agreed on what the security sector includes. Some take narrow interpretations, e.g. just those state bodies that have what is called “a monopoly on the use of force.” Others take a broader view, e.g. all of the above plus judicial institutions and civil society groups. International organizations like the United Nations have, however, attempted to marshal some consensus on what the security sector includes. This Guide draws on the report of the U.N. Secretary-General on Security Sector Reform (A/62/659) to define the security sector as:

>a broad term often used to describe the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management, provision and oversight of security in a country. It is generally accepted that the security sector includes defense, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services and institutions responsible for border management, customs and civil emergencies. Elements of the judicial sector responsible for the adjudication of cases of alleged criminal conduct and misuse of force are, in many instances, also included. Furthermore, the security sector includes actors that play a role in managing and overseeing the design and implementation of security, such as ministries, legislative bodies and civil society groups. Other non-State actors that could be considered as part of the security sector include customary or informal authorities and private security services."

Clearly, there are many different entities responsible for providing security in a country, but they fall into two broad camps. The first (operational forces) includes “boots on the ground,” or police forces that have the responsibility to establish order in society—a not insignificant task in a post-conflict situation where chaos and violence may be the order of the day. The second (institutional structures) includes those ministries or branches of government that oversee these forces. These include institutions such as the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior, and related parts of the executive branch, plus oversight committees in parliament, court systems, and groups in civil society. SSR, then, includes the whole package of the operational forces and institutional structures that are necessary to stabilize fragile states and to establish public order.

In the aftermath of a war, putting operational forces in place to assure security is often seen as an immediate need and building institutions is often seen as a longer-term task. The international community has learned, however, that the two must go together if security sector reform is going to be effective. For example, having professional and well-trained army and police units in a country emerging from a war is important, but the system may well fall apart if there is incompetence and corruption in the institutions that are managing these units.
Origins and History

As far back as the 1950s and 1960s, the United States had multimillion dollar programs to train police officers abroad. During the Cold War, it supported extensive military assistance and training programs in allied countries. And, closer to home, the U.S. has long funded initiatives to improve law enforcement, border security, and crime prevention programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. The United States is known for its ability to implement these and other “security assistance” programs and is often called upon to train military and police forces.

But, over the past couple of decades, the international community has been thinking about this topic in broader terms. The term “Security Sector Reform” itself only dates to the late 1990s and grew out the international community’s experience with trying to stabilize countries in crisis during that decade, including Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor. The end of the Cold War lessened donor support to poor countries, but it was also seen as a time to rethink how foreign assistance should be provided. Many were critical that—under an umbrella of the superpower rivalry between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.—such assistance had been used to prop up corrupt dictators, like Mobutu Sese Seko in the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and to support security services in the developing world that had become bloated, corrupt, and inefficient.

Many in the development community were hopeful of moving resources away from an overemphasis on military support and into social and economic activities, which, they noted, were necessary for longer-term human security (see glossary). But, they were also aware that a secure environment was needed for sustainable development to flourish. Farmers who are taking their goods to market, women setting up new microcredit businesses, and students making their way to school all need to be assured that they can get to their destinations safely and without being harassed.

Of course, where development requires security, security also requires development. Any country’s security is less likely, notes a U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) paper on this topic, when there is “social injustice, absence of a rule of law, a disproportionate distribution of wealth, political exclusion of groups, economic hardship, [and] ethnic violence. ... Such failures of development give rise to public grievances that may be exploited by militias, terrorist groups, and other internal combatants who seek to justify their use of violence for political gain.”

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Guidelines for Effective SSR as developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):

- Support host nation ownership;
- Incorporate principles of good governance and respect for human rights;
- Balance operational support with institutional reform;
- Link security and justice;
- Foster transparency; and
- Do no harm.
Discussions about the relationship between security and development—that often brought development professionals into the same room with military leaders for the first time—led to the birth of the SSR concept. Civil society groups, too, began to weigh in on the importance of linking security, development, and democratic governance. Mark Sedra, a key thinker on SSR, claims that this concept is now a “mainstay in state-building policy and practice, widely perceived as a precondition for stability and sustainable development in countries recovering from conflict or making transitions from authoritarianism, fragility or collapse.”

At present, the concept of SSR is still evolving and has faced a lot of growing pains. There is a notable lack of international coordination for implementing SSR programs, and policymakers still do not always work from common definitions. And, there are differences in focus. Some say it is most important to focus on building up military and police forces to combat terrorism (e.g. the Taliban) and other violence, although others would focus on improving governance and oversight. Whatever the emphasis, it is clear that you need to do both, a daunting task. For this and other reasons, there are more failures than successes to cite in how SSR has been implemented in different countries. Additionally, national elites often want to hold on to privileges they have enjoyed and, thus, may have little interest in reform. As a very political process, SSR initiatives often upset a delicate power balance.

SSR is also sometimes criticized as a process that is too externally-driven rather than locally owned. An international presence is often needed at the outset to bring stability to countries, and to play training and advisory roles thereafter. But, only a country’s citizens can determine the path that best fits their own national and local context. As the above-noted UN report adds: “Successful reform of the security sector needs political commitment, basic consensus and coordination among national actors. ... Security sector reform can succeed only if it is a nationally led and inclusive process in which national and local authorities, parliaments and civil society, including traditional leaders, women’s groups and others are actively engaged.” This means that the general population, including civil society, government leaders and institutions, and the media need to be part of SSR, from the onset, in order to ensure success. Everyone must feel that they are part of the SSR process.

Unpacking Acronyms:
SSR, DDR, and ROL

As you consider how to prepare your essay, it’s just as important to know the different tools of SSR or related concepts.

SSR and DDR: Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) functions as an “important first step in ending or limiting violence by disarming large numbers of armed actors and disbanding illegal, dysfunctional, or oversized military organizations (UNOSAA).” While DDR cannot stop conflict, it does help to establish a secure environment so that SSR can take place. DDR is one of the first steps in a series of peacebuilding processes that include SSR.

SSR and ROL: According to the UN, the rule of law (ROL) “refers to a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly circulated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, ...and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards” (UN Doc. S/2004/616). Like DDR and SSR, Rule of law is a very important step in the peacebuilding process. Reestablishing ROL and justice reform is an essential aspect of peacebuilding that contributes to the success of SSR.
PART II: STABILIZING SOCIETIES, BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

Introduction

As noted above, in a post-conflict context, international military forces may be on the ground initially to restore order, get as many weapons off the streets as possible, and provide basic humanitarian services, but that presence cannot be maintained indefinitely. The preferred option is for security to be placed in the hands of a national government that is accountable to the citizens it serves. In an ideal world, conditions for SSR would include having a safe environment that is not characterized by armed violence, a reform plan that is agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders, adequate financial support for reform efforts, an appreciation for civilian oversight of security forces and institutions, strong political leadership, collaboration between the different branches of government on SSR plans, and the active participation of civil society groups.

In reality, most of these conditions do not exist. Rather, armed troops who have been engaged in years of violent struggle may be reluctant to embrace peace plans, the military may be very politicized, government ministers may be corrupt and/or resist oversight of their activities, legislatures may not be willing (or able) to properly oversee the security sector, there may be significant political tensions—or ethnic differences—between different branches of the government that prevents implementation of reforms, donor support may be minimal and uncoordinated, and civil society groups may be playing a marginal role. In other words, putting SSR programs in place is a very complex task and many experts in this field are critical of the way it has been done, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There has, however, been progress too, such as in Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Liberia, Morocco, and Georgia. And, there have been plenty of lessons learned that may lead to improvements in the future. SSR has a better chance of success, notes Robert Perito at the U.S. Institute of Peace, “in countries with established, legitimate government that have the capacity to provide guidance, take decisions, explain their actions to citizens and implement programs. SSR may have to wait until democracy takes root to have a chance for success.” Or, in thinking about it another way, SSR—if done well and with the participation of diverse stakeholders—can be a way for democracy to take root. This section examines the measures that key actors can take to establish secure environments, and the oversight that institutional bodies and the civil society sector can provide.

Establishing Secure Environments

Post-conflict environments often have a profusion of military and paramilitary troops who have been fighting in lengthy civil wars, and there is an overabundance of weapons. The conflicts in Nepal, Guatemala, and, presently, in Syria are cases in point. And, armed groups within a country rarely just include government forces. Militias, liberation armies, rebel groups, criminal gangs, and private security forces are also involved and are defined as “non-state” security
actors. The role of spoilers can also not be underestimated, or those individuals who have vested interests in keeping conflict going and working against a peace process (see glossary).

In many countries in conflict, the amount of money and resources going into the security sector is excessive and is in stark contrast to the lack of even basic public services for citizens. For example, during its extended battle with the Tamil Tigers, the armed forces in Sri Lanka grew from 95,000 soldiers at the end of the 1990s to over 200,000 by 2008. The role of spoilers can also not be underestimated, or those individuals who have vested interests in keeping conflict going and working against a peace process (see glossary).

In many countries in conflict, the amount of money and resources going into the security sector is excessive and is in stark contrast to the lack of even basic public services for citizens. For example, during its extended battle with the Tamil Tigers, the armed forces in Sri Lanka grew from 95,000 soldiers at the end of the 1990s to over 200,000 by 2008. As countries emerge from conflict, these priorities often need to be shifted so that resources are more evenly distributed, i.e. ensuring that there are adequate military and police personnel to provide security, but not neglecting broader social needs for jobs, education, health care, etc.

Achieving that balance may sound easy, but it has big political ramifications. When armed forces are significantly downsized, for example, it can affect the livelihoods of thousands of soldiers. And, former soldiers who are out of a job may be more likely to join terrorist cells or criminal gangs, which fuels new cycles of conflict and violence. For these reasons, peace agreements often include provisions to integrate former soldiers and military leaders into new armies or police forces.

When Kosovo came under the administration of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 1999, for example, about half of the soldiers from the former Kosovo Liberation Army were integrated into the new Kosovo Police Service. The peace agreement in El Salvador necessitated a 70 percent reduction of the existing armed forces. The UN oversaw the dismantling of a military-controlled national police force, plus the abolishment of other police branches like the National Guard, treasury police, and national intelligence directorate. These were, however, replaced with a new police force under civilian command—a process that took two years.

Whereas militaries are meant to defend a national territory and deter potential adversaries, police forces are meant to maintain internal security. And, to establish legitimacy, it is important to establish the latter as soon as possible once a new government comes into power. “A professional police service that has the trust and confidence of people and responds adequately to the needs of all sections of society is essential to increasing community safety and providing an enabling environment for sustainable development,” notes a handbook on SSR from the Organization for Cooperation and Development (OECD). “In many countries, however, unaccountable and abusive police forces are major perpetrators of human rights violations; they fail to protect communities from crime and violence; and they are associated with corruption.”

Training police units—whether entirely new forces or reconstituted ones—goes far beyond providing them with modern equipment and teaching them how to use it; it also entails training them in how and when to use force, basic police procedures, crisis management, civil disturbances, corrections, ethical and legal norms, gender sensitivity, and human rights. International and UN forces often play a role in conducting this training, like the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) after a coup d'etat in 2004. Although Haiti attempted
to rebuild from a devastating earthquake in 2010 and is still plagued by poor governance, MINUSTAH has led a well-regarded training program for the Haiti National Police that vetted new recruits, professionalized the force, led to greater public confidence, and included more women.\textsuperscript{xx}

As another example, human rights groups criticized police forces in Egypt in 2011 for committing “serious human rights violations” with “almost total impunity.”\textsuperscript{xxi} In such circumstances, citizens may have very low trust of police officers. Part of building this trust—and establishing justice—means dismissing those who have committed particularly egregious human rights abuses. “Background checks are needed to weed out officers and applicants who have committed crimes,” states *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building*. “This is particularly important when recruits are drawn from former combatant formations that have abused the civilian population.” The text goes on to note how tricky this vetting process can be when there is little background information or documentation available.\textsuperscript{xxii} This vetting process also needs to take place for military personnel.

**Strengthening Institutional Capacity**

SSR has often been criticized for focusing too much on developing functioning armed forces (military or police) and not enough on strengthening the institutions that are meant to control these forces. Having well-trained military and police units, in other words, may be beside the point if the institutions that have oversight of these forces are poorly managed. That was one of the main problems with SSR in Iraq, where newly-trained police officers reported to an interior ministry that was criticized as corrupt, dysfunctional, and dominated by one militia group. The U.S., which was leading the rebuilding effort in Iraq, underestimated the political ingathering, which crippled institutional reform.\textsuperscript{xxiii} “Without democratic checks and balances, security services can all too easily be used for partisan political purposes or can intervene directly in the political process,” suggests Nicole Ball. “A lack of democratic accountability can also lead to the misallocation of resources within the security sector and the hollowing out of security services.”\textsuperscript{xxiv}

In an ideal world, the military and police forces would answer to civilian bosses and, thus, be subject to some control over their activities. Democratically-elected governments would determine, among others, how the military are employed, would approve strategic plans, and be responsible for failures related to using force beyond borders.\textsuperscript{xxv} In reality though, the degree of such oversight can vary over time, governments may not have the capacity to sufficiently monitor forces (or punish abuses), and military leaders may retain significant power and control. In many countries in Africa, for example, the security sector has not, historically, been subject to civilian control.

This point raises the question of whether there can be, or should be, any one approach to security sector governance. The United Nations reiterates that “states and societies define and pursue security according to their particular contexts, histories, cultures, and needs” and that
“no single model” exits. The United Nations does, however, identify several common features that are needed for effectively governing this sector. Besides the necessity of having the personnel and resources to provide security, it stresses the importance of having “a legal and/or constitutional framework providing for the legitimate and accountable use of force in accordance with universally accepted human rights norms and standards”; and “an institutionalized system of governance and management” that allows for the direction and oversight of security. xxvi

Perhaps because of its links with democratic systems of government, SSR has sometimes been criticized for being “too Western” in its orientation. It remains the case, however, that citizens everywhere are largely pushing for security sector institutions to reflect democratic norms. “An examination of civil society activities around the world demonstrates that the principles behind SSR—transparency, accountability, inclusiveness—are widely supported and that there is an understanding that effective security services and justice institutions that are accountable to elected officials and citizens are critical to economic and social well-being,” Ball adds. xxvii

Policy and Practice

The legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government all play different roles in overseeing the security sector. And, a country’s constitution is one of the most important documents for establishing the legal basis for that oversight. While security sector governance in every country is likely to be handled differently, the international community advocates some best practices. Generally, this means a situation where the legislature passes laws that regulate the security sector, the executive branch implements security policy, and the judicial branch prosecutes those who have committed wrong-doing.

At the legislative level, a parliament not only passes laws, but may also play a key role in developing national security policy. Additionally, it typically sets the budgets for different agencies (like an interior ministry), and defines how it will track these expenditures. Other roles for a legislature may include appointing senior officials to defense agencies, approving major weapons programs, or making the decision to go to war. xxviii Additionally, as in South Africa, a legislature may appoint an independent body to investigate the functioning of defense forces. xxix

While the legislative role is critical, some point out that parliamentarians often do not have the expertise they need—in areas like military strategy, readiness, and weapons procurement—to play the oversight role they are meant to. Can they really watch over the military, for example, when they rely on information from the military in the first place? Limited terms, political affiliations, and the closed nature of the security sector may also prevent parliamentarians from making unbiased judgments. xxx And, then, there are cases like the Central African Republic where decades of one-party rule and the concentration of power in the presidency has led to the parliament to largely deferring to the executive on security matters. xxxi
At the executive level, the head of state may not have the responsibility of being the supreme commander of armed forces. He or she, however, is often responsible for implementing security policy through a variety of different ministries. In many countries, a Ministry of the Interior, sometimes referred to as the Ministry of Home Affairs, is responsible for internal security and policing functions. As a USIP paper on this topic notes, “Oversight ministries play an essential role in the functioning of police, border guards, emergency response agencies, and other internal security and law enforcement forces. Their functions include setting policy and budgets, coordinating policy and strategies across agencies, appointing personnel, inspecting and auditing operations, and managing administrative processes.”

The part these ministries play in financial management is a critical element of reform. For example, do they have procedures in place to ensure that there is good stewardship over how public funds are used? Are adequate records and budget information accessible to the public? And, have arrangements been made for external audits? These questions are particularly important to answer in environments where there is a history of corruption. Many countries in the former Soviet bloc, for example, have transitioned from communism to multiparty democracies over the past 20 years, but fraud and the misuse of funds is still a problem. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and a number of European governments have devised some public financial management (PFM) principles that provide some helpful frameworks.

Oversight of intelligence agencies is also critical. These agencies, by their nature, are meant to conduct much of their work in secret. However, as a paper that addresses this topic notes, “Intelligence services can become threats to the society and the political system they are meant to protect. Therefore, there is a great need for clear democratic and parliamentary oversight of the intelligence services in addition to executive control. Only a system of checks and balances can prevent the executive or the parliament from misusing intelligence services for their own political purposes.” Defining the limits of these agency’s powers and holding them accountable is an important function of the legislative and executive branches of government. Even in developed countries, though, oversight of intelligence agencies may be minimal and they can be granted wide, and sometimes questionable, powers—as demonstrated by criticisms over the passage of the Patriot Act in the United States in 2001.

The judicial branch is the third arm of government to consider when thinking about security sector governance. In an ideal world, it is a court system that holds people to account if they have broken the law or committed serious human rights abuses. Formal justice sector institutions can be strengthened through training of judges and lawyers, modernizing court administration, publishing laws and court decisions, and forming independent legal groups. Courts generally work closely with prisons to make sure that those who pose a danger to society are taken off the streets. In reality, though, that does not always happen because justice systems are likely to be very weak in a post-conflict environment and there may be a significant lack of trained, or honest, personnel. “Arbitrary or politicized sentencing, an incompetent or corrupt judiciary, and inhumane prison conditions may quickly undermine the benefits that
come from better policing,” indicates a RAND report. In Timor-Leste, for example, very few of those implicated in violent events in 2006 have been prosecuted.

Beyond better courts, the SSR community is paying more attention to the larger concept of justice. If average citizens do not feel they are being treated fairly or if laws are not enforced, the whole system is weakened. Because formal justice institutions can take a long time to establish, and may not always be trusted to deliver justice, some researchers are advocating that more work be done with informal justice institutions. These informal systems include traditional, local structures for resolving disputes—like commune councils in Cambodia, Gacaca courts in Rwanda, and Shura councils in Afghanistan. These vehicles can be faster, cheaper, and have far more credibility with local populations.

Transparency and Civil Society

The engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in security sector reform is also fundamental because they represent the voice of citizens—through faith-based organizations, professional associations, human rights groups, and more. Globally, there are international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that may act as partners to states on some issues, or as critics. They may also represent international donors, national elites, or grassroots constituencies. As such, they may either favor change or maintenance of the status quo. It is often the case that the security sector in countries in transition is not known for fostering constructive relationships with the general public. They may not be very open to public input and citizens themselves may have less interest in security affairs than in other social and economic priorities, but this may be changing as an increasing number of CSOs are pushing for say in how security institutions are operating. CSOs—along with the media—can publicize unethical or illegal conduct, monitor police forces, make sure that government records are publicly available and transparent, and promote dialogue between officials and the public on security policy priorities. Individual citizens and experts can also serve on independent oversight bodies, such as human rights commissions, audit and inspector general offices, ombudsmen, and public complaint commissions.

There are various examples of where CSOs have had a say on security policy. In South Africa, national consultations were held on developing a Defense White Paper, then a Defense Review and, finally, a New Defense Act in 2002. CSOs, and particularly women’s groups, had significant input into this process. The OECD notes that “the active participation of women’s constituencies [in South Africa] transformed the defense reform process, turning it into a broad-based national discussion on issues of human security and a more responsive security system.” In the late 1990s, Indonesia underwent a peaceful democratic transition that included rethinking the position of the military in society. A group of CSOs formed the Indonesian Working Group on Security Sector Reform, which was involved in policy dialogues and advocacy activities at multiple levels. And, after the 1996 peace accords in Guatemala, the War-Torn Societies Project brought civilian and military officials together in an intensive dialogue process that generated specific reform recommendations.
Despite these examples, some argue that CSOs are still on the sidelines. “Civil society, in particular indigenous civil society, has remained largely marginalized in SSR programs that tend to be state-centric, top-down and technocratic,” claims Marina Caparini in an article on this topic. Despite claims that SSR must be locally-rooted, it still “fails to engage with broad sectors of the population,” she adds.\textsuperscript{xliv}

Part III: A CHANGE OF CULTURE

Introduction

Post-conflict environments are notoriously difficult to work in because basic infrastructure and services may not even exist. Corruption, ethnic rivalries, political differences, and lack of collaboration can all bedevil the best laid plans. Because of this, SSR is a process that can take decades to implement, and international donors are rarely ready to commit the resources that are needed for the long-haul. For their part, national governments may not have the capacity to train personnel and pay them a living wage, which can lead government employees to engage in illicit activities. Or, the government may not have the will to implement reforms, or may resist them altogether—like in Timor-Leste where a former government agreed to an SSR review, but a newly-elected one had no interest.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

Some suggest that SSR is unlikely to go forward where there has not been a “change of culture” that emphasizes public service over individual enrichment. This last section of the Study Guide looks at some of these challenges and the broader ethical questions that SSR raises. Finally, it invites students to consider solutions and to offer their own recommendations of how to improve the security sector in countries in transition.

Complexities of Local Ownership

The United Nations’ focus on the imperative of involving national and local authorities in SSR was referenced in Part I of this Guide and is reiterated in almost all of the literature on this topic. Why? Because everyone recognizes that, without such national and local support, SSR will not be sustainable. As the OECD Handbook on SSR makes clear, “reforms that are not shaped and driven by local actors are unlikely to be implemented properly and sustained.”\textsuperscript{xlvii} (The term “local” actors will henceforth refer to country nationals.)

However, if education in a state is poor, or schools and universities have been devastated due to conflict, it may be impossible to find the local administrators, accountants, policy analysts, judges, lawyers, and other professionals that are required to get security institutions—or any other government agencies—up and running effectively. In such cases, international experts are often brought in to conduct training and to serve in advisory capacities, but that can be politically sensitive. Besides the concern that many developing countries have about “Western-
driven agendas,” there is often a gulf between what external donors want to achieve versus what local actors want to prioritize. As Timothy Donais says in a book on local ownership and SSR, there is often a tension between a vision of SSR that is “driven by external actors armed with a purportedly universal set of norms and institutional blueprints” and a contrasting vision that maintains that SSR “must not only be rooted in the values and traditions of the reforming state, but also produced by locals themselves.” One area where these visions may be at odds, for example, is gender norms. Universal standards related to gender equality may conflict with traditional norms that limit a woman’s role in society.

There is also the complex question of which local actors should be involved in SSR. International donors have a history of working with elites at the national level. In many cases, that makes sense as such persons are likely to be making governance decisions that affect the whole country. But, these individuals may also be pursuing their own political agendas (see below), or may not have legitimacy among the populace. To make sure that reform proposals also represent the views of grassroots constituencies, organizations like the North-South Institute advocate working with a broader cross-section of society. “Local actors such as domestic non-governmental organizations, hereditary chiefs, or church groups, can play a central role in supporting the cohesiveness of reform initiatives and ensuring that reforms reflect the changing needs of a population and the context in which it functions,” notes a briefing paper on this topic. One example of how to engage the public can be drawn from an Internal Security Sector Review conducted in Kosovo in the mid-2000s. Public opinion surveys, consultative town hall meetings across all municipalities, and television/radio programs were part of a holistic approach to SSR that involved getting public participation in the process.

Paying Attention to Politics, and Money

Security sector reform is, above all a political process, because it can upset delicate power balances and threaten vested interests. In a post-conflict setting, for example, there are many individuals who want to hold on to their positions of power and privilege and who will spoil, or actively subvert, a reform process in order to do so. The international community has wrestled for a long time with how to “neutralize” these spoilers. They may be integral to getting things done on the one hand, but their pursuit of narrow political and ethnic agendas can also derail progress. It creates a difficult dilemma when leaders who are promoting divisive agendas are put into positions of power in new governments.

But reform does not necessarily just threaten people at the top of the hierarchy. “Resisters are defending their interests (material, cultural, political), or those of their organization or group as they understand them,” notes the OECD. It goes on to cite several examples of why people may resist reform efforts, such as “an administrative judicial clerk who may fear the implementation of an automated case management system for various reasons, such as loss of income from bribery or fear of losing employment due to lack of requisite skills. Paramilitary units within the police may fear the loss of power if the government’s approach to policing changes from
maintaining public order to law enforcement. And the military may resist SSR if a key element is the transfer of responsibility for governing to civilian authorities.”

In post-conflict settings, many individuals may also have a big interest in maintaining corrupt systems, such as police who have grown accustomed to supplementing meager incomes with collecting bribes. Or, government officials who, without controls on their behavior, have funneled money to favored patronage networks. Take Afghanistan. The police are identified with demands for bribes, illegal taxes, and various kinds of human rights violations and tend to target the poorest members of society. And, power brokers in the Afghan government have largely used resources from international sources to strengthen their own networks of ethnic and sectarian groups. The security sector has been dominated by leaders of the Panjshiri-led militias of the Northern Alliance who, according to a USIP report, has used these bodies “to advance their own parochial interests.” The report adds that, “with the positions of minister of defense, minister of the interior, and the director of the National Directorate of Security initially occupied by Shura-i Nazar militia members [largely from the Tajik ethnic group], many Afghans grew to mistrust SSR, as it became increasingly politicized along communal lines.” Thus, many militias arose as a way to counter the official security forces.

There are a number of measures that can be taken to tackle corruption. Such measures can be punitive in nature (focusing on legal prosecution for crimes committed) or preventive. Some of these mechanisms might include writing anticorruption laws; establishing corruption commissions; ensuring budget transparency across government agencies; punishing those who are convicted; and involving citizens in anti-corruption campaigns. Other structural and formal procedures can be put into place to help incentivize security forces. This can be a clear structural/formal career track and mechanisms that security forces can buy into, for career advancement. No matter what measures are taken, a strong leadership from the top is important—such as that provided by heads of state in Botswana and Singapore who simply did not tolerate cultures of corruption in their governments.

Another example is Georgia where “the Saakashvili government that was swept up to power by the Rose Revolution of 2003 cracked down on corruption in the public sector after 2003 by better disclosing public officials’ assets, strengthening whistleblower protections, and improving public financial control and procurement measures. In addition, it criminalized active and passive bribery, enforced its criminal legislation and created the Anti-Corruption Interagency Council, tasked with developing and implementing a new national anti-corruption strategy.”

**Collaboration Required**

International engagement is critical to SSR. Countries in transition rarely have the financial resources or human capacity to put trained, professional police forces in place quickly or to rebuild governing institutions that may have been devastated by decades of conflict. One could assert that the United Nations has the most political credibility to take up these tasks, but the
UN is hamstrung by lack of resources and, aside from technical advice, it has largely turned this domain over to bilateral donors. Countries like the U.K., France, Australia, and the United States are among those taking up the mantle of reform efforts. In many cases, multinational coalitions may work together to help rebuild the security sector in any given location—such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Afghanistan. This is not to say, however, that their activities are coordinated or that money is endless.

Long-term support from international donors is unrealistic at best. Among other things, constituencies in donor countries may chafe at the costs of funding these operations for the long term. Take the United States as an example. At the time of this writing, and according to the National Priorities Project, the U.S. has spent nearly $1.5 trillion in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.\textsuperscript{lx} Not all of these funds have been spent for SSR, but the bulk of U.S. resources in these countries are directed to working with operational forces. Because providing security has become a very big business, a lot of the money also goes to U.S. contractors, which raises a broader moral question of whom these resources are really serving and to what degree they are nationally-owned.

Author William Byrd and others advocate for post-conflict countries to adopt a “transition strategy” so that they are not dependent on external support for financing the security sector. Ideally, as economic conditions improve and revenue comes in from taxes, national governments should be able to devise their own national security strategy and pay for their own security needs.\textsuperscript{lx} But, this process can take years, if not decades—not least because it is difficult to gain consensus from a range of stakeholders on how such a strategy should look.

If donors are working in transition countries for years at a stretch, then it is reasonable to ask how the money they are spending can be used most effectively. Rather than huge plans and big checks, a better approach for some is support for more modest, smaller initiatives that better reflect local ownership and political priorities.\textsuperscript{lx} Others are asking whether, at the end of the
day, SSR is really appropriate for all post-conflict environments, e.g.
in places where there is little political will to implement reforms? The role of donors’ vis-à-vis partner countries continues to be debated. Stakeholders at local, national, regional, and international levels all do have a part to play in SSR, but determining what recipe might work best, and coordinating activities among diverse players, continues to be an experience of trial-and-error.

CONCLUSION

It would be nice to think that with political support, committed funding, and the right procedures in place, one could end up with accountable, professional security forces. But, training and decent salaries may not be enough. The tougher goal is to transform once-armed gangs into a professional police or military force that respects human rights and a rule of law. Ultimately, that requires behavior change. As Riefqi Muna puts it succinctly in an article on the SSR program in Indonesia, “reforming the military to adjust to democratic governance means dealing with the issue of cultural or behavioral change, both individually and institutionally. In this regard, reform is not simply about changing strategic policies but requires deeper insight into how to change the culture of the military from viewing itself as the dominant defender of the regime in an authoritarian state to taking on a ‘normal’ national defense role in a democratic society.” These same concepts can also be applied to national police forces.

The United Nations highlights a number of common features, like legal frameworks, that are needed for effective and accountable security sectors (see page nine). But, the UN also cites the need for a “culture of service,” or “promoting unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality and respect for human rights among security actors and shaping the manner in which they carry out their duties.” Achieving these principles may be particularly challenging in environments where individuals, especially powerful ones, are out to achieve their own gain (or the gain of their own tribe) versus having concern for the welfare of the larger community.

At the end of the day then, SSR is about values and about relationships between people and their government. In the short term, it is a step forward if SSR can create the safe spaces that are needed for further political, social, and economic development. In the longer term though, as author Herbert Wulf points out, “the underlying structural causes of interstate—and especially intra-state—crises cannot be resolved through quick fixes. Security sector reform does not end with the cessation of the most obvious gross violence and warfare. It is a medium-range reform program, which has to be embedded in a long-term process of peacebuilding.” The challenge for the next generation, then, may be to address SSR in more holistic ways and to propose some “out of the box” solutions.

Endnotes


xiii Ibid.

xiv Interview with Bob Perito at U.S. Institute of Peace on February 19, 2013.


xxiii Interview with Querine Hanlon and Nadia Gerspacher at U.S. Institute of Peace on February 27, 2013.


Ibid. Pages 24 and 32.


Ibid. Pages 244-262.


Ibid. Page 33.
v See USIP Study Guide on Governance, Corruption, and Conflict:
vii Ibid.
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Glossary of Terms

**Accountability:** Is the notion that individuals, including public officials, should be held responsible for their actions. Political accountability means the responsibility or obligation of government officials to act in the best interests of society or face consequences. Legal accountability concerns the mechanisms by which public officials can be held liable for actions that go against established rules and principles. In cases of crimes against humanity, accountability means that individuals should be held accountable by the state in which the crimes occurred or by the international community.

**Checks and Balances:** Usually refer to the institutional mechanisms for preventing power abuse. Often, they are constitutional controls whereby the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) and other state institutions have powers over each other so that no single branch will dominate.

**Capacity Building:** Enables people, organizations, and societies to develop, strengthen, and expand their abilities to meet their goals or fulfill their mandates. Capacity is strengthened through the transfer of knowledge and skills that enhance individual and collective abilities to deliver services and carry out programs that address challenges in a sustainable way. It is a long-term and continuous process that focuses on developing human resources, organizational strength, and legal structures, and it involves all stakeholders including civil society.

**Civil-Military Relations:** A broad term for the relationship between civilians and military personnel. It typically refers to how civilian and military leaders cooperate or compete to create national security policy. For most democratic states, civil-military relations refer to “the need for the military to be subordinate to society, not a self-serving actor pursuing its own interests and objectives. With the end of the Cold War, there was a growing emphasis on the idea that the military not only had to be subject to societal control, but that this control needed to be democratically constituted.”

**Civil Society:** A collective term for nongovernmental, mostly non-profit groups that help their society at large function while working to advance their own or others’ well-being. It can include civic, educational, trade, labor, charitable, media, religious, recreational, cultural, and advocacy groups. A strong civil society, or “public space,” can protect individuals and groups against intrusive government. Some definitions do not consider the media, most of which is for profit, to be part of civil society but rather a tool that can promote civil society.

**Civilian Oversight:** Occurs when “civilian authorities have control over the military’s missions, composition, budgets and procurement policies. Military policy is defined or approved by the
civilian leadership, but the military enjoys substantial operational autonomy in determining which operations are required to achieve the policy objectives defined by the civilian authority.

**Corruption:** While there is not a universally recognized definition of corruption, many practitioners in the field use Transparency International’s definition, or “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” In international law, a person commits the criminal act of corruption when he or she “promises, offers, or gives” undue benefits to a public official “in order that the public official act or refrain from acting in the exercise of his or her official duties.” If a public official solicits, or accepts, such an undue advantage that also counts as corruption.

**Corruption Commissions:** Usually established by a central government as a neutral institution, corruption commissions investigate instances of corruption within the government typically, but, depending on mandate, within the private sector as well.

**Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):** The process of disarming soldiers or other fighters, disbanding their military units, and helping them integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods. This can be done by comprehensive programs offering skills training, job creation, housing, psychological assistance, and re-socialization.

**Democracy:** A state or community in which all members of society partake in a free and fair electoral process that determines government leadership, have access to power through their representatives, and enjoy universally recognized freedoms and liberties. Democracy building or democratization is the exercise of consolidating and strengthening institutions that help to support democratic government. These institutions may relate to rule of law initiatives, political party development, constitution building, public administration development, and civil society education programs.

**Development:** In general, development is the process of improving people’s lives. Originally, the term focused on the goal of greater economic prosperity and opportunity. But it now typically includes efforts at human development that take into account such issues as governance, education, the environment, and human rights.

**Failed State:** A state that is unable to provide its citizens basic services, often because of war, genocide, corruption, mismanagement, or criminal threats. Some analysts use the term collapsed state to refer to a situation where national structures have essentially dissolved and there is a complete vacuum of authority. Conversely, a weak or fragile state may be on the verge of failure because of instability and weak governance.

**Governance:** The exercise of authority to implement rules and policies in an effort to bring order to the social, political, economic, and judicial processes that allow a society to develop. Good governance involves a process that is informed and to a degree monitored by, and ultimately serves, all members of society, including civil society groups. Good governance also
implies a level of accountability and transparency, both of which will help to ameliorate the risk of corruption, a corrosive and destabilizing practice.

**Human Security:** According to the UN Development Program, human security means “first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development.”

**International Human Rights Law:** According to the United Nations, “International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.” These concepts were defined globally for the first time in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948.

**Justice Sector:** The World Bank notes that “a justice system comprises institutions concerned with the peaceful resolution of breaches of law or disputes over citizen rights and obligations.” Justice institutions are important in determining the extent to which citizens can be assured that power “is not exercised arbitrarily and where basic rights are respected ... including expectations that laws are effectively implemented and that justice services and processes are fair and accessible to all.” Actors in the justice sector include judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court administrators, the police, prison officials, and those working in ministries like justice, interior and defense.

**National Security:** The protection of a state’s key social, economic, and political institutions against threats arising from other independent states, non-state actors, and global threats including disease and natural disaster.

**Nongovernmental Organization (NGO):** A private, self-governing nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing objective(s) such as alleviating human suffering; promoting education, health care, economic development, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution; and encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society. Some people use the term international nongovernmental organization (INGO) to differentiate those organizations that transcend national boundaries from local NGOs. They can also be known as private voluntary organizations, civic associations, nonprofits, and charitable organizations.

**Non-State Actors:** A large category that includes nongovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, media, terrorist groups, warlords, insurgents, criminal organizations, religious groups, trade unions, universities, and diaspora communities. Most types of non-state actors would be considered part of civil society. They can also be called non-official actors.

**Non-Statutory Security Forces:** Military organizations unaffiliated with state institutions, including “private military and private security companies and community self-defense groups
that operate in traditional societies, as well as actors such as organized criminal and terrorist groups that seek to undermine or destroy the state. viii

**Ombudsman Institutions:** “An ombudsperson is independent from the executive and the judiciary and is funded by the legislative body. The office of the ombudsperson can take various forms. It can be a general-purpose or specialized agency that receives and investigates citizen complaints against bureaucratic actions, an agency charged with protecting citizen’s human rights, or an agency to protect other rights and interests (e.g. environmental protection).” ix “Two important characteristics of ombuds institutions are their independence from the bodies they are tasked to oversee and their impartiality in carrying out their duties. By receiving and investigating complaints, ombuds institutions are an important component of any system of independent oversight.” x

**Political Corruption:** The term "political corruption" is conceptualized in various ways through the recent literature on corruption. In some instances, it is used synonymously with "grand" or high-level corruption and refers to the misuse of entrusted power by political leaders. In others, it refers specifically to corruption within the political and electoral processes. In both cases, political corruption not only leads to the misallocation of resources, but it also perverts the manner in which decisions are made. xi

**Post-Conflict Recovery:** Also known as post-conflict reconstruction and war-to-peace transitions: The long-term rebuilding of a society in the aftermath of violent conflict. It includes political, socioeconomic, and physical aspects such as disarming and reintegrating combatants, resettling internally displaced persons, reforming governmental institutions, promoting trauma work and reconciliation, delivering justice, restarting the economy, and rebuilding damaged infrastructure. The term “recovery” has a broader connotation than reconstruction, which implies an emphasis on physical aspects.

**Power:** The ability to influence others to get the outcomes one wants. It may involve coercing them with threats, inducing them with payments, or co-opting them. Hard power refers to the use of military and economic means to influence the behavior of others through coercion or inducements. Soft power refers to the ability to attract or co-opt others through one’s values, policies, and performance to “want what you want,” in Joseph Nye’s words. The term smart power encompasses both hard and soft power, emphasizing the need to employ whatever tools—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—are appropriate for the situation.

**Power Sharing:** A system of governance in which all major segments of society are provided a permanent share of power. Traditionally, that has meant coalition governments; protection of minority rights; decentralization of power; and decision-making by consensus. Because of its emphasis on group rights and consensus, power sharing can lead to deadlock, so some analysts argue that it should be seen as a short-term measure that helps prepare a society for the transition to multiethnic parties.
**Private Military Forces (Also Private Military Companies):** “Private military companies (PMCs) are businesses that offer specialized services related to war and conflict, including combat operations, strategic planning, intelligence collection, operational and logistical support, training, procurement and maintenance... PMCs vary enormously in size, ranging from small consulting firms to huge transnational corporations. Although PMCs first appeared during World War II, geopolitical changes and the restructuring of many countries’ armed forces following the end of the Cold War have spurred rapid growth in the private military industry. Today more than 150 companies offer their services in over 50 countries.”

**Public Official:** As defined in international law, a public official is a “person who holds a legislative, executive, administrative, or judicial office” (appointed or elected). It also includes a person who “performs a public function” or provides a public service.

**Rule of Law:** A principle of governance in which all persons and institutions, public and private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly announced, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and consistent with international human rights norms and standards. The drafting of laws must be transparent, and they must be applied fairly and without arbitrariness. In addition, all persons must have access to justice—the ability to seek and obtain a remedy through informal or formal institutions of justice.

**Security Assistance:** The U.S. Department of Defense defines this as providing to another nation “defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services, by grant, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives.”

**Security Sector:** According to the United Nations, the security sector describes the “structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management, provision and oversight of security in a country. It is generally accepted that the security sector includes defense, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services and institutions responsible for border management, customs and civil emergencies. Elements of the judicial sector responsible for the adjudication of cases of alleged criminal conduct and misuse of force are, in many instances, also included. Furthermore, the security sector includes actors that play a role in managing and overseeing the design and implementation of security, such as ministries, legislative bodies and civil society groups. Other non-State actors that could be considered as part of the security sector include customary or informal authorities and private security services.”

**Security Sector Reform (SSR):** According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), SSR entails “transforming the security system, which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions—working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance and thus contributing to a well-functioning security framework.”

**Spoilers:** People who seek to block or sabotage a plan of reform and its implementation because it threatens their power and interests.
**Systemic Corruption:** Occurs when corruption is an integrated and essential aspect of the economic, social and political system. Systemic corruption is not a special category of corrupt practice, but rather a situation in which the major institutions and processes of the state are routinely dominated and used by corrupt individuals and groups, and in which most people have no alternatives to dealing with corrupt officials. xvii

**Transitional Justice:** Efforts to address a legacy of large-scale human rights abuses that cannot be fully addressed by existing judicial and non-judicial structures. Government responses have included criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations, gender justice, security system reform, memorialization, and other reconciliation efforts.

**Transparency:** Visibility or accessibility of information regarding government decision-making and financial practices, such that stakeholders not only have access to the decision-making process but also the ability to influence it. Transparency is considered an essential element of accountable governance, leading to improved resource allocation, enhanced efficiency, and better prospects for economic growth in general.

**Vetting (of soldiers):** “Vetting is a process by which individuals are screened for access to rights or duties. Vetting in one form or another is carried out for practically all positions in government and business. For instance, whenever a job applicant is asked about their criminal background, this constitutes a form of vetting. In the security sector, vetting tends to be much more rigorous and extensive. When properly conducted, it constitutes a vital part of the counterintelligence process... Approval should be obtained from the subject prior to the investigation. The only possible exceptions are military conscripts, whose consent may not be required for very limited vetting measures.” xviii

**Note:** Most of the terms above are drawn from the USIP Glossary at the following link: [http://glossary.usip.org/resources](http://glossary.usip.org/resources) Additional sources are cited in the endnotes.

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**Endnotes**

1 “DCAF Backgrounder: Democratic Control of Armed Forces” DCAF May, 2008. [http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/DCAF-Backgrounders](http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/DCAF-Backgrounders)

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