

Helpdesk Research Report

The role of security organisations in security sector reform: key themes

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Question

What are the themes of current literature on Security System (or Sector) Reform? What are the major areas of contention and debate, and of significant consensus, particularly with relevance to the role of donor and host country state security organisations?

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1. Overview

There is a relatively large amount of literature that examines the role of host country state security organisations in security sector reform (SSR). However, there is much less information on the role of donor country security organisations. There is coverage on the role of donors more generally, which possibly reflects how donors approach programming, with security organisations from the donor country supporting the activities and objectives of multilateral and bilateral missions and programmes. Debates in the more recent academic literature (especially in the last three to four years) tend to focus on the political nature of SSR rather than the technical aspects of reforms. These debates apply to SSR as an overarching concept, rather than looking at the particular roles of individual partner or donor country state security institutions.

This rapid review focuses on recent academic and policy-orientated literature. The search strategy focused on literature from the previous five years, but exceptions were made for older seminal or widely-referenced publications. All of the literature examined in this review is qualitative, with a mix of single and multi-country studies, and normative guidance notes.

There is consensus that **donor approaches to SSR have failed** to achieve the ambitious goals and objectives espoused in policy documents. Debates in recent literature centre on the reasons for this '**policy-practice gap**' (Sedra, 2010; Bakrania, 2014b). Key themes include:

- There is agreement in the literature that donor assistance has generally taken an **apolitical and technical approach** (OECD-DAC, 2007b; Stabilisation Unit, 2014).
- There is consensus that **local ownership** is a key political challenge for donors, but a lack of clarity on how donors can support true local ownership (Donais, 2009; Mobekk, 2011).
- There is debate on **how SSR should evolve** to close the policy-practice gap. There are differences of opinion over the role of the state: is the state capable of providing security alone, or can hybrid arrangements involving non-state actors deliver more effectively (Sedra, 2010)?

The literature questions whether **holistic approaches to SSR** are feasible. Key themes include:

- There is consensus the programmes are more effective when donors take a **long-term gradual, pragmatic and problem solving approach** to programming (SU, 2014).
- The literature suggests that **links should be established where possible**, rather than addressing all sectors at once. Evidence suggests that tactical partnerships, rather than strategic partnerships, have more impact (SU, 2014).
- Experience shows that **international assistance is less effective where communication between donors is lacking**, and where they have diverging views of the role and reform of different security actors (Born, 2009).

The **oversight and governance** of security are recognised as fundamental issues for SSR. Key themes include:

- For the host country, **the executive, legislature, judiciary and civil society all have key roles to play** in ensuring democratic oversight and governance of security institutions (Born et al., 2011).
- **Donors have both a political and technical role** to play in supporting oversight and governance (UN, 2012).
- The **extent to which democratic oversight and governance can take root in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts is questioned** (Born et al., 2011). Evidence suggests that oversight structures are generally weak or marginalised in such contexts (Hendrickson, 2008).
- Whether the **liberal oversight structures recommended in policy documents are appropriate** for fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts is an area of debate (Scheye, 2009).

The **military** is recognised as the most powerful security institution, which can influence reform in other areas (OECD-DAC, 2007a). Key themes include:

- **The military's role in the political process:** The military can be involved in technical aspects of policy-making and implementation, but not in fundamental decisions about how a country is run (Chuter, 2011).

- **The military's role in civilian law enforcement:** this is a controversial and problematic role which entails risks. It can lead to politicisation and can threaten civilian oversight of the military (Born et al., 2011).
- Experience suggests that donor country **coordinated approaches to defence reform are more effective**. In Sierra Leone, the UK FCO, Ministry of Defence and DFID were all stakeholders in military assistance (Le Grys, 2010).

The **police** are the key security and justice institution that citizens interact with and the main point of entry into the criminal justice system (SU, 2014). Key themes include:

- **The multi-layered nature of policing:** a range of actors provide policing in post-conflict and fragile contexts. They operate at the national state to local village levels, and there are often informal and formal relationships between all of these actors (Baker, 2013).
- **The utility of community-policing:** Evidence as to whether such approaches are effective is contested, and there is disagreement on its potential to reduce crime and the fear of crime (Denney & Domingo, 2013).
- **The militarisation of policing** and the use of force by police is recognised as a sensitive issue for SSR (Heiduck, 2011; Lutterbeck, 2013).

The literature emphasises the unique nature of **intelligence agencies**, which are distinguished by the special powers they possess to collect information. Key themes include:

- **Intelligence oversight and transparency:** In developing and transitional countries, the controls and oversight mechanisms to minimise illegal conduct and abuse of power are difficult to achieve due to the high level of secrecy of intelligence services (Nathan, 2012).
- **The role of intelligence in policy formulation and coordination:** experience from Sierra Leone shows that intelligence structures can play a fundamental and lead role in SSR policy and coordination (Conteh, 2010).

2. The policy-practice gap

There is consensus in the literature that donor approaches to SSR have so far failed to achieve the ambitious goals and objectives espoused in policy documents such as the OECD-DAC's *Handbook for Security System Reform* (Bakrania, 2014a; 2014b). Debates in recent literature centre on the reasons for what Sedra (2010) terms the 'policy-practice gap'. These debates apply to SSR as an over-arching concept, and on donor approaches more generally, rather than looking at the particular roles of partner or donor country state security institutions.

The political nature of SSR

In a literature review on the political nature of security (and justice), Bakrania (2014b) notes how security (and justice) are central to state-society relations and deeply political and contested amongst a range of security actors operating at different levels. Current SSR policy documents emphasise the political nature of SSR (OECD-DAC, 2007a; UN, 2012).

There is agreement in the literature that donor assistance has generally taken an apolitical and technical approach. The OECD-DAC (2007b) states that SSR programmes have largely been directed towards

reforming state institutions based on idealised templates. The SU (2014) notes how these approaches have proved especially unrealistic in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Local ownership

There is consensus that local ownership is a key challenge for donors, but some debate on how donors can support true local ownership.

Hansen and Wiharta (2007) recognise that there are dilemmas for donors choosing local counterparts; those in power may not be representative, or they may not be supportive of reforms, or may act as spoilers. Authors distinguish between different types of local ownership. Mobekk (2011) differentiates between 'minimalist' (restricted to national state institutions), and 'maximalist' (including a broader participation of actors including political elites, security leadership, non-state providers, civil society and other non-organised and non-represented people).

Donais (2009) argues that SSR programming has often focused on national governments and institutions as the sole local owners. He concedes that it is difficult to realise a maximalist approach, especially when partner countries are socially fragmented and non-state expertise in security issues is limited. He concludes that these challenges have led to an understanding of local ownership where local owners are expected to 'take ownership over' externally driven processes (p. 122).

The issue of reconciling local realities with the normative basis of SSR is also a challenge cited in the academic literature. Jackson (2011) argues that national or local actors may not buy into values of democracy, good governance, gender equality and human rights norms. Therefore, the political will for reform may be lacking at local or national levels.

The future of SSR

Given the widely recognised lack of success in SSR, current and on-going academic debates focus on how SSR can evolve to meet key challenges and close the policy-practice gap.

Sedra (2010) summarises these debates. He notes that there is agreement on the need for a change to the model, but the nature of the change remains disputed. A key point of contention centres on whether the state alone is capable of providing security, or whether hybrid arrangements can deliver more effectively. Some believe that SSR's preoccupation with a state-centric approach based upon Western templates is unrealistic. Others believe that the problem lies with donors' inability to follow the model's Western and state-centric principles - due to the lack of donors' institutional and human capacities (p. 26).

3. Holistic approaches to security sector reform

The literature recognises the benefits of linking and co-ordinating efforts in different security sub-sectors, but argues that approaches should be politically realistic, gradual and targeted towards specific problems.

The OECD-DAC (2007a) argues that a holistic (a term used interchangeably with 'comprehensive' and 'system-wide') approach is SSR's over-riding objective. A holistic approach means that programmes focused on one sub-sector (e.g. defence reform) are informed by a broader assessment of all security institutions.

Arguments for gradual and politically realistic approaches

The OECD-DAC (2007a) also concedes that a holistic approach is initially unrealistic in many contexts given the political sensitivity of security issues. Programmes are more effective when donors take a long-term gradual, pragmatic and problem-solving approach to programming. Whilst a holistic approach is seen as an eventual goal, the OECD-DAC propose a range of options for working towards that goal (p. 17):

- 'A problem-solving approach, focusing on one security or justice problem (such as violent crime, prison overcrowding or court backlogs) as an entry point for system-wide engagement.
- An institutional approach, supporting existing reform initiatives at an institutional level (such as a government-initiated review of the prison or police service). Linkages to other institutions can then develop over time.
- A phased approach to post-conflict situations focusing on understanding and, where possible, integrating stabilisation — “securing the peace” — and development-oriented objectives.'

More recent literature reinforces the argument for gradual, pragmatic and problem solving approaches to SSR. Schnabel (2009) notes how there can be a mismatch between donor-driven expectations of a holistic approach and local realities, which means that recipient governments may not have the political will to implement ambitious and long-term plans. In Cambodia, for example, a lack of local political support for a sector-wide reform strategy led to narrower focus in select areas where the political space for work existed (AusAID, 2012). For the SU (2014), a gradual and realistic approach means setting longer-term strategic objectives but designing short-term measures to enable gradual progress within typically short-term project cycles.

Identifying essential partnerships

The literature suggests that linkages should be established where possible, rather than addressing all sectors at once. The SU (2014, p. 31) state that: 'The key is identifying which are the essential partnerships to address the specific safety and security problems the programme is targeting. Developing these linkages should be an integral part of assistance programmes.'

The SU (2014, 42) also point towards evidence in the South Pacific and Malawi suggesting that tactical partnerships, rather than strategic partnerships, have more impact. In these cases, strategic sector-wide coordination committees in partner governments have largely failed. Bringing together security and justice organisations at the tactical level, such as Court User Committees, Community Policing Forums, and National Juvenile Justice Forums, have been more effective.

International co-ordination

International co-ordination is also important, as other donors may be supporting programmes in other sub-sectors that could be mutually reinforcing (SU, 2014). Born (2009) notes how experiences from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Timor-Leste show that international assistance is less effective where communication between donors is lacking, and where they have diverging views of the role and reform of security actors (Born, 2009).

4. Oversight and governance of security

Democratic governance and oversight of security is a key objective of SSR. The literature describes the roles that national security sector institutions and donors can play in working towards this objective.

National institutions

In a guide on oversight for parliamentarians, Born et al. (2011, p. 64) describe the roles of the main branches of the state:

- **The executive** exercises direct control and determines the budget, the general guidelines and the priority activities. It ensures oversight of security forces in the execution of their daily tasks. Through this oversight, the executive ensures that security forces comply with laws in exercising their responsibilities.
- **The legislature** exercises legislative powers and parliamentary oversight by passing laws that define and regulate the security services, and by adopting budgets. This may include establishing a parliamentary ombudsman, or permanent/ad hoc committees to investigate complaints made by the public. The legislature also has the constitutional right and duty to call members of the executive before its committees and to question them, including high-ranking officers.
- **The judiciary** provides a key link between the justice and security sectors. It prosecutes malpractice when necessary. It monitors the actions of the executive branch to ensure that they conform to the constitution and the laws of the country. The role of the judiciary is crucial in ensuring that the individual rights of citizens are upheld.
- **Civil society**, including academic institutions, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can influence security sector decisions and policies. They can also participate in public debates on the security sector.

Donor roles in supporting oversight and governance

UN (2012, pp. 94-107) guidance suggests several key aims for donors to support democratic governance and oversight. These are both political and technical in nature and involve strategic and operational interventions. Key aims identified include:

- **Strengthening constitutional and legal frameworks:** including securing political commitment to the strengthening of constitutional and legal frameworks in line with international legal obligations; and supporting an inclusive approach to developing these frameworks.
- **Strengthening civil society, including women's groups:** including gearing support towards the inclusion of civil society (including marginalised and women's groups) in SSR dialogues. This may entail confidence-building measures between civil society and the security institutions, as well as supporting the capacity of CSOs to undertake outreach and awareness.
- **Strengthening independent oversight institutions:** including supporting the commitment to adopt legal frameworks that provide independent oversight institutions and the provision of resources to these bodies.
- **Strengthening institutional governance systems:** through supporting a security architecture based on clearly legislated roles and responsibilities. This may entail support to institutional mechanisms that facilitate inter-institutional cooperation.

- **Strengthening management and internal oversight:** including support for internal accountability mechanisms, clear reporting lines and professional conduct. This could encompass human and financial resource management, and management capacity for effective policy implementation.

The challenges of implementing oversight

The literature questions the extent to which democratic oversight and governance can take root in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.

Born et al. (2011) state that the **challenges are vast where the state lacks authority or legitimacy**. In such cases, governments may exercise limited control over assets and the development of security policy has to be negotiated with other actors who may control territory or natural resources.

Evidence from comparative research in Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda cited in Hendrickson (2008) illustrates the political nature of security decision-making in such contexts, suggesting that **oversight structures may be weak or marginalised**. The study finds that:

- Control of security decision-making is elitist, personalised and secretive.
- Nepotism, patronage and corruption can exclude segments of the population.
- Recurrent crises hinder the channels through which citizens can influence policy.

Locally-relevant oversight

Another area of debate concerns whether the **liberal oversight structures recommended in policy documents are appropriate for fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts**. Scheye (2009) argues that partner countries may not be inclined and/or may not have the capacity to strengthen civilian oversight. Instead, there may be 'shorter' routes to accountability through ensuring that local provision corresponds to local needs, which can compliment other institutional accountability initiatives.

5. Defence

Military

The military is the most powerful security institution and can influence reform in other areas (OECD-DAC, 2007a). Their significance means that an effective, efficient, accountable and affordable defence sector is essential objective for SSR, as well as for sustainable peace and development (UN, 2011).

The military's role in the political process

In a volume on defence sector governance, Chuter (2011, p. 47) argues that the relationship between the military and the political process is a fundamental issue for SSR. In transitional contexts, this relationship can be complex and varies according to the nature of the transition itself. The military may previously have had the decisive voice in security policy, it may have dominated the entire political process, or it may have been aligned to certain political, ethnic or religious groups no longer in power.

For Chuter (2011, pp. 47-48) a key objective should be for the military to play a correct and useful role in the political process: they can be involved in technical aspects of policy-making and implementation, but not involved in the fundamental decisions about how a country is run.

The military's role in civilian law enforcement

Born et al. (2011, p. 158) state that the military supports civilian law enforcement in most countries. This can occur when the state and society are subject to threats beyond the ability of law enforcement authorities to deal with. However, this is a controversial and problematic role and entails risks. It can lead to politicisation and therefore could threaten civilian oversight of the military. The military is trained for combat and not for policing tasks, such as dealing with large crowds or civilians. Furthermore, a blurred division of responsibilities can increase rivalry between the police and military. As such, this function needs to be carefully considered and a legal framework established to ensure and protect citizen rights.

Ministry of defence

Burcur-Marcu (2009, pp. 24-25) states that the Ministry of Defence is the central public authority responsible for the development of the armed forces. It has a number of characteristics with regard to SSR:

- It organises, coordinates and conducts national defence activities.
- It has a role in policy formulation and implementation, assessing the security environment, identifying risks and threats, and contributing to drafting the policy and implementation guidance for its implementation.
- It has a legislative role – it may propose legislation and regulations and is involved in drafting budgetary proposals.

Defence reform and the role of donor institutions

Rather than individual roles for donor security institutions in defence reform, past experience suggests that coordinated approaches are more appropriate. The UK experience of supporting armed forces reform in Sierra Leone is indicative.

Le Grys (2010), in an account of British military involvement in Sierra Leone, describes how the UK-led International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) had the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and DFID as stakeholders. IMATT's main roles were to support armed forces training, and to support reviews and plans towards the creation of an effective, accountable and correctly sized military. IMATT personnel were integrated into the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). They initially held command and executive posts, providing military advice to the Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence and the government, which reduced to a handful of specialist staff posts over time.

The policy literature, such as UN (2011), emphasises that donors have both a technical and political role to play in supporting defence reform. Again, the Sierra Leone example is illustrative. Jackson (personal communication, 24th July, 2014) states that IMATT had come to an end in April 2013, but was reinvented as the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT), because it was recognised that it played an important role in helping keep the military out of politics.

6. Policing

The SU (2014, p. 10) states that the police are the key security and justice institution that citizens interact with, the main point of entry into the criminal justice system, and the state agency primarily responsible for upholding the rule of law, protecting and promoting human rights, and maintaining public order.

Police reform and the role of donor institutions

In a background paper on police reform, DCAF (2009, p. 1) state that the goal of police reform is 'humane, accountable, responsive and capable policing'. It aims at a fundamental change from a police 'force' to a 'service', with an orientating of policing goals towards the community and an emphasis on democratisation.

The SU (2014) describes how UK international policing support involves large numbers of serving and retired policemen, playing roles on regionally and internationally mandated missions. In Libya for example, UK-led policing assistance has focused on improving police capacity to protect those involved in the transition process; improving the institutional capacity of the police and Ministry of Interior to develop policy, strategies and plans; and increasing the capability to provide more effective, responsive and accountable services.

The multi-layered nature of policing

There is consensus that a range of actors provide policing services, especially in post-conflict and fragile contexts. Therefore a key aspect of improving policing is to engage with the range of multiple actors. Baker (2013) describes how policing in Ethiopia is provided by the state (including federal and regional level police), and by part-time militias at the village level. Traditional leaders, courts and peace committees provide justice services at a local level. There are informal and formal relationships between all of these actors as part of a 'hybrid policing model'.

Community policing

The literature questions the utility of 'community-policing' approaches. Evidence as to whether such approaches are effective is contested. In a review of the evidence, Denny and Domingo (2013) argue that whilst community policing can encourage a focus on the community and their needs and increase trust in the police, it is not a panacea. There is much disagreement on its potential to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

The militarisation of policing

The militarisation of the police and the use of force by police are recognised in the literature as a sensitive issue for SSR. According to the SU (2014, p.18), the police 'should use physical force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or have no realistic chance of achieving the intended result'. Recent experience in Afghanistan highlights how citizens often mistrust the police because of their role during and after conflicts, particularly with regard to the misuse of physical force and firearms.

Lutterbeck (2013) states that a paramilitary or gendarmerie force is a police force either with military status and answerable to the ministry of defence, or a police organisation that has military characteristics, such as a more centralised structure, the use of heavy weaponry, and stronger suppression capabilities. They are commonly involved in border control, counter-terrorism, fighting organised crime, and dealing with

serious internal disturbances. Lutterbeck (2013) also describes how the rationale for gendarmerie-type forces is contested. Critics see them as representing the militarisation of internal security, and incompatible with democratic principles. Advocates argue that a force that combines both police and military characteristics is a significant asset given that contemporary security challenges blur the line between domestic and international.

Heiduck (2011), in a review of EU and US approaches to police reform in Afghanistan argues that efforts there have largely produced paramilitary forces to support counter-insurgency rather than civilian police officers. He states that whilst the EU's policy is based on democratic policing standards, in practice EU member-states have contributed to US-led militarised reform programmes.

7. Intelligence

The literature emphasises the unique nature of intelligence services amongst security agencies. Born and Mesevage (2012) state that intelligence services are distinguished by the special powers they possess to collect information, including powers to intercept communications, to conduct covert surveillance, and to make use of secret informants.

Intelligence oversight and transparency

A key issue for intelligence with respect to SSR is oversight and transparency. Nathan (2012) argues that intelligence services can undermine democratic processes and the security of citizens if they abuse their unique powers. He states that 'they can violate human rights in contravention of the law, interfere in lawful political activities, and favour or prejudice a political party or leader. They can intimidate the opponents of government, create a climate of fear, and fabricate or manipulate intelligence in order to influence government decision making and public opinion' (p. 49).

A characteristic of intelligence in many developing and transitional countries is an excessive culture of secrecy. Africa and Kwadjo (2009) states that this is the norm among African intelligence services. This makes it difficult for citizens to participate in the processes of debating security threats and how to address those threats, of holding the intelligence services to account, and assessing their performance. In many cases, intelligence is associated with regime security rather than human security.

Nathan (2012) contends that the rules, controls, and oversight mechanisms to minimise the potential for illegal conduct and abuse of power are difficult to achieve due to the high level of secrecy of intelligence services. This impedes monitoring and review by oversight bodies and inhibits public scrutiny. Furthermore, power is more likely to be abused, and human rights are more likely to be violated, in conditions of secrecy than in open political environments. For Nathan, secrecy should be the exception, not the norm. Openness is a necessary condition of democratic governance and protection of human rights. Therefore, 'secrecy should be regarded as an exception that in every case demands a convincing justification. Whereas the emphasis of intelligence communities throughout the world is on secrecy with some exceptions, in democratic societies the emphasis ought to be on openness with some exceptions' (p. 52).

The role of intelligence agencies in policy formulation and coordination

Experience with intelligence reform in Sierra Leone highlights that intelligence agencies can play a key role in SSR policy formulation and coordination. Conteh (2010) gives an account of the role of the Office of National Security (ONS), which serves as the secretariat of the National Security Council (NSC) and

coordinates security sector activities. It leads in the formation of national security policy, facilitates cooperation and oversight across the security sector and has mechanisms for civil society input at the provincial and district levels. As part of UK-supported SSR efforts, the ONS conducted a security sector review in 2005, which provided the basis for future policy direction and implementation.

Donor roles in intelligence reform

The Sierra Leone experience is an example of how donors can approach intelligence reform in both a political and technical manner. The 'Intelligence and Security Service' (ISS) element of the Sierra Leone Security Sector Programme (SILSEP) programme was supported by a visiting UK intelligence adviser with a capacity-building background and other UK intelligence advisers.

Ashington-Picket (2010), describes how the 'Intelligence and Security Service' (ISS) element of the Sierra Leone Security Sector Programme (SILSEP) focused on depersonalisation, depoliticisation, the separation of intelligence collection operations from intelligence assessment and policy advice, the involvement of civil society, and security sector coordination. More specifically:

- Institutional reform efforts included the restructuring of existing collecting agencies was to achieve a workable level of intelligence production with reliable and actionable intelligence.
- Capacity building included efforts to ensure the right staff were recruited at the executive and staff levels, and that these were carefully selected and well-trained officers.
- Work on policies and procedures included establishing legal parameters including organisational roles responsibilities, authority, and resources.

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Key websites

- The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces – <http://www.dcaf.ch/>
- Developmental Leadership Program – <http://www.dlprog.org/>
- GSDRC – <http://www.gsdrc.org/>
- OECD-DAC – Security and Justice section
<http://www.oecd.org/development/incaf/securityandjustice.htm>
- Security Sector Reform Resource Centre – <http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org/>

- Stabilisation Unit – Stabilisation and Conflict Lessons Resource – <http://www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/stabilisation-and-conflict-resources.html>
- UN – SSR pages – <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/security.shtml>
- World Bank – Justice for the Poor – <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTLAWJUSTICE/EXTJUSFORPOOR/0,,me nuPK:3282947~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:3282787,00.html>

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