



## ARTICLES

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# SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ: EXPOSING A CONCEPT IN CRISIS

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### Abstract

*Security sector reform (SSR) has come to be a cornerstone of the state-building project in post-conflict contexts, providing an enabling environment for peacebuilding and development. However, an examination of the Afghan and Iraqi cases illustrates that the SSR model applied there is ill-equipped to confront the challenges of post-conflict environments. The failure to actualise the holistic, people-centred aims envisaged in both cases highlights a disjuncture between policy and practice consistent with the SSR experience in other post-conflict cases. This has led to questions concerning the feasibility of the SSR model in the aftermath of September 11. This article argues that resolving the crisis in which the SSR process is mired requires its re-conceptualisation and a fundamental shift in donor policy and practices.*

### Introduction

In July 2003, Afghan President Hamid Karzai opened a national symposium on security sector reform in Kabul, affirming that the process 'is the basic prerequisite to re-creating the nation that today's parents hope to leave to future generations' (Karzai 2003). In Afghanistan as in Iraq, SSR has come to be accepted by both the Western donor community and the incipient Afghan and Iraqi national governments as a central pillar of the state-building project, providing an enabling environment for peacebuilding and sustainable development. However, just as the two cases have underscored the importance of SSR in rebuilding post-conflict states, they have also highlighted the limitations of the SSR model and the new challenges that confront it in the post-September 11 era.

The SSR concept gained prominence in the late 1990s, a product of an emerging understanding of the nexus between security and development. It represented a paradigm shift in donor approaches to the provision of security assistance to developing states, emphasising the security of people rather than regimes. Development agencies rather than

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traditional security actors became the champions of the concept. It did not take long for an SSR model to take shape, a normative framework featuring a holistic vision of reform that balanced the need to enhance the effectiveness of the security forces with the

imperative of entrenching principles of democratic governance and the rule of law. However, the rapid rise of the model and its wide acceptance in the Western donor community contrasts sharply with its limited record of achievement, revealing a

‘conceptual-contextual divide’ (Chanaa 2002). The SSR model has seemingly been unable to translate its ambitious reform principles into practical reform programmes. Nowhere is this disjuncture between policy and practice more apparent than in the two most visible state-building projects of the post-September 11 era, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The SSR model has proven to be ill-equipped to adapt to the conditions prevalent in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its success is dependent on a number of preconditions that were largely absent in both cases. As a result, a familiar pattern ensued in which the ‘hard’ security elements of the process – typified by the security force train-and-equip programme – superseded its ‘soft’ security dimension. The latter was epitomised by the advancement of good governance in the sector, notably its subordination to democratic civilian control and the entrenchment of core principles such as transparency, accountability and respect for fundamental rights. This ‘slide toward expediency’ in the process is less attributable to flaws in the SSR normative framework than to a shift in security thinking following 11 September 2001 (Sedra 2006).

The SSR model has been most clearly defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which has charted a set of guidelines for its implementation based on the core principles mentioned above (OECD 2005). Different variations will invariably emerge, but to fall under the rubric of SSR they must conform to these principles and adhere to the holistic vision. In actuality, most applications diverge so substantially from that vision that they defy the use of the term, and the Afghan and Iraqi cases are no different. This has raised questions over the applicability of the archetypal SSR model.

SSR has come to be a catch-all term employed to justify any externally sponsored security activities regardless of their consistency with the SSR ideal. The phenomenon of aid securitisation in the development sphere – the instrumentalisation of development

assistance to advance a security agenda – has manifested itself in the Afghan and Iraqi SSR agendas. The disproportionate focus on security force operational effectiveness and the appropriation of the SSR agenda to achieve donor strategic objectives, all at the expense of efforts to promote good governance in the sector, illustrates this trend of SSR

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securitisation. United States leadership over the process in both countries also accounts for this phenomenon. The centre of gravity for SSR continues to be in Western Europe where states have begun to incorporate elements of the model into their development and security policies. Although the U.S. has appropriated the language of SSR, as seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has yet to internalise its principles, leading to the employment of practices and approaches that diverge significantly from the SSR ideal.

By deconstructing and analysing the Afghan and Iraqi SSR processes, this article seeks to elucidate the gaps and emerging trends in the SSR model that can inform a debate on its re-conceptualisation. The first section briefly introduces the SSR concept and outlines a framework of conditions that must be present for it to achieve tangible results. The second provides a survey of the reform contexts in Afghanistan and Iraq with an emphasis on the military, police and judicial reform elements. Finally, the framework set out in the first section is used to analyse and assess the two cases, demonstrating the need to dispense with the unitary model approach to SSR in favour of a reform typology more attuned to specific reform contexts. It illustrates the need for donors to fundamentally alter their *modus operandi* in post-conflict settings.

## Preconditions for Security Sector Reform

The objective of SSR, says the OECD, 'is to create a secure environment that is conducive to development, poverty reduction and democracy' (OECD 2005:16). This 'holistic, people-centred approach to security' can be considered a sub-set of peacebuilding (OECD 2005:58). The model is rooted in the notion that the absence of a responsible and accountable security sector possessing a monopoly on the use of coercive force will invariably prompt the population to seek security from other sources, leading to the proliferation of weapons and non-statutory security forces. The SSR process was designed as a means 'to strengthen the ability of the sector as a whole and each of its individual parts to provide an accountable, equitable, effective, and rights respecting service' (UNDP 2003:5). The aim is to mould the security sector into an instrument to consolidate and uphold the peace rather than to threaten or unravel it.

SSR can be conceived as being dependent on the existence of a number of specific conditions. First, SSR programmes 'must be locally designed, locally implemented, and locally evaluated, for what may appear to be productive from the perspective of the international community may have significantly different connotations and effects when judged by domestic actors' (UNDP 2003:15).

Second, even if the process is successful in entrenching formal, Western-oriented security structures, 'the attitudes beneath them may remain deeply wedded to tradition' (Chanaa 2002:41-42). Accordingly, the principles, policies, laws and structures developed during the reform process must be reconciled with the country's history, culture and legal framework.

Third, the success of SSR programmes 'depends upon there being a consensus among domestic actors on the principles of their SSR programme, on the strategic vision embedded in the programme, and on the specific objectives the programme seeks to achieve' (UNDP 2003:15). There has been a tendency among external actors to rely on a narrow set of like-minded elites to oversee reforms. In many cases, the selection of local partners has been based more on expediency than the need to foster an inclusive process. The formation of clientelistic relationships with certain ethnic-based groups is a common practice of external actors, with far-reaching ramifications for SSR. Robin Luckham notes the dangers of 'ethnicising' the process: 'When ethnic patronage is built into military, police and security bureaucracies, it corrupts them, weakens discipline, reinforces a sense of impunity and fosters public (and especially minority) distrust of the state itself' (Luckham 2003:22).

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Fourth, a minimum level of security is required to advance the process. SSR cannot be implemented in a security vacuum; it is a long-term process intended to address the structural causes of insecurity, not a means to confront immediate security threats. Post-conflict countries are invariably confronted

with a high degree of residual insecurity. The deployment of a peace support mission offers one means to provide a security buffer for the process and 'raise the cost to local stakeholders of choosing violence over dialogue and compromise' (Ball 2002:7).

Fifth, implementing comprehensive reforms that are owned and directed by local actors requires at least the foundations of stable institutions and human capacity. In countries that have experienced state collapse or are recovering from civil strife, institutional and human capacity is invariably limited. Determining a starting point for the process and how to sequence reforms in such contexts is exceedingly difficult.

Sixth, with a multiplicity of external and local stakeholders involved in the process, all with their own goals and interests, it is important to establish mechanisms to ensure the coherence of SSR at the planning and operational levels. Donors in particular 'often bring with them their own set of concerns', which Chanaa warns 'can seriously jeopardise the agenda's holistic vision' (Chanaa 2002:55).

Lastly, external actors must recognise that SSR is a lengthy process. While the immediate aftermath of a conflict represents a vital formative period during which concerted donor attention and support are required to launch reform and recovery efforts, SSR can take up to a decade to reach its fruition. There is no quick fix: SSR requires a long-term outlook and durable supplies of resources to succeed. These seven preconditions provide a lens with which to gauge the impact of the SSR model in the two cases and provide some insight on how it can be re-conceptualised.

## The Afghan Case

Afghanistan's SSR process was launched with a Group of Eight security donors' meeting in Geneva in the spring of 2002. The meeting set the agenda for the process and instituted a multi-sectoral donor support scheme. The process was divided into five pillars, each to be overseen by a lead donor nation: military reform (U.S.); police reform (Germany); judicial reform (Italy); the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants (Japan); and counter-narcotics (United Kingdom). From its outset, the Afghan process was hindered by capacity deficits, coordination breakdowns and a precarious security environment. As stated earlier, this paper will focus on the military, police and judicial reform pillars, the core of the SSR agenda in post-conflict states.

### *Military reform*

The military reform process overseen by the U.S. has two components: the creation of an Afghan National Army (ANA) and the reform of the Afghan Ministry of Defence. The formation of the ANA is widely perceived to be a success story of the SSR process. By June 2006, approximately 30,000 troops had completed training and five regional commands had been established.<sup>1</sup> It is envisaged that the ANA will reach full operational capability, meeting its force ceiling of 70,000 troops, by 2010. Despite these impressive figures, the ANA training process has faced significant obstacles. The force has been hampered by problems of force retention since its inception. In the summer of 2003, the desertion rate reached a high-water mark of 10% per month (Giustozzi & Sedra 2004). Recruits left the force in such high numbers due to low pay, poor living conditions and displeasure over the length of service away from their home regions. In 2003 and 2004, the U.S. implemented a series of measures to augment troop retention, including the renovation of barracks, the introduction of an elevated pay scale and the institution of strict ethnic quotas to ensure that the force adequately reflects Afghanistan's ethnic mosaic (Kucera 2004). These measures contributed to the reduction of the desertion rate to a respectable 1.8% by May 2004, a level that remained consistent in the two years that followed.

ANA soldiers have reportedly performed well in joint operations conducted with Coalition forces; however, they still cannot undertake complex operations without Coalition support. Moreover, reforms in the defence ministry have lagged behind the project to stand up the ANA. The two processes were advanced independently, due largely to the U.S.'s lack of trust in the first post-Taliban Minister of Defence, Marshal Mohammed Qasim Fahim, who filled the ranks of the ministry with members of his own Tajik-dominated Shura-i Nazar faction and exploited the institution to advance his own interests. It was only with



the appointment of General Abdul Rahim Wardak, a Western-oriented professional soldier, to the post in December 2004 that the U.S. began in earnest to overhaul the institution and treat it as an equal partner in the formation of the ANA. While the defence ministry had undergone significant changes by the spring of 2006, demonstrating enhanced competency, professionalism and greater ethnic parity, it could still be characterised as corrupt and factionalised. As with the police and judicial reform pillars, scant attention was given to advancing administrative reforms in the ministry, undermining the state's capacity to manage its security forces in the long term.

### *Police reform*

In spite of the centrality of the police in combating Afghanistan's array of domestic threats – including terrorism, illegal border incursions, the illicit drug trade, warlordism and organised crime – the Interior Ministry and Afghan National Police (ANP) have not received resources and attention commensurate to that of the ANA (Jalali 2006:8). In contrast to the ANA, which was built from the ground up, reforms in the area of policing aimed to re-fashion existing structures and personnel. The problem with the approach was that existing police largely consisted of former mujahideen fighters who had minimal formal police training and owed their allegiance to regional commanders rather than to the new central government. Although 55,000 officers had received some form of training by June 2006, the ANP is widely regarded

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as dysfunctional and has had little impact in improving the security situation on the ground.<sup>2</sup> According to a spring 2006 essay by former Afghan Interior Minister Ali A. Jalali, who served in the post from 2003-2005, 'the ANP continues to be ill-trained, poorly paid, under-equipped, and inadequately armed' (Jalali 2006:10). In the light of these conditions, it is not surprising that factionalism and criminal patterns of behaviour have become

a prominent feature of the police service. In November 2004, a spokesperson for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) claimed in an interview with a state-run newspaper that police had perpetrated 15% of all human rights violations reported over the previous six months. The most common offences reported were torture, forcible theft of property and the failure to prosecute murder cases (IWPR 2004).

The reform process has failed to alter existing patterns of behaviour in the police or establish oversight mechanisms to mitigate abuses. Rather than creating community police capable of upholding the rule of law and meeting the human security needs of the population, the process has merely produced another layer of security forces – albeit largely ineffective – to supplement the ANA and international military forces in counter-terrorist and counter-insurgent operations.

### *Judicial reform*

If the military pillar could be categorised as the success story of the SSR process by early 2006, judicial reform could be labelled as its failure. Although judicial reform was allocated an individual pillar of the SSR agenda to be overseen by Italy, in practice it has been treated as a secondary objective, a process ostensibly to be advanced in earnest once the security situation has stabilised. This attitude was reflected in the resource levels allocated to the process, with only 3% of the funds dedicated to the SSR agenda being channelled to reforms in the judicial system as of November 2005 (World Bank 2005:50).

Conditions in the judicial system are dire. It lacks physical infrastructure such as courthouses, law libraries, correctional facilities and office buildings; trained jurists are in short supply, salary levels are dangerously low and corruption is rampant (Thier 2004). In the light of these conditions, public trust in the system is exceedingly low. In a national poll conducted by the AIHRC in 2005, 65% of respondents expressed little or no faith in the judicial system, which was viewed as corrupt and under the thumb of regional warlords (Samar & Nadery 2005). According to the Afghan Ministry of Justice, fewer than 10% of all cases adjudicated in Afghanistan are done so in the formal legal system (GIRA 2006:32).

Acute divisions between the main stakeholders in the process over the goals and pace of reform inhibited meaningful change, notably the extension of the formal legal system from Kabul into the rural periphery. Relations between the three main Afghan judicial institutions

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– the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court and the Office of the Prosecutor General – have ranged from being strained to openly hostile. Rather than contributing to the amelioration of intra-governmental tensions, donor engagement has exacerbated them, with donor stakeholders rapidly assuming the guise of additional factional players on the domestic political stage. For instance, the two main

donors to the judicial reform process, Italy and the U.S., have clashed repeatedly over reform plans. This inter-donor rivalry, which largely stems from their differing legal traditions, has impeded the formation of a coherent, system-wide reform strategy and permitted recalcitrant Afghan actors to evade reforms. The resultant justice gap has stalled the entire SSR agenda, demonstrating the innately interconnected nature of the process.

## The Iraqi Case

While U.S. President George W. Bush declared an end to major combat activity in Iraq on 1 May 2003, it remains problematic to refer to it as a post-conflict setting. From the time of that declaration until late December 2006, the U.S. suffered more than 2,800 combat fatalities and the intensity of the insurgency steadily increased (Brookings Institution 2006). According to U.S. Army Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, who headed the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), the Coalition institution overseeing SSR, from June 2004 to September 2005, the task of training and equipping 'Iraq's security forces...in the middle of a tough insurgency... [is] akin to repairing an aircraft while in flight – and while being shot at' (Petraeus 2004). The escalation of the insurgency has placed pressure on the U.S. to accelerate and adjust its strategy to reconstitute the Iraqi security sector, prioritising efforts to enhance the combat capacity of the security forces above initiatives to instil the sector with a democratic ethos and entrench the rule of law. The fact that the term SSR is rarely used in the Iraqi context is telling; the project is more akin to a Cold War security assistance programme than an application of SSR. Nonetheless, SSR principles suffused initial U.S. designs for the reconstruction of the Iraqi security sector, as reflected both in statements by its principal architects and the content of the plans and orders of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the Coalition body responsible for governing Iraq until its dissolution in June 2004.

### *Military reform*

According to Walter L. Slocombe, the former Director for National Security and Defence for the CPA, Iraqi society had been 'grotesquely over-militarised' under the Ba'athist regime, and the aim of the U.S. military reform programme was to create 'an armed force that will

be professional, non-political, militarily effective and truly representative of the country' (Schodolski 2003). By November 2006, the Iraqi armed forces did not exhibit any of these characteristics. Perhaps the paramount reason was the low priority the U.S. accorded the mission at its outset. Maj.Gen. Paul D. Eaton, Commander of the Coalition Military Assistance and Training Team (the forerunner of the MNSTC-I) from May 2003 to June 2004, has argued that the mission was understaffed, poorly planned and launched late (Shanker 2006). This contributed to what he has called a 'false start' for the process that set it back a year (Shanker 2006). This situation changed dramatically in 2005, by which time the reconstruction of the army and the entire security sector had been elevated to top priority for the Bush Administration, coming to define its exit strategy. A common refrain of Administration officials in response to queries about the duration of U.S. military engagement in Iraq came to be: 'As Iraqis stand up, we will stand down' (Fallows 2005:60).

In November 2006, trained and equipped Ministry of Defence forces numbered 134,700. (Brookings Institution 2006:25). The goal of the MNSTC-I is to reach a troop threshold of 137,000 by the end of 2006, a target which appeared clearly in reach. However, these figures belie serious problems that confront the process. For instance, the numbers of soldiers trained and equipped does not convey their readiness to engage in military operations. The MNSTC-I uses a four-point classification scheme to determine unit readiness, with Level 1 ascribed to fully capable soldiers and Level 4 assigned to 'incapable units' (Fallows 2005:61). By December 2005, only 50 out of the 102 battalions formed were in the 1-3 range, with most of those falling into levels 2 and 3 (Cordesman 2006:ii). The lack of readiness of the troops was reflected in their early performance. Iraqi forces have not acquitted themselves well in combat situations. For instance, during Coalition operations in Fallujah in June 2004, Iraqi army units refused to join U.S. offensives on militants and deserted en masse (Fallows 2005:63). More recently, in the autumn of 2006, the Coalition had to reassume control of security in an area that it had handed over to the Iraqi army only months earlier. Insufficient training, the dearth of competent officers and the lack of an effective command and control system have been blamed for the poor performance of Iraqi troops (Tavernise & Burns 2005).

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Another major problem of the force relates to ethnic representation and factionalisation. The new military is fragmented along ethnic lines, with Sunnis severely under-represented and Kurds over-represented, creating conditions ripe for the future atomisation of the army and its absorption into the country's myriad of ethnic militias. The extent of the divisions within the army and their potential

volatility were made clear in May 2006 when Kurdish and Shi'a units clashed in Balad, a Shi'a city north of Baghdad, resulting in the death of at least one Shi'a soldier (Filkins 2006). Shi'a militias have colonised large parts of the army, using it as a tool to advance their communal interests in an intensifying sectarian struggle in the country.

While the Coalition expanded its efforts to build up the Iraqi Armed Forces in 2004, the civilian component of the defence establishment received comparatively little attention. The Iraqi Defence Ministry is rife with corruption – exemplified by the investigation of numerous high-ranking ministry officials over the misappropriation of funds – and it lacks adequate systems to pay salaries, procure equipment and supplies and recruit new personnel (Cloud 2005). As in the Afghan case, reforms to the civilian institution intended to govern the armed forces was treated almost as an afterthought. Both cases have shown that the security forces cannot be developed in isolation from the institutions intended to

manage them. Problems of corruption and factionalism inevitably trickled down from the Afghan and Iraqi Defence Ministries into the armed forces, undermining their effectiveness and cohesiveness.

### *Police reform*

Iraq's police force under the Ba'athist regime, numbering 76,000, disintegrated after the fall of Saddam Hussein (IRIN 2004). A U.S. State Department report dated 30 May 2003, titled 'Iraqi Police: An Assessment of Their Present and Recommendations for the Future' offered a grim prognosis (Gordon 2004). The police who remained in uniform were unprofessional, corrupt and disloyal. As in the case of the dissolution of the Iraqi military, the U.S. was slow to respond to this adverse situation. General Eaton described the police training programme as a 'disjointed fiasco' (Gordon 2004).

By November 2006, 188,300 interior ministry forces had been trained and equipped – a significant proportion of whom are part of special police branches that could be characterised as paramilitary units – exceeding the authorised end-strength for the force of 188,000 (Brookings Institution 2006:25). While the U.S. training 'assembly line' has placed

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a large number of new police on the streets, their performance has been less than exemplary. For instance, in early November 2004, in response to a wave of attacks on police stations and government facilities in the northern city of Mosul, 3,200 of the city's 4,000 police abandoned their jobs (Graham 2004).

Violence and intimidation of police across the country – it is estimated that 4,000 police have been killed and 8,000 wounded between 2004 and 2006 – compelled scores to desert the force (O'Neil 2006). However, in a country with an unemployment rate in the range of 50%, the average salary of \$228 per month that the force offers has ensured a steady stream of recruits (Wong 2004).

The UK military's attack on an Iraqi police station in the southern city of Basra in December 2006 shows that the problems facing the police extend beyond that of effectiveness and loyalty. The force has been infiltrated at all levels by militias and criminal gangs, primarily Shi'a in origin. Basra's serious crimes unit, which occupied the station that was besieged and destroyed by British forces, had allegedly fallen under the control of a criminal gang and was engaging in 'death squad activity' (Negus 2006). Such abuses of power by the police have become the norm in Iraq, where the sight of uniformed police involved in militia clashes or criminal activity such as abductions have become commonplace. The lines separating the police from criminals, militias, and political factions are blurred.

Factionalisation is perhaps the paramount problem facing the Iraqi Police Service (IPS). Despite Coalition and Iraqi government vetting of recruits, the IPS is dominated by officers whose allegiance lies with their militia or sect rather than with the national government. Militia groups such as the Shi'a Badr Brigade and the Kurdish Peshmerga have been able to assert control over whole sections of the police apparatus in their regional strongholds (Filkins 2005). In late 2005, the Coalition began to express concern that the interior ministry, dominated by Shi'a officials, was undertaking 'illegal raids and killings' largely targeting Sunnis (Cordesman 2006:73). On 15 November 2005, 169 Sunnis, many of them showing signs of torture, were discovered in a Ministry of Interior prison located in a Baghdad bunker (Cordesman 2006:73). The prisoners were under the supervision of a unit of the Special Police whose commander was said to report directly to the interior minister. In a



speech delivered on 10 January 2006, President Bush would call such abuses 'unacceptable' and affirmed that the U.S. would work with the 'Iraqi government to increase the training Iraqi Special Police receive in human rights and the rule of law' (Cordesman 2006:74). The first major step to address these problems was taken in October 2006 when the interior ministry sacked more than 3,000 officers: 1,228 for breaking the law and nearly 2,000 for dereliction of duty (*Middle East Online* 2006). In the same month, the ministry began to recall problematic Iraqi police brigades for retraining (Wood 2006).

The acceleration of police training over the past two years to address the deteriorating security environment and compensate for the under-resourcing of the process during its early stages has, paradoxically, compounded many of the problems afflicting the force. At a time when careful vetting and comprehensive training and mentoring are needed to alter police behaviour and militate against factional infiltration, the process has been streamlined and condensed to increase throughput. The Iraqi experience shows that SSR may not be feasible in settings that have not clearly entered a post-conflict phase.

### ***Judicial reform***

In the aftermath of the fall of the Ba'athist regime, the judicial sector was in disarray. Much of the infrastructure was damaged or destroyed during the war and subsequent looting. For instance, about 75% of the country's estimated 110 courthouses outside the Kurdish region were said to be in a state of disrepair following the cessation of major combat operations, including 12 of the 18 located in Baghdad (Global Security 2006). A report by the International Legal Assistance Consortium affirmed that the 'Iraqi judicial system does not suffer from a shortage of trained jurists'; the problem, it states, stems from 'the disastrous effect on the system of three decades of international isolation, in combination with Saddam's policy of systematic undermining of any judicial independence' (ILAC 2003:10). Political control of the judicial system has not ceased; it has merely shifted from one actor, the Ba'athist state, to numerous non-state militia groups that have used intimidation, violence and incentives to control the judiciary.

The U.S. has taken a number of preliminary steps to reconstruct the judicial system, including the re-establishment of the Council of Judges charged with the supervision of the judicial and prosecutorial systems; the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure; the training and vetting of judicial personnel; and the reform of legal codes (GAO 2004:82-83). However, as in Afghanistan, such initiatives have been ad hoc and disjointed and have received only a fraction of the resources and attention accorded to the security force train-and-equip programmes. The failure to address the justice system in the early stages of the SSR process,

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### **Assessing the Afghan and Iraqi Cases**

The conditions prevalent in Afghanistan and Iraq have not been conducive for the actualisation of the SSR model, forcing it to adapt in a manner that has contravened its underlying principles. This is consistent with the SSR experience in other post-conflict settings, most notably the Balkans, where comparable patterns, marked by a slide toward

expediency in reform implementation, can be detected. In Bosnia, for instance, reforms of the judicial system were similarly under-resourced in the initial stages of the post-conflict period, which had a cascading and debilitating effect on the SSR and wider state-building processes. The geopolitical significance of the Afghan and Iraqi cases, coupled with the overlay of a counter-terrorist agenda, has merely served to magnify the innate inadequacies of the model. The following section, in an effort to further elucidate these shortcomings, applies the framework of preconditions for SSR implementation outlined in the first section to the two case studies.

### *Local ownership*

In both the Afghan and Iraqi cases, SSR could be characterised as a donor-driven enterprise with insufficient attention paid to fostering local ownership. The lack of capacity and endemic corruption of Afghan security institutions compelled donor states to implement reform programmes unilaterally with insufficient consultation of Afghan actors. Exemplifying this situation was the ANA training process. During its first two formative years, the Afghan Ministry of Defence was largely excluded from decision making over the force. In effect, the ANA was treated as a Coalition project.

In Iraq, the U.S. has maintained a monopoly over the design and direction of the SSR process, with other external actors such as NATO making only minor contributions. As in Afghanistan, it has been reluctant to devolve authority over security issues to Iraqi institutions that are heavily factionalised and corrupt. The decision to work around rather than through Afghan and Iraqi institutions has challenged the legitimacy of reforms. Such an approach, while expedient in the short term to achieve force targets and restore immediate stability, risks undermining the long-term sustainability of the sector.

### *Understanding and engaging the local context*

The OECD-DAC *Guidelines on Helping to Prevent Violent Conflict* aptly affirms that 'local capacities should be supplemented, reinforced or strengthened by external resources, not substituted or overwhelmed by them' (OECD 2001:24). In Afghanistan, the notion that all

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traditional security structures have been destroyed, are anachronistic or are incompatible with international norms of human rights is ingrained in its SSR agenda. In actuality, not only are informal or traditional structures intact and functioning, but they also present the most viable option

to promote security and stability in some areas. For instance, most Afghans continue to look to informal justice structures and norms to resolve grievances; however, donors supporting the judicial reform process did not launch initiatives to reconcile the formal and informal legal systems until 2005.

The legacy of repression and abuses by the Iraqi security forces under Saddam Hussein compelled the U.S. to adopt a policy that favoured the reinvention of the sector. The dissolution of the Iraqi military in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Ba'athist regime, an element of the de-Ba'athification campaign, was the centrepiece of this strategy. Critics of this controversial decision hold that retaining the Iraqi army could have avoided transforming 'hundreds of thousands of discharged soldiers into an armed and resentful opposition group' and helped to provide stability and jumpstart the reconstruction process (Fallows 2005:65). In a tacit recognition of the misguided nature of the move, the Coalition

began actively to recruit members of the former Iraqi armed forces, including junior officers, in 2005 (LaFranchi 2005). The failure of the U.S. to draw upon the large cadre of professional Iraqi troops and police untainted by the previous regime in the early phases of the

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reconstruction process demonstrated a lack of understanding of local political dynamics and set back the process. The U.S. approach to SSR in Iraq illustrates the proclivity of donors implementing SSR to float above political and socio-economic realities rather than engage and transform them. Not only

does this render the structures built by the process unsustainable and prone to collapse, but it can also create new sources of conflict through the alteration of existing power dynamics and the undermining of traditional modalities to resolve disputes.

### *Consensus building*

The two cases illustrate the tendency for external actors to rely on a narrow set of like-minded local elites as a conduit to implement reforms in the security sector. In both cases, the selection of local partners has too often been based on expediency rather than the imperative of fostering an inclusive process. In Afghanistan, the outcome of the Bonn Conference favoured the narrow ethnic-based leadership faction of the Northern Alliance, Shura-i Nezar, facilitating its assumption of control over the top security posts in the interim government. While the Karzai government would restore a semblance of ethnic balance in the cabinet by 2006, Shura-i Nezar's dominance of the security institutions during the formative period of the Bonn political process allowed it to embed its allies and patronage-based networks within the security architecture. Accordingly, in 2006 it continued to exert a disproportionate degree of influence over the security apparatus. In selecting local partners on the basis of military and political expediency, the international community institutionalised an ethnic imbalance in the security sector that undermined efforts to attain a broad-based consensus on reforms.

As in Afghanistan, Iraq's security sector has been ethnicised to a large degree. While Iraq's security forces nominally report to the central government, their composition and loyalty are typically dictated by the local political and ethnic context (Ripley 2004). The Kurdish Peshmerga in the north and Shi'a militias in the south have vastly different conceptions of their role and function in the new Iraqi security terrain. Where they converge is in their determination to safeguard and advance the interests of their ethnic or factional constituencies. The failure to foster a national ethos in the Iraqi security sector could ensure that in the long term the main contribution of the SSR process will be to enhance the military capability of Iraq's factional militias, thereby augmenting the likelihood of a civil conflict.

### *Addressing insecurity*

Ideally SSR is not designed to succeed in a security vacuum. Nor is it a mechanism to address the short-term causes of insecurity. The case studies demonstrate that the residual effects of conflict, if not addressed appropriately, can paralyse and distort reforms. Afghanistan has faced persistent and, in some areas, escalating levels of insecurity since the fall of the Taliban regime. Although the Coalition has maintained troop levels of between 15,000 and 20,000, its primary mission has been to destroy the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not to consolidate a particular type of peace. By contrast, the United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which by 2003 fell under the command of

NATO, was endowed with a stabilisation mandate. However, the lack of political will of the international community to expand the force beyond the confines of Kabul and its environs early in the post-conflict period circumscribed its ability to fulfil this role and missed a seminal opportunity to extend the reconstruction process from the centre to the periphery. Although NATO deployed a significant military contingent to the volatile south in 2006 to stem the escalating Taliban-led insurgency and fill the gap left by withdrawing U.S. forces, the onus for addressing the country's security dilemma continues to fall upon the SSR process, a burden it has proven incapable of carrying. The resultant pressurisation of the process has led to its acceleration and securitisation.

With international troop levels in Afghanistan insufficient to keep the peace, its fledgling security forces have been expected to fill the gap before they have developed the requisite capacity. Security force training schedules have been compressed and vetting processes compromised to deliver troops into the field more expeditiously, usually without the equipment or institutional support needed to fulfil their role. The result has been a police and military apparatus of limited operational effectiveness that is prone to corruption and factionalisation. Paradoxically, in an attempt to address the country's security dilemma rapidly, the SSR process has merely facilitated the criminalisation and factional infiltration of parts of the security sector, a phenomenon that has undermined the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

As is the case in Afghanistan, the greatest problem facing Iraq's SSR process is the adverse security situation. There is no precedent for an SSR process having been operationalised during a full-blown insurgency. It is in effect 'SSR under fire' (Slocombe 2004:231). The task entailed in the process is to create a security sector that is 'both immediately effective

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and permanently democratic and law-abiding', goals that may be incompatible (Slocombe 2004:235-236). The desire for quick results permeates the process. Initial U.S. planning assumed that they 'were going to build an army in a benign environment', but this was not to be the case (Shanker 2006). As

an internal Pentagon report stated: 'The first Iraqi Army infantry battalions finished basic training in early 2004 and were immediately required in combat without complete equipment' (Fallows 2005:72). The imperative of getting the incipient Iraqi security forces into the fight to relieve pressure on overstretched U.S. forces and expedite the conditions for a U.S. exit has had a corrosive effect on the force. Placing newly trained recruits into the battlefield is not the best way to hone their skills; on the contrary, it tends to erode discipline and undermine cohesiveness.

### *Human and institutional capacity*

Implementing complex reforms in the security sector that are, in effect, intended to create institutions that meet the standards of wealthy industrialised countries requires a high degree of existing institutional and human capacity. In Afghanistan, a quarter of a century of civil war destroyed much of the machinery of the state and severely depleted the country's human capacity. It is not surprising therefore that the government is beset by problems of bureaucratic inefficiency, disorganisation, corruption and clientelism.

While 10 years of sanctions and the two Gulf wars took a heavy toll on Iraq, a great deal of its infrastructure survived intact. In sharp contrast to Afghanistan, Iraq is endowed with abundant natural resources; however, its political and economic isolation over the past decade



contributed to the decay of its institutions, the deterioration of its professional class, and the decline of its education system, limiting what was once a large pool of highly skilled labour.

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bureaucracies of donor officials, international advisors and private security contractors have driven the process and donor funds have been disbursed unilaterally rather than through domestic budget channels or international trust funds. While such practices may accelerate the pace of reforms in the short term, they are

counter-productive in the long term as they fail to transmit the expertise and skills needed to operate reformed institutions once the international community disengages.

### *Stakeholder coordination*

Without effective sequencing and coordination in SSR agendas, advances made in one pillar of the process could be negated by inaction or failures in another (Lilly et al 2002:9). Coordination has proven to be problematic at various levels of the reform process in Afghanistan. Competing agendas and rivalries among donors, capacity deficits and mistrust between donors and the government, factional divisions within the government, and competition over scarce resources among donor agencies have disjointed the process. Paradoxically, the multi-sectoral donor support scheme established to facilitate the process has undermined efforts to promote vital synergies between its pillars; compartmentalising the process in this way engendered competition and turf wars among donors.

The corrosive effect of coordination deficits prompted the U.S. gradually to appropriate large parts of the SSR agenda. By early 2006, the U.S. was the largest funder of three of the five pillars of the process, and provided significant assistance to the remaining two. Although filling much needed funding gaps, this approach did not mitigate existing coordination problems. On the contrary, it created new faultlines of tension as the existing lead donors resisted the *de facto* U.S. colonisation of the process.

In Iraq, the coordination of external actors is not a major issue of concern as the Iraqi SSR process is, at its core, an enterprise directed unilaterally by the U.S. However, fostering coordination between U.S. agencies and among the fractious assemblage of Iraqi groups that form the government has been problematic. For instance, conspicuously few linkages have been developed between the interrelated programmes to stand up Iraq's nascent police service and to recreate the country's judicial system. Furthermore, the division of responsibilities between the ministries of the interior and defence has been highly ambiguous, leading to wasteful overlap and destructive inter-departmental competition (Cohen 2006). The predominant position of the U.S., whose commitment to SSR principles is tenuous, in the application of both the Iraqi and Afghan SSR programmes partly accounts for the failures of the model in each.

### *Long-term perspective*

SSR requires donors both to dedicate durable supplies of resources and attention to the process and assume a long-term perspective. However, both cases have exhibited a short-termist approach that could serve not only to unravel reforms in the long run but also stimulate renewed conflict. The pattern of the security force train-and-equip programmes

monopolising the SSR agenda, ignoring the civilian institutions mandated to manage them, exemplified the tactical rather than strategic outlook of the processes. Such an approach undermines the central principle of the SSR ideal: the imperative of ensuring the sector's accountability to civilian authority.

Epitomising the short-termist outlook of the Afghan SSR agenda is the issue of fiscal sustainability. In 2004-05, security expenditures equalled 494% of domestic revenues and 23 percent of GDP (World Bank 2005:42). Most of this spending represents direct investment of the international community outside the formal budget process. Even if the government meets its target of raising domestic revenue to 8% of GDP by 2010-11, it will still not be able to sustain such expenditures (GIRA 2006:56). When international support to the security sector inevitably diminishes in the coming years, the government will be left with a security apparatus that it cannot afford. This front-loading of assistance, intended to condense the process, could have the perverse effect of thrusting the state into a fiscal crisis.

While President Bush has repeatedly affirmed the commitment of the U.S. to keep military forces in Iraq for 'as long as necessary', the imposing costs of the occupation have prompted administration officials to hint of timelines for withdrawal. Advocates of withdrawal were emboldened in the wake of the defeat of the Republican Party in the 2006 U.S. Congressional elections, seen by some as a referendum on the Iraq war, and the release of the Iraq Study Group Report, which called for a phased redeployment of U.S. forces. Such notions are anathema to James Dobbins who asserts that 'the U.S. will only succeed in Iraq if it is willing to spend time establishing robust institutions and does not tie its departure to artificial deadlines' (Dobbins *et al* 2004:194). Slocombe warns that it is important to resist the temptation to look for a quick fix to the security situation that may undermine the project. He believes success requires that the security sector is not only 'strong enough to manage the nation's security but also fully responsive to Iraq's new legal and constitutional order and respectful of the rights of its people', which in a society with such a long legacy of authoritarianism may take a generation to achieve (Slocombe 2004:247).

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It is clear that new metrics are needed to assess the impact of the SSR process in complex post-conflict contexts. Although it is vital that the process is set on a solid foundation in its initial formative years, there

must be recognition that it is a long-term endeavour. In many ways, however, such an outlook is incompatible with donor practices and funding cycles, revealing the need for a fundamental reshaping of donor behaviour. Otherwise the SSR ideal will be unrealisable.

## Conclusion

The Afghan and Iraqi cases gave the SSR concept more visibility than ever before; the model was mainstreamed and embedded at the core of the state-building project in both. It is perhaps because of the unprecedented centrality of the model in the two cases that they demonstrate so clearly its inadequacy to succeed in complex post-conflict environments. Realising the principles and goals of the concept in such environments requires more than the reform or reconstruction of institutions but the transformation of norms and mindsets about security – something the current SSR model and donor aid practices have proven incapable of achieving. As Woodward notes, implementing SSR amid 'conditions of fundamental systemic transformation and profound human and state insecurity requires a conceptual framework quite distinct from that normally underlying

the sectoral aid policies of donors' (Woodward 2003). While the notion that SSR is 'context-specific' and must be tailored to meet local conditions is widely accepted among policy makers and practitioners, donors have yet to reconcile their own interests with the measures required to transform the individual security sectors of post-conflict states in accordance with the core principles of the SSR ideal.

Efforts to adapt the SSR agenda during implementation to meet the unique exigencies of post-conflict settings, such as a deterioration in security conditions, has invariably distorted the process, stripping it of its 'soft' security dimension in favour of a pragmatic, 'hard' security orientation. Compounding this problem are the often tenuous commitments to the fundamental principles of the SSR concept by some donors, such as the U.S., whose approach has been dictated more by its own security interests – prosecuting the war on

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**Strengthening state security forces without instilling democratic principles, erecting robust civilian oversight mechanisms and entrenching the rule of law ignores one of the core precepts upon which the SSR model is based – that state security forces left unchecked can be a source of, rather than a solution to, instability and insecurity.**

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terror – than by the goal of consolidating a durable peace. The securitisation of the process is clearly perceptible in Afghanistan and Iraq where initiatives to advance the rule of law and establish democratic controls over the sector have been overshadowed by efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the security forces through train-and-equip programmes reminiscent of Cold War-era forms of security assistance. Strengthening state security forces without instilling democratic principles, erecting robust civilian

oversight mechanisms and entrenching the rule of law ignores one of the core precepts upon which the SSR ideal is based – that state security forces left unchecked can be a source of, rather than a solution to, instability and insecurity. It creates the impression that the process is geared to 'containing' the threats posed by failed and post-conflict states rather than addressing the structural causes of instability and insecurity.

This is perhaps the crux of the dilemma facing the SSR model in the post-September 11 era. Whose security does it seek to advance? The model is built upon the principles of human security, but the Afghan and Iraqi agendas appear to be driven by external security interests rather than by advancing the security of individual Afghans and Iraqis. The two SSR agendas appear oriented to creating a situation of 'controlled insecurity' (Ivan Krastev quoted in Woodward 2003:279), preventing insecurity from spilling across their borders into the region and wider international community in the form of terrorism, organised crime and refugees rather than fostering the creation of democratically accountable institutions rooted to the rule of law.

States engaging with SSR will always have particularistic interests, but for the model to achieve its aims, those interests must be subordinated to the broader goal of durable peace. This requires a fundamental change in donor behaviour in post-conflict settings geared to meeting the preconditions outlined in this article. However, in cases such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where the geopolitical stakes are so high, re-orienting the goals and altering the 'business as usual' approach of donors will be an arduous task.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan (CSTC-A) official, Kabul, 24 June 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with German police project official, Kabul, 14 June 2006.

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