

Response to Herbert Wulf's paper

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1. Introduction

In his concise yet comprehensive overview, Herbert Wulf has set out the main parameters of the emerging paradigm of security sector reform, including some of its advantages and limitations. This response piece will expand on certain of his points and examine some issues that are generally overlooked in the literature. I write from the perspective of someone who has worked in an organisation that for almost the past 3 years has made the study and facilitation of security sector reform its primary mission, with particular emphasis on defence and military reform in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. My insights are based on our efforts to collect information and documentation on the subject, help develop the concept in analytical terms, and help to operationalise and apply security sector reform in transition and developing countries. The statements in this piece nevertheless reflect my personal views and do not necessarily reflect those of the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

2. Observations

2.1 SSR as a holistic concept

The concept of SSR is slowly spreading in acceptance and its agenda is being endorsed by a growing number of donors for implementation in various countries. However, SSR as it aspires to be – holistically conceptualised, planned and implemented – has so far rarely been undertaken or achieved in practice. In the past, reform of security institutions has tended to be undertaken in piecemeal fashion, often in isolation from other related parts of the security sector, and often for reasons other than establishing good governance of security institutions. Also, as discussed by Wulf, there is visible today a degree of creative re-labelling, with, for example, defence modernisation or intelligence sharing being repackaged under the category of SSR. Security sector reform is a much broader concept that deals with the various dimensions and levels of analysis, including not only state security from external military threats, but also security of individuals and communities from crime, persecution, instability, corruption and injustice. While SSR is a concept whose appeal is spreading, there is a danger that, used indiscriminately and as a catch-all phrase for activities that do not, on their own, constitute security sector reform, it will lose value as a prescriptive approach to guide policy.

The fact remains that although efforts are being made to bridge the gap, we continue to lack the inter-disciplinary perspectives and understanding to fully implement SSR. The SSR community is looking to integrate knowledge about (admittedly partial) reform processes in various categories of countries – developing, post-conflict and developed – to further their understanding of what individual components of SSR entail. Efforts have gone into developing assessment frameworks aimed at helping a government and donors supporting SSR determine how best to go

about strengthening democratic governance of a country's security sector.¹ The gradual accretion of knowledge from these experiences would constitute a rich source of lessons learned for the further development of the concept and methodology of SSR, but it should be borne in mind that these are but building blocks of SSR, and not SSR as a whole. There are many security-related aspects in the fields of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, governance and democratisation, whose experiences and insights should be incorporated into thinking on security sector reform. Unfortunately, the fragmentation of the policy and academic communities across these various approaches and schools remains an obstacle to 'joined-up' thinking that is essential for effective institutional reform. Furthermore, competition for resources and influence over policy and academic agendas among governmental and non-governmental actors in these fields acts as a further impediment to co-operation.

There is also a latent disagreement within the security sector reform community between those who remain focused on its close ties to the developmental agenda and, as a result, on the developing, transition and post-conflict group of states, and those who maintain that it should have a broader application to include mature democracies. I believe that the more inclusive view of SSR does not dilute the concept but rather captures the notion that security is a perennial concern for people, and its effective and accountable provision is a fundamental basis of the legitimacy of the modern democratic state. One of the primary functions of the state is to provide security and protection to its people, and in democratic states that includes the protection of basic human rights and freedoms. This requirement is of continual concern in both developed and developing contexts. As Wulf points out, SSR must deal both with effectiveness in the provision of security (capacity, efficiency) and the effectiveness of oversight of the security sector (accountability, transparency, control, responsiveness). One of the two requirements is sometimes ignored, for example in discourses stressing the need above all for effective security measures, as was the case during the Cold War and superpower efforts to build up the military capacities or internal security apparatuses of allies, or in prevailing approaches in the current so-called war on terrorism. In both instances, human rights concerns are subordinated to the requirements of improving military or internal security capacities. Similarly, countries in transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones frequently experience sharp increases in crime rates, spurring calls for harsher approaches to crime control. Reforms aimed exclusively at building capacity or modernising armed forces and police do not necessarily amount to SSR, although they may be couched in such terms. Neither is SSR served by an exclusive focus on democratic control. Having a democratically controlled military or police is only half the task of security sector reform; these organisations should also be proficient at fulfilling their legitimate responsibilities for providing the public goods of external security and public security. An armed force which is under firm civilian and democratic control, yet which is weak and has insufficient capacity to defend the country from external attack, does not contribute to security. Similarly, a police organisation that is efficient in the performance of its law enforcement and public order tasks yet which is unaccountable or uncontrolled or commits human rights abuses with impunity does not serve the safety and freedom from fear of individuals and communities or the wider public interest. Whether because of lack of resources, lack of capacity or corruption, ineffectiveness requires further reform. The value of SSR is that it serves as a constant reminder that both functional efficiency and democratic oversight considerations should guide institutional development and reform. For that reason, it is a useful guide for framing transformation in both developed and developing states.

¹ OECD, Security System Reform and Governance : Policy and Good Practice, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, 2004, p. 18. Available at : <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/39/31785288.pdf>

Developing and implementing a holistic approach embedded in a ‘multi-sectoral strategic framework... based on the security needs of people and the state’² is very difficult in practice to achieve. Many analysts bring a functional focus (for example, specialising in specific areas such as defence and national security, civil-military relations, development, criminal justice, the legal framework) or bring a specific area expertise to SSR, contributing to what has been called intellectual ‘stove piping’ – the compartmentalisation of knowledge as a result of entrenched academic disciplines and public bureaucracies – with the result that knowledge is not effectively integrated across disciplines, nor are the potential synergies of reform activities realised. Military and defence analysts, for example, may not have expertise in peacetime border management or policing or judicial /rule of law issues. The narrow focus and fragmentation of knowledge in stove piping undermines efforts to implement security sector reform holistically, such as in peacekeeping missions where police reform has been undertaken and undermined by the failure, at least initially, to address judicial reform (Haiti and Sierra Leone, the Western Balkans). One of the lessons learned in efforts to reform policing is that it cannot be undertaken in isolation and must be planned and occur with transformation of the penal and judicial systems. Boundaries are blurring and peacekeeping methodologies and issues now visibly segue into police reform and security sector reform more broadly. Those scholars and practitioners who could claim expertise in civil-military relations and defence reform typically in the past did not consult closely with those having expertise in rule of law or criminal justice. These boundaries are beginning to erode and the complexity and multidimensionality of security sector reform is increasingly appreciated, as experts diversify and seek to determine to what extent they can apply their knowledge in related areas. However, there is far to go in comparing methodologies and gauging the extent to which methods, standards and benchmarks in reform are fungible and transferable from one component of the security sector to another. Understanding each of the functional components of the security sector requires specialised knowledge of the key institutions involved, types of policy issues that arise, in addition to knowledge of the local culture and political system. Thus, while SSR underscores the need to understand and consider all related areas, doing so will require substantial pooling and synthesis of intellectual resources.

Limitations to holistic, system-wide reform also exist in the form of domestic politics, donor resources and competing donor interests. The idea of ‘sequencing’ becomes relevant here, not only because it may not be realistic in terms of resourcing to undertake wide-ranging reform across multiple sectors simultaneously, but also because gaining the support of political and other actors with vested interests may require that reforms be implemented in stages. Sequencing is an ongoing requirement that must respond to changes in the internal and external environment. As a political process, it must involve communication between host government, security sector representatives and donors in an ongoing dialogue.

2.2 The relevance of civil society in SSR

The participation of citizens in decisions that affect their lives distinguishes substantive democracy from formal or procedural democracy, which refers mainly to the institutions and procedures of democratic systems, particularly the occurrence of free and fair elections. It has become accepted in the field of democracy studies that democratic politics go beyond the periodic electoral contests that characterise formal democracy, and are based on a culture of participation

² The Netherlands Institute for International Relations ‘Clingendael’ for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security Sector : An Institutional Framework*, (2003). Available at : http://www.clingendael.nl/cru/pdf/2003_occasional_papers/SSGAF_publicatie.pdf

in which citizens can seek to exercise their voice actively through multiple possible mechanisms, such as an active civil society (NGOs, social movements, other autonomous organisations), political parties and pluralistic media.³ A vibrant civil society performs an informal oversight role in democratic systems and improves the likelihood of good governance through its decentralised expertise and autonomous interests that are affected by, and may seek to influence, various aspects of security policy. When civil society actors are able to question knowledgeably government and its decisions, provide alternative analyses and options for policy, and fulfil an educational role both to policy-makers and the broader public on specific issues, they contribute to the quality of governance in a democracy.

The SSR literature holds that civil society contributes to good governance of defence and security affairs, largely through the watchdog function of representative organisations, interest groups and NGOs. Inclusion of civil society is adjudged to contribute to more effective and equitable policy making and implementation by providing policy-makers with a wider range of information, perspectives and alternatives. The input of civil society is recognised as crucial for the process of democratising a security sector, particularly through the development of independent civilian expertise that governments, parliaments, the media and other actors can call on to provide independent perspectives, analysis and advice on security policies and issues. Alternative perspectives are valued as a counter to vested bureaucratic interests that may inhibit reform or colour analysis and policy recommendations made by members of security institutions or those closely linked to them.

Yet while frequently invoked in SSR circles, civil society tends to be understood superficially, discussed in narrow terms, and is the subject of little systematic research. The role and contribution of civil society and the media are especially poorly understood by those in the defence and military sector. Some maintain that civil society actors tend to be too critical of government policy in the defence sphere and do not provide constructive and informed alternatives, resulting in their being frozen out of dialogue and consultation exercises within the security community. For others, civil society may serve as a reservoir of expertise, such as is found in research institutes, NGOs, pressure groups, think tanks and other autonomous bodies dealing with defence and security issues. While this is a valid and valuable role, it is also true that individuals who belong to such institutes and organisations often have close links to the institutional bodies on which they are commenting, as former ministers, ministry officials, advisers or as former members of the security institution in question. While this may give such individuals an insider's perspective, including a more accurate understanding of the constraints and opportunities faced by policy-makers and officials in these domains, it may also result in a lack of critical distance and continued close identification with the interests of the ministry or security institution itself, as opposed to serving the broader public interest.

Such civil society organisations may also rely on research or programme funding provided by the government or ministry concerned. Financial dependence may in practice impose limits on the extent to which such organisations are willing to criticise government policy and performance. The co-option of 'civil society' (in particular, specialised expert groups in defence affairs) is not only a phenomenon in developing countries, but is clearly visible in most Western states as well. There is an implicit acknowledgement that the state plays an important role in actively supporting civil society in the domain of the security sector – that is, the state contributes to building good governance of the security sector if it helps to build capacity and empower civil society groups. At the same time, this element that is often necessary in building civil society in this specialised domain

³ Robin Luckham, Anne Marie Goetz and Mary Kaldor, 'Democratic Institutions and Democratic Politics', *Can Democracy be Designed? The Politics of Institutional Choice in Conflict-Torn Societies* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2003), p. 20.

raises the possibility of ‘captured’ or ‘co-opted’ civil society actors and organisations.

Unless there is a clear effort to open the policy process to a diversity of groups, including human rights and civil liberties groups, this ‘inclusiveness’ is in practice limited to other elites and specialist groups. A participatory approach is necessary to build a sense of local ownership in reforms, and hence the legitimacy of reforms. Strengthening civil society’s capacity to play a role in oversight of the security sector is worthy but largely overlooked. Much neglected are opportunities to open up the defence or security policy-making process and the political system more generally to the wider interests of audiences in civil society, such as through public meetings and consultative exercises. NGOs and civil groups contain much expertise and information that is relevant to public security reform, such as police and the criminal justice system, but that is often untapped by those planning reforms.

There is also typically very little engagement with civil society and the local community on the long-term development of police systems and rule of law in the context of peace support operations. Civil society tends to be more vocal in its criticisms of policing than its support of good practice, and the perception of overly-critical social groups may engender a defensive and closed attitude among police. Nevertheless, the involvement of civil society groups is vital to the success of police reform and democratic policing because they serve to link the police to the broader community. Bar associations and human rights groups should be involved in the planning and monitoring of police reform. In countries that have undergone regime change and are vetting employees of security institutions, especially police organisations, panels composed of respected members of civil society could be involved in the vetting process. Ways and means of civil society inclusion is an area where the conflict transformation community can contribute to developing the agenda and understanding of the dynamics of security sector reform.

The minor role that civil society has played in SSR in some regions is explained in part by the sheer absence of members of civil society with sufficient interest or expertise in security affairs. In many post-communist countries, for example, dismantling of the state security apparatus was a priority immediately after the transition and new democratic regimes were in place. But there was very little public interest in dealing with police or intelligence reform on a longer-term basis and in addition an aversion to dealing with internal security issues. On the donor side, civil society involvement was minimised by an initial preoccupation with legal frameworks and institutional reforms and direct military-military and police-police contacts and assistance. This trend largely continues today through military assistance programs, co-location of institutional experts, and twinning programs.

More generally, the security sector is traditionally one that is executive-dominated and characterised by a necessary level of secrecy. It has traditionally not been very accessible, even to other members of the political sector. Parliamentary oversight of intelligence agencies, for example, is a relatively recent development in mature Western democracies and is still far from adequate in most countries. The idea of broader inclusion in the monitoring and control of security institutions, and broad public input into security policy, is being very slowly accepted but still encounters many obstacles. That extends to the role of the press, in particular formal and informal curbs on media freedom to report on security-related issues and corruption within the security sector, which remain formidable in many states.

The need to examine closely the role of civil society in security governance also suggests that we might gain from questioning other canons of security sector reform. One such principle is the essential role played by the legislature in overseeing and scrutinising the work of the government. While this may certainly hold true for specific political systems, in others, especially those where strong

party discipline prevails within the legislature and its committees, the oversight role of parliament may in practice be highly constrained. In Canada, for example, parliament has been criticised for surrendering its already limited powers to oversee the executive and functioning as a rubber stamp for policy decisions, the overwhelming majority of which are made in a highly centralised fashion by the prime minister and his/her political and senior cabinet advisors.⁴ In defence and security policy, the legislative committees and subcommittees have not served as effective mechanisms of oversight⁵, and according to one former insider, there are no truly substantive discussions of defence policy taking place in the Canadian parliament.⁶ This brief example shows that legislative oversight of the security sector even in a 'mature' democratic system such as Canada leaves much room for improvement, and that improving oversight is not just a question of reforming state institutions, but may invoke broader political reform. It further demonstrates the truism that formal structures and mechanisms provide only part of the picture of oversight and control; one must also look to less easily quantifiable factors such as tradition, political culture and other informal rules of behaviour in a political system to gain insight into the accountability of public institutions. Finally, it suggests that contrary to the common assumption that a democracy will sustain itself once a structural base is established, even strong or consolidated democratic states can falter due to serious political or social problems. Established democracies need to continually resolve problems that arise, and maintain their legitimacy through constant strengthening of the social contract whereby they provide essential public services, perhaps most notably that of security, and good governance of the state bureaucracy through which a government exercises its authority.⁷

2.3 Changes in donor approaches required

SSR implies a holistic approach on the donor side, improving co-ordination and co-operation among donors in terms of reform assistance. This can be a challenge, as competition and resistance to co-ordination among donors and intergovernmental organisations often hamper coherent and effective delivery of international assistance.⁸ Co-ordination may be difficult even in the context of the assistance provided by a single donor country, which may channel funds bilaterally via various departments, agencies and task forces prone to similar types of rivalries and lack of communication. In some instances, a regional organisation or NGO may strive to function as an honest broker to help identify gaps in assistance or duplication of effort. However, identifying gaps does not necessarily mean that donors will act accordingly to fill them, as donor policies may be more influenced by domestic constituencies and priorities than by the overall effectiveness and coherence of assistance delivered to a recipient.

There is also a growing recognition in security sector reform that some problems, such as organised crime and trafficking, are regional in nature and scope, and must be dealt with at the regional or sub-regional basis. There is similarly growing attention to regional and sub-regional groups of political and civil society actors that can contribute to enhancing local ownership of

⁴ Donald Savoie, *Governing from the Centre : The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁵ Douglas L. Bland and Roy Rempel, 'A Vigilant Parliament : Building Competence for Effective Parliamentary Oversight of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces', *Policy Matters / Enjeux publics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (February 2004).

⁶ Roy Rempel, *The Chatterbox: An Insider's Account of the Irrelevance of Parliament in the Making of Canadian Foreign and Defence Policy* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2002).

⁷ Ezra Suleiman, *Dismantling Democratic States* (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 2003), pp.1, 7.

⁸ For a regional discussion of donor competition in security sector reform, see Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 'Preliminary Gaps Analysis', *Security Sector Reform in South Eastern Europe : An Inventory of Initiatives* web page, URL: <http://ssr.yciss.yorku.ca/>.

security sector reform.⁹ Donor approaches that support the development of regional networks might help to mitigate the competition at the local level.

Some interesting insights on donor practices in SSR can be drawn from the highly topical issue of border management. Considerable attention has been focused on strengthening border security of Western states since the events of 11 September 2001. In Europe, the process of creating a common market with no internal borders for the free movement of people, goods and capital throughout the European space has been developing quickly since the early 1990s. With the accession of new members to the European Union from Central and Eastern Europe in May 2004, attention has also shifted to strengthening the new external frontiers of the EU. In Southeastern Europe, this has translated into vigorous efforts by donors to assist states in the region in combating organised crime, trafficking and corruption more effectively.¹⁰

There are at least three things to note in this trend that are interesting from a SSR perspective. First, there has so far been a clear emphasis on efficiency with little effort to address oversight issues of border control and customs agencies except insofar as corruption compromises the efficiency of border policing. Second, capacity-building has not been approached holistically across sectors of the security system, as in some cases in the Western Balkans border police are being paid several times what regular police are paid, and are the recipients of modern equipment and computer systems donated by EU member states. The funnelling of assistance towards border control has drawn off recruits, personnel and resources from regular policing and their capacity to provide public security. Third, the border management discourse from donors to recipients focuses exclusively on the 'sending' countries, and has avoided dealing with the 'pull' factors at work in developed Western destination countries, such as lack of enforcement of regulations against employment of illegal migrants, corruption, official complicity and tolerance of underground and unregulated workers in certain sectors of industry (such as the service industry, prostitution, and agricultural industries), and corruption of police, border, consular and other state officials in the destination countries. The SSR discussion has not adequately broached the issue of drivers of donor support and the politics of conditionality. Until it does, reform of security institutions touching such sensitive areas as migration control will remain a one-way dialogue from donors to recipients with questionable implications for issues such as local ownership.

The so-called global war against terrorism highlights other features in contemporary donor approaches concerning reform of security institutions. Wulf points out that while many donors have embraced SSR, they have been slow to support SSR through funding or conditionality of aid. In contrast, many donors have jumped onto the counter-terrorism bandwagon. The war against terrorism has affected the countries receiving funding for security reforms, but this has not amounted to SSR. Rather, it often involves shoring up military capabilities, even though these are of questionable utility against terrorist threats, in addition to internal security (law enforcement and intelligence) capabilities. The war on terror has justified building up the institutional capacities of security institutions, but not the capacities of those who oversee the security providers. Moreover, it has focused on building up institutional capacities linked directly to counter-terrorism, deflecting attention from continuing deficiencies in public security in regions such as South America.¹¹

⁹ See for example Chris Ferguson, ed, Conference Proceedings of the Latin America and Caribbean Security Network Symposium, Kingston, Jamaica, 20-21 April 2004, published as GFN Paper Number 66, 10 May 2004.

¹⁰ The European Union's strategic approach in the Western Balkans prioritises improving regional capacities in policing and border management, in particular combatting organised crime, drug trafficking, illegal immigration. See Commission of the European Communities, Report from the Commission : The Stabilisation and Association process for South East Europe. Third Annual Report, COM (2004) 202/2 final (Brussels : European Commission, 2004), pp. 20-21. Available at : http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep3/strat_pap.pdf

¹¹ Ferguson, p. 39.

Western states have also been preoccupied with domestic capacity-building and improving inter-agency co-ordination and intelligence-sharing; oversight issues have been clearly subordinated to the perceived requirement of bolstering internal security. At this point it is unclear when the prevailing preoccupation with reinforcing security will be balanced or overtaken by a concern with preserving human rights and civil liberties. In a similar vein, systematic human rights abuses of governments in countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia have been overlooked in the quest for the co-operation of strategic allies in the war against terrorism.¹² There is an effort among some donors and Western actors to understand better how conditions in the underdeveloped parts of the world affect the international security environment, specifically how exclusion, despair and alienation lead disaffected individuals and groups to support terrorism, and to develop assistance strategies that aim to prevent the development of terrorism as a strategy in development co-operation.¹³ However, despite the rhetoric of addressing the root causes of terrorism, there has been little evidence that efforts to combat terrorism have acted as spurs to reforms emphasising good governance, whether in general terms or with specific reference to the security sector. To the contrary, the anti-terrorism agenda is being used across Asia to consolidate state power, resulting in the stifling of political opposition, criminalisation of internal dissent, and suppression of movements for democracy and human rights.¹⁴

3. Conclusion

In summary, security sector reform is a worthwhile concept, but it still requires much work to be done at both the conceptual and practical levels, in particular more effort must be expended in integrating the insights of relevant cognate disciplines and co-existing areas of study and foreign assistance. Such areas include the overlapping fields of conflict management, civil-military relations, peacebuilding and democratisation. More effort needs to be invested in linking the distinct literatures that exist on security institutions, including police, intelligence services, armed forces, and border management, in order to identify common processes, overlapping functions and insights from past reform processes. Other perspectives, such as human rights or human security, also help to break down stove-piped institutional perspectives. Indeed, such alternative frameworks may end up challenging or supplanting SSR if the latter's proponents fail to clearly delineate and uphold its normative aspects and to reject the privileging of efficiency over the good governance aspects of democratic control and accountability that is emblematic of the Bush administration's global war against terrorism. Deeper familiarity with the history, local conditions and culture of the countries constituting the subject of security sector reform is also required. Specific outreach activities that can further advance understanding of security sector reform include improving the security literacy in civil society to include the requirements of security in a democracy, both in terms of capacities and control. By raising public awareness and debate on the real security problems and threats faced by a society and state, it becomes more likely that security policies and the security sector reform agenda reflect local and national priorities.

In the current hyper-securitised climate of the so-called global war against terrorism,

¹² Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2004, available on-line at URL : <http://web.amnesty.org/report2004/index-eng>

¹³ OECD, 'A Development Co-operation Lens on Terrorism Prevention : Key Entry Points for Action', DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁴ Liz Fekete, 'People's security versus national security', *Race and Class*, Vol. 44, Issue 3 (2003).

the concept of SSR contains the reminder that essential values of transparency, accountability and democratic control of security institutions need to be respected in democratic systems even in the face of perceived heightened security threats. In underdeveloped, transition and post-conflict countries, as well as in mature democracies, SSR offers an antidote to approaches that concentrate on building capacity while ignoring transparency and accountability issues.

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