BUILDING SECURITY WHERE THERE IS NO SECURITY

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Abstract

Formal and accountable security systems are rare in many of the fragile states where the international community provides assistance. In most cases, individuals and communities create their own security mechanisms or accept compromised and unaccountable security provided by non-state actors. This article examines how such alternative security mechanisms have evolved in communities in two fragile states, Colombia and Liberia. The authors conclude that the ability of both state and non-state actors to provide security hinges on perceptions of the legitimacy of those providing security among the population at large. Systems that involve community representatives in managing security mechanisms are critical to developing this legitimacy. Without attention to this key element, programmes for security sector reform are unlikely to succeed.

Introduction

Life in many societies is defined by insecurity caused in part by a lack of formal public security. In more than a dozen countries, formal security mechanisms barely exist or are entirely absent (Fund for Peace 2005). In many others, there may be some formal security but it is often ineffective or available only in certain geographic areas. Some of these societies will receive assistance from the international community. Part of that assistance will focus on reforming public security mechanisms, most notably the police. Unfortunately, fragile states benefiting from international assistance too often revert to renewed violence despite the extensive efforts of the international community to establish or re-establish effective and responsive public security. Individuals and communities in such states are forced to take security into their own hands. They are often remarkably effective and creative in doing so. In these contexts, people find ways to minimise their vulnerability to violence by creating their own security mechanisms, such as community security teams. Sometimes they also initiate relationships with perpetrators of violence to avoid victimisation.

Improving local security is a critical step to consolidating peace in fragile states and creating conditions for sustainable development. Initial stages of both the reconciliation and reconstruction process are unlikely to receive buy-in if those who must participate feel insecure. Insecurity also discourages foreign direct investment and domestic investment in human capital and infrastructure, hindering the economic development required for improved incomes and quality of living and further frustrating attempts to address levels of poverty that have almost always contributed to frustrations and desperation that fed the violence and conflict in the first place.

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Strategies for stabilising and reforming fragile states are the subject of significant debate.[1] Many question the role and effectiveness of democracy as an important part of the process (Carothers 2006). Others believe that democratic functions are critical to stabilisation but often criticise the effectiveness of attempts to provide access to and participation in policy change (Bendaña 2003; Ghani *et al* 2006; Baranyi 2005). These critics often tie security to rebuilding a state with true legitimacy, and tie legitimacy to perceptions that leaders are acting in the best interests of constituents and that the government is responsive to their needs. They argue that 'the loss of legitimacy is the primary cause of the fragility and failure of states…the ultimate marker is the loss of legitimacy in the use of violence by the state' (Ghani *et al* 2006:101). Conversely, one of the first indications of regaining legitimacy is the use of public security mechanisms to meet the security needs of citizens.

This article examines security sector reform (SSR) at the most immediate and basic level – in communities beset by violence and largely abandoned by any effective state security mechanisms. Understanding what systems work when nothing else works, including informal, community-driven systems, can reveal valuable lessons for future SSR, particularly in contexts where indigenous strategies are effective and formal SSR has failed. Of special importance in this discussion are issues that affect the *responsiveness* of security mechanisms – a central goal of SSR. Conclusions here can inform the type of change necessary in governance of the security sector and the role of responsive democratic mechanisms in the security sector – the 'structural dimensions of peacebuilding' (Bendaña 2003:39) which are tied to building legitimacy.

An understanding of what works in the local context, and why it works, is important for another reason. Several commentators criticise top-down, centralised approaches to security reform and to rebuilding security mechanisms, a process which is almost always driven by Western models (Bendaña 2003; Baranyi 2005; Woodward 2005; Call 1997). These analysts fault the lack of investment in the domestic base of society and the tendency for old elites to be replaced by new elites who often have no more legitimacy or incentives to be responsive and devolve power than their predecessors.[2] The security models from stable and more developed societies and the tendency to build centralised security systems – often only because they were there before or because they present logistical advantages for the implementing agency – have not served the goals of stability. Legitimate, responsive and effective police forces are unfortunately the exception in fragile states that receive international assistance, and legitimacy of formal security, like all forms of governance, is typically linked to relevance to local needs – in turn suggesting a more 'bottom-up' approach to security that builds community buy-in.

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This article examines the development of informal mechanisms that people use to protect themselves from violence when the state cannot.[3] It briefly reviews recent analyses of the relationship between legitimacy and security reform, explores the development of informal security mechanisms in two communities struggling with the provision of public security, and finally discusses local, non-state mechanisms for security, incentives for increasing responsiveness in security forces and the need for decentralising reporting chains.

State Failure to Provide Security and the Development of Informal Security Mechanisms: Cases from Two Continents

The failure of state-sanctioned security services creates a vacuum which non-state armed groups often fill. Security is a fundamental requirement for any society that must be met by one means or another, and in most cases there is a clear link between effectiveness of an armed group in achieving equitable public safety and the perception of that group as useful and legitimate by the community and its key representatives. Rebel groups, militias and others operating outside the bounds of conventional law are sufficiently concerned to cultivate this perception of being legitimate and responsive to the needs of the community.

In the violent communities examined below, the community often sees formal security forces as impeding public security rather than serving it due to their predatory or heavy-handed behaviour (which in many cases was a factor in perpetuating conflict), lack of concern for the key aspects of safety in the community, or their effective absence. Non-state-sanctioned forces, such as militias or paramilitaries, often fill that void. In most cases, the non-sanctioned force will not serve the community evenly. It has its own agenda and a plan to consolidate power. It is in this context, where communities are caught between a deal with the devil and ineffective state-sanctioned security services, that programmes for security reform must help establish responsive and legitimate security functions (Neild 1999).

Residents of the communities examined address insecurity with a range of personal behaviour adjustments, some predictable and others less so. They move their homes to safer locations; improve physical security in their shelter; and cultivate relationships with key decision makers more readily than during less secure times. Each of these communities has also created organisational mechanisms to address insecurity. This analysis focuses on these mechanisms. Without effective formal security, people cobble together informal mechanisms that attempt to provide protection, sometimes in collaboration with state-sanctioned security services, and occasionally in spite of those services. The communities have also created mechanisms to reduce violence through resolving disputes and deterring crime. The leaders of these communities might agree, though, that the informal mechanisms they utilise do not begin to provide an adequate level of protection. Thus, these communities remain profoundly insecure and have a significant stake in SSR.

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SSR takes place in countries with a complex mix of social, cultural, economic and political forces and traditions. They are sufficiently distinct in important ways that make it hard to generalise usefully (Doornbos 2006). The cases studied come from two continents and there are significant differences in their culture, government structure, traditions, perceptions of the role of the state security apparatus, levels of conflict, structure of the organisations engaging in violence, and motives of those promoting violence. They do not represent all possibilities, but they are examples of the range of contexts in which SSR in fragile states must proceed.

Colombia: the struggle for credibility [4]

Colombia continues to suffer an internal armed conflict that has lasted more than four decades. The government faces two opposing leftist insurgent groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as a

right-wing paramilitary group, the United Self-defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). All three illegally armed groups (IAGs) finance their operations by drug trafficking, kidnapping and other forms of extortion.

As the Colombian government grows increasingly successful in combating the insurgents, reducing violence and regaining control of rural territories, IAGs expand their operations to urban and peri-urban areas, mostly among squatter settlements and poor communities. The lack of effective police presence in many of these areas forces communities and individuals to find non-state mechanisms to provide for their own security. IAGs are often welcomed, directly or indirectly, as a means to establish some type of order in a seemingly helpless situation. The takeover of communities by IAGs, however, generates additional violence. Although Colombia generally has a legitimate police force, its credibility and legitimacy are in question in certain parts of the country. Inadequate budgets and political pressure to ensure a presence elsewhere mean that state police typically have limited presence in the poorest neighbourhoods in urban areas, where the government has historically ignored needs. Police there often indiscriminately target poor residents as troublemakers or insurgents.[5] They have sometimes been attentive, but in ways that are predatory or exploitative, and have consequently lost credibility and effectiveness.

By establishing order and providing security services, IAGs gain traction in the communities they want to control for their own political and economic motives. IAGs are often welcomed by one faction of the community seeking to gain an advantage over another or by an entire community seeking 'protection', grateful for any force that reduces violence. Information obtained in the communities examined suggests that most inhabitants believe IAGs are often more effective protectors of vulnerable populations than the police because the police are largely absent. This is due to their limited capacity and, since police are poorly paid, the incentives they have to protect wealthier communities first.

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Some IAGs, motivated by the need for legitimacy, punish socially unacceptable behaviour such as drug abuse and child abuse, and the resulting reduction in violent behaviour becomes the basis for IAGs' legitimacy. In the Soacha neighbourhood of Altos de Cazucá, child abuse is often dealt with directly by the IAGs. Police and the Colombian Family Welfare Institute are rarely called in, as the IAG response in identifying, judging and punishing a suspected child abuser is immediate. The suspect is punished physically, forced to leave the community, or killed.

IAGs provide protection, fill a gap in security needs where formal police presence is lacking and seek legitimacy to reduce opposition. But this legitimacy is limited. They typically act with impunity and there is rarely community oversight or meaningful input into the security process. The rules enforced by IAGs serve the economic and political needs of IAG leaders, which usually involve illicit income generation.[6] The lack of formal policing creates conditions that invite IAGs into urban slums, further reducing police presence and generating more violence as IAGs establish control. Many local government officials, health and education providers and NGOs refuse to work in high-risk, IAG-controlled areas. The abandonment of areas controlled by IAGs reduces government relevance and legitimacy, and compounds social and economic problems, spurring yet more violence. In Soacha, the police are often aware of the active presence of IAGs in certain neighbourhoods, but maintain their distance. Except for periods of extreme violence when community outsiders such as the Colombian

press and United Nations organisations demanded their presence, the police have paid little attention to neighbourhoods like Altos de Cazucá and the *comunas* of Cali.

In these abandoned and conflict-ridden areas, some communities have begun to develop mechanisms for building more responsive security mechanisms. In Cali, one of Colombia's most violent cities, the Council for Development, Coexistence and Security (DESEPAZ)[7] provides training in personal security, first aid and organisational support to youth 'community security teams' (CSTs). The teams provide limited security to communities; in some cases they provide additional services such as recycling and park maintenance, alternatives welcomed by unemployed youth seeking recognition and prestige. The CST initiative has become a model for similar programmes in other municipalities and is supported financially and in other ways by municipal governments and NGOs that recognise the difficulties police face in providing security in marginal communities where support for the police is minimal, security environments are complex, and security needs are great.[8]

In some neighbourhoods, such as Nelson Mandela on the outskirts of Cartagena, mature members of the community form the CSTs. In others, such as those in Cali, CSTs are comprised of youths, many of them former members of street gangs. CSTs focus on prevention, escorting vulnerable members of the community, serving as first responders in emergencies and providing a presence on the street that deters crime. In most cases, CSTs are encouraged to avoid roles in direct arrest or violent intervention and are not authorised to carry arms.

The CSTs have other positive impacts. As police are motivated to re-assert their presence in a community, the CSTs provide tools for that re-engagement. Police cautiously use CSTs as their eyes and ears and engage them as guides to developing legitimacy in the community. As they engage with CSTs, police develop a more nuanced view of the youth. Less abusive police behaviour in some communities is sometimes attributed to the working relationships that police build with CSTs.[9] With reduced violence and a more organised community, residents coax teachers, health workers and other social development organisations, such as international NGOs, to work in the area. This in turn motivates police to increase patrols in the area in order to support these individuals and organisations.

Where the CST system is effective, success is primarily due to the ability of teams to gain support from the community, reduce violence and bridge the gap between local police and the community, allowing police to re-enter the community and regain legitimacy. In Altos de Cazucá, the community expressed a desire to have a police presence and to build a positive relationship with the police. Once a dialogue began, police increased their presence and attended activities such as soccer tournaments and other community events. Communication improved as relationships were built and risks reduced. Renewed police presence in the *comunas* of Cali also began with providing security for local sports and cultural events. Several months later, police now have more frequent

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street presence. Interviews indicated significantly improved interaction with youth and residents. Increased police effectiveness in these neighbourhoods is thus seen to be the consequence of separate processes that are mutually reinforcing. The re-engagement of police is motivated by a combination of at least three factors: first, concerns within the police force of perceptions of illegitimacy and ineffectiveness (particularly when this perception is held by international organisations); second, positive interaction with residents that builds

understanding of the dynamics of violence in the community, enlists community members in addressing violence, and increases police effectiveness; and third, a change in police leadership. CSTs must operate in delicate balance with the agendas of IAGs and minimise the threat to IAG dominance or control over arms corridors and income from drug trafficking. As CSTs establish some civilian community control over security, and as police expand their presence in the community, it becomes necessary to negotiate degrees of influence between IAGs, CSTs and police.

Lofa County, Liberia: searching for security following destruction

Wedged between Guinea and Sierra Leone in northern Liberia, Lofa County was a principal battlefield in Liberia's intermittent 14-year civil conflict. During Charles Taylor's reign as warlord and president, multiple rebel movements formed in an effort to unseat him. Some of them based their operations in Lofa County and drew heavily from its residents to fill their ranks. Lofa County has been at times devoid of formal security services and mechanisms, and insecurity depopulated its communities during the conflict. When the fighting subsided in 2003, Lofa was decimated. Its residents returned slowly. No reliable statistics exist, but local estimates in May 2004 were that only 10-20% of pre-war inhabitants had returned home. More returnees trickled back as the region stabilised and formal security services – including a Pakistani-led United Nations peacekeeping contingent, United Nations Civilian Police and the reconstituted Liberian National Police – were put in place. Many communities are now close to or exceed their pre-war populations.

As soon as widespread hostilities ceased, individuals and communities were forced to find ways of providing their own security as the potential for violence remained high. The threats came from within and without as rebels aligned with Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) remained active, ex-combatants grew increasingly frustrated with the pace and rewards of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, and ethnic and religious tensions flared. In Lofa, these tensions exist primarily between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group, often perceived as 'outsiders' due to their prominence in neighbouring Guinea, and mainly Christian ethnic groups such as the Lorma and Kpelle. Mandingos are thought to have comprised the majority of LURD combatants,[10] and were responsible for many atrocities committed in Lofa, with Lorma and Kpelle often the victims. LURD has sought to take credit for 'liberating' Liberia from Taylor and former LURD fighters are often frustrated that they do not receive the credit they think they deserve, particularly from members of other ethnic groups. Much of Liberia has never enjoyed responsive, legitimate formal security services. Under President Samuel Doe (1980-1990), the security services behaved in a predatory manner, seeking to create fear among the population in order to tighten political control and prolong his reign. Taylor used the security services in a similar manner during his period in power.

Lofa communities have sometimes relied on the militias of warlords to provide a modicum of order and protection, though what they receive is often just the opposite. As villages were repopulated in 2004 and 2005, remnants of LURD, which still enjoyed significant influence in Lofa, assumed policing roles. LURD 'commanders' presided over the main towns of Zorzor and Voinjama and several of the larger villages. Each commander was surrounded by dozens of young combatants (some commanders were quite young themselves) who were often under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Several communities derived their security from association with

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commanders, probably under the assumption that with the LURD troops in the community they were less likely to fall victim to LURD attacks, which still occurred occasionally. But the presence of these young, often well-armed combatants under little effective oversight was a security risk in itself. In the town of Konia, residents rarely complained publicly of the combatants' behaviour and addictions (although they did so privately) and seemed to appreciate the relative order that accompanied their presence. The local commander maintained a positive relationship with the community, even though his subordinates were frequently disruptive. Konia was not the home community for these ex-combatants as part of the LURD strategy was to place combatants in communities where they did not have family, so as not to compromise their effectiveness (and sometimes ruthlessness).

In many communities, pre-war chiefs remained in Monrovia or in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) for a variety of reasons, including security and benefits they received there.[11] The chiefs who replaced them were often weak leaders in comparison. LURD commanders stepped into the leadership vacuum. In some communities, the commander took on a civilian leadership role himself, doubling as a quasi-chief. Empirical evidence suggests, however, that commanders were largely ineffective in this role; while they probably possessed rudimentary military leadership skills, they lacked public management skills and the respect of the community usually accorded a traditional leader.[12]

In anticipation of disputes between returnees that could both slow the return and trigger renewed violence, in 2004 a United States-based NGO, CHF International, began a programme among eastern Lofa communities to support local adjudication mechanisms. The programme assists communities that want to form community peace councils (CPCs) whose 10 or 12 members are responsible for mediating in low-level disputes with the potential to escalate. CPC members are chosen by their peers in a transparent process that is guided, but not directed, by CHF. In most cases, selection is by community consultation rather than formal elections. The objective is for the ethnic composition of the CPCs to be roughly representative of the ethnic make-up of the community. This obtains in most CPCs. They deal frequently with land and property disputes and ethnic tensions, but also intervene in domestic issues and accusations of theft, occasionally make citizens' arrests and deliver accused criminals to the nearest formal security service (usually the UN peacekeeping force). CHF's observations suggest that CPC members have gained increasing respect within their communities for settling potentially divisive issues and are perceived as an important stabilising element. Legitimacy is also derived partly from an affiliation with an international entity. The fact that CPC members are often seen in the community meeting with personnel from international and Liberian NGOs brought in to conduct trainings, as well as the shirts and signs they receive that associate them with international organisations, builds respect for and legitimacy of the CPCs.

The authors observed in the field that in 2004 and 2005, both militia and CPC members derived their legitimacy from an ability to provide a modicum of security, whereas the state provided none (the most important security provider by far was and continues to be the UN peacekeeping force). Interviews indicate that most Lofa residents do not expect the state to provide security and there is a profound sense of detachment from national government. Some Lofa residents are ready to accept security services, even minimal and flawed services, provided by alternatives to

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the state. As non-state security providers gain legitimacy, it becomes increasingly difficult for the state to reassert its role in the provision of security. The challenge for Liberian

security services in Lofa, and likely elsewhere, is to gain legitimacy and the trust of the population and show that they can provide security to a standard above that of entities that have stepped into the traditional role of the state.

Alternatives to State Security – Learning from Non-state Solutions

State security has lost legitimacy in the Liberian and the Colombian communities examined in the study. The residents built alternative mechanisms to address insecurity that the state could not or chose not to address. Fundamentally, residents increase security by resolving disputes or through deterring violence.

Resolving disputes

Observers of communities in Lofa County are struck by how well most residents understand the importance of containing the potential for violence. This led first to acceptance of a security mechanism imposed by LURD, and then to the success and acceptance of the CPCs. In some communities, adjudication has become a useful tool for addressing insecurity: such community-based adjudication provides a mechanism that avoids the need for parties to seek redress through violent action or from IAGs. While this does not guarantee that peaceful methods of dispute resolution will prevail, it reduces the probability that IAGs will be used and perceived as legitimate, as is the case in Liberia. The weight of community acceptance of the decisions of the CPCs has become a way to enforce rules without the sanctioned use of violence, and can reduce the legitimacy of IAGs' role as a quasi-police force.[13]

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Adjudication mechanisms in the Colombian communities examined were never developed far enough to reduce the need for policing as they were in Liberia. This was due primarily to lack of space for a mechanism like CPCs to develop and little tradition of local adjudication through chiefs or elders. In Lofa County, there was a strong community understanding of the need for a mechanism to reduce violence, but there was also an international peacekeeping force that discouraged IAGs from asserting control or co-opting CPCs.

Deterring violence

Preventing violence is a critical need in fragile states. An enforcement mechanism is required, and police usually play this role. In the communities examined, police are sometimes perceived as professional but are often ineffective and sometimes predatory. When community leaders began to reclaim some democratic control of public security, they did not turn initially to police. In Lofa, police have historically never been a truly effective force for stability; their limited presence has been more negative than positive. In Colombia, police have been marginally effective in the most violent neighbourhoods for many years.[14] At the time of writing, some police leaders are beginning to work through the CSTs to re-establish their relationships with community leaders and regain legitimacy. Those interviewed in recent months in the violent neighbourhoods examined acknowledge renewed police presence, significantly reduced police paranoia and an increased acceptance of police as role models for young men. In many cases, the CST

mechanism is playing a role in the redevelopment of the improved relationships between police and the community.

In both cases, especially Colombia, there are clear links between the effectiveness of an armed group in achieving equitable public safety, the communities' perception of them as useful and legitimate, and their concern to maintain and cultivate this perception. In both cases, centralised formal police forces have been ineffective, are often corrupt, and are not considered legitimate and fair enforcers of decisions that lead to true public safety. While the effectiveness of an IAG is based partly on fear of and respect for its capacity for violence, communities sometimes trust them simply because they know what to expect from the IAG. In the end, communities may trust the more responsive informal forces more than they do the formal ones – a trust that is relative to the ability of the informal force to impose a consistent, albeit undemocratic, regimen and gain legitimacy in the community. In the Colombia case, the police find the mechanisms created by the community leadership useful in re-establishing their effectiveness, but the communities continue to be wary of the motives and behaviour of police. As noted, work with CSTs has sometimes led to a more nuanced perception among police of these violent communities, and that perception can enhance police responsiveness, improve police behaviour and instigate a degree of reform in the police force.

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Security Sector Reform: Drivers and Incentives

Whether or not it is sanctioned by the state, the link between perceived legitimacy, effectiveness of a security force and general good order is emphasised in recent literature. A population will try to break the rules less frequently and rarely resort to violence if it feels that the public security force regulating its behaviour is legitimate (Tyler 2004; Hawdon et al 2003; Neild 1999:33-34).

In the communities examined, residents have improvised systems (CSTs and CPCs) to provide security. The systems they create rely on local leaders whose decisions are respected by virtue of tradition and/or the perception of their fairness and integrity and nearly always because of a pressing need for this sort of mechanism. In some cases, IAGs themselves are such a system and the IAG typically seeks legitimacy through acceptance of its role by local leadership. In these communities, IAGs arise because the criminal leadership seeks control either over economic resources or in the political conflict, but the mechanisms that hold them accountable to the community are tenuous.

Based on experience in a range of fragile states, the authors believe that most, if not all, local leaders would appreciate a state-sponsored security solution that works; conversations with these leaders suggest they do not want to be burdened with the responsibility of managing community security. A state response is the preferred solution, but most of these leaders also assume that the state will not provide acceptable public security, and many accept that they must learn to manage security concerns or build mechanisms outside of the state to prevent conflict. It is in the climate of loss of state legitimacy that security reform must operate. In the vacuum created, leaders and their communities create systems that suffice. They also build expectations about responsiveness and legitimacy that the state security apparatus, should it re-appear, will be compelled to meet. Reform efforts seeking to reinstate state security must pay closer attention to how and where legitimacy and accountability is lost and can be regained.

Keeping what works: incorporating non-state structures

Systems and mechanisms: Communities create new mechanisms or adapt traditional systems that play a significant role in managing security. Where systems are in place to manage local security, they can be important in shaping a sustainable state mechanism for providing security. Often they work in ways not immediately apparent to planners, who may assume that all societies can successfully adapt Western models for security management. But it is important to understand where traditional systems and consensus are critical to mechanisms that reduce the need for enforcement and such understanding may come only from the local population or from experts with significant experience in a particular region or with a specific group. Planners cannot assume that because a society is impoverished, chaotic, violent or lacking in formal government or leadership there is no mechanism to reduce violence. Such mechanisms almost always exist, and understanding how they work is important for creating a system that can use the dynamics of security mechanisms that are understood and accepted in the community to make imposed systems (both police and justice) more effective. Early assessments and programmes must be sensitive to the mechanisms that communities cobble together and take into account the dynamics that drive the choice of leadership, processes, and types of control of the mechanism. In both cases examined, a set of leaders, skills and a mechanism with legitimacy is in place that reduces insecurity. In the case of CSTs, police are beginning to integrate these groups into their attempts to reassert control, a process that is also bringing reform to their own approach.

Local security management capacity: Historically, local leaders have been encouraged to leave security management to police and the state decision makers. In the cases examined, local leaders learned how to manage informal security services so that they reduce predatory behaviour and play useful roles in reducing crime. They developed skills to play a management role mostly without the benefit of training or encouragement. Even though the need is well recognised by analysts, local civilian leadership skills for managing security issues are too often left off the current menus of governance training typically provided by the international community (Neild 1999:37). In most cases, local leaders struggle with the perception that they do not have the right to build new mechanisms or even take a role in a system that addresses security. Building the capacity of local leaders to demand police responsiveness is often the most neglected component of reform. The confidence of local leaders to assume a role in security is critical to the success of supporting sustainable reform. This confidence is built through development of skills in managing relationships with police, managing rules of engagement and instilling codes of conduct that raise expectations and demands by both police and citizens. Where civilian leadership of CSTs developed the confidence and ability to engage with police in the violent Colombian neighbourhoods described above, they brought police back in a way that increased their effectiveness and supported reform of attitudes within the police force.

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Building legitimacy through structural change

Recent attempts to reform the security sector show a poor track record in building effectiveness and responsiveness in insecure communities. Historically, police respond to decision makers at the national level, as incentives are attached to the needs of elites.[15]

There is rarely much structural incentive for police to respond to citizens of communities like those examined here. In Altos de Cazucá, police began to pay attention only when the press and international community began to demand that something be done about the intense violence. People easily perceive whose agendas the police support, and the legacy of centralised police control plays a significant role in the dynamic that erodes trust between police and communities.

In attempts to remake security services, police reporting structures continue to be set up to respond to central authority, and much attention is paid to developing 'professional' police officers who are not tempted to become the tools of local bosses. These programmes go forward under the assumption that professionalism can be learned through training and that legitimacy of the police force will follow. This is a questionable assumption. Analysts link the lack of police responsiveness to reduced accountability to local leadership (Hills 2002; Green 1997; Call 2003; Neild 2001). In the communities examined, it seems that the closer the leader is to a community, the more important legitimacy is for him or her. Supporting this legitimacy is a key focus for local state-sanctioned civilian leaders and non-state-sanctioned leaders in a way that it is not for national leaders.

Assumptions about the ability to deal with corruption through both centralised reporting structures and professional police training ignore the history and force of incentives in systems where police have been used as tools of central rulers and where positions in the security apparatus are a means to increase income through corruption. These are patterns that reform must address (this is, incidentally, not a condition confined to the developing world).[16] 'Demand-driven' policies for reform are gaining increasing credence (Call 2003). Even those opposing decentralisation in favour of the presumably enhanced professionalisation of a centralised national police force recognise the importance of changing 'management' systems to increase responsiveness (Bayley 2001). Others argue that police forces that report to local leadership have become tools of local elites with agendas that do not serve all members of the community equally. Instead, they are often used in personal power struggles. This is clearly a danger and it has been part of the impetus behind continued support for centralised reporting structures that are assumed to be less susceptible to abuse.

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While decentralised reporting is worth considering, many aspects of centralisation may be important to retain, not the least of which is a national standard for police behaviour (Bayley 2001). In general, it is critical to establish structural mechanisms that both encourage local responsiveness and allow democratic local leadership to monitor predatory activity. A combination of reporting that sets a standard for professional behaviour and creates incentives for police to respond to and work closely with local leadership might be most appropriate. Such an approach should also be informed by systems that emphasise greater engagement with and responsiveness to the community as an important component of professionalisation (Green 1997).

A recent example of this approach is the Local Community Safety and Crime Prevention Councils (LCS & CPCs) created in Kosovo in 2004 and composed of local representatives from civil administration, the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR), civil society groups, ethnic

groups, religious communities, the business community, youth and others interested in reducing crime and improving public security. The LCS & CPCs do not report to Kosovo central authorities, but rather to the Kosovo Community-based Policy Steering Group, which is responsible for coordinating and supporting community-based policing and other community security initiatives. Complementary to this structure, the NGO Saferworld and the Kosovar NGO Forum for Civic Initiatives collaborated in a process bringing community members and local authorities together to build expectations and mechanisms for police to work in conjunction with local authorities in identifying and addressing community safety and security concerns in the town of Germova.

The success of a more decentralised approach to state security reform rests on the maturation of democratic culture and the capacity of citizens to buy into and demand responsive and accountable governance capable of managing local police. It also requires that responsive media and other elements of democratic society function reasonably well, and many analysts note that where reform is successful, it supports structures that promote local responsiveness through the creation of democratic skills and culture. (Green 1997; Neild 2001; Zeigler & Neild 2002; Prillaman 2003). The communities examined here cannot be said to have developed a mature democratic culture, but there is tremendous local demand for security to which national mechanisms have not been responsive. These communities will put in place, or allow IAGs to put in place, some form of security. In both cases, the need for security has also driven attempts to develop a responsive local democratic mechanism to provide management and accountable oversight.

Analysts often debate the relationship between a truly democratic state and SSR. Is stability a prerequisite for moving forward with democratic development? Is SSR a prerequisite for establishing a force that can create sufficient stability? Or must a society see truly democratic change before the security sector can be reformed? This 'chicken-or-egg' discussion assumes that one of these can be put in place first – a discussion that is too often divorced from reality. Increased stability, democratic development and SSR must all occur, if not simultaneously, then at least in a three-partner dance in which one first takes the lead, then another, but all must move together for the dance to finish.

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Evidence from the cases examined highlights the importance of legitimacy of security services in the eyes of the communities they serve, whether or not the services are state-sanctioned. The CSTs and CPCs discussed above have developed strategies to achieve that legitimacy; efforts at SSR must be guided by the value of achieving similar legitimacy. The cases examined also point to the importance of finding ways to support decentralised democratic mechanisms and SSR simultaneously, illustrated by the LCS & CPCs mechanism in Kosovo. Ultimately, they suggest problems with approaches that build capacities in these two areas separately, at different periods of a development process, and without substantial community engagement.

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Endnotes

[1] For the purposes of this article we accept DFID's definition of a fragile state, one in which the government 'cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor' (DFID 2005).

[2] See articles in *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*: 1:2 of 2003.

[3] The authors thank Jonathan Allen of CHF/Colombia for his input and suggestions, as well as the hundreds of conflict-affected individuals interviewed.

[4] Descriptions and assertions in these case studies, where not otherwise referenced, are taken from a series of informal interviews and observations by CHF International staff. In Colombia, informal interviews were conducted in Comuna 13 and Comuna 15 in Cali and Altos de Cazucá in Soacha. In both cities, CHF built credibility with the communities and worked alongside the IAGs over a lengthy period, allowing it important access to information, viewpoints and concerns without having to conduct formal interviews which would have been seen as intrusive and often too dangerous to conduct. In Liberia, interviews were conducted in more than a dozen communities in Lofa County in 2004 and 2005, soon after cessation of hostilities. Most of the interviews were with returned internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, many of whom are ex-combatants. In both countries, the authors have had numerous discussions with IDPs, refugees, ex-combatants, policy makers and leading intellectuals. Information presented in the article is also based on discussions with Colombian and Liberian CHF International staff, who daily work closely with residents of the communities examined. In discussions with community members, IDPs, refugees and CHF staff, bias is taken into account and information provided by the interviewee is cross-referenced through other discussions for accuracy.

[5] IDPs are in an especially challenging position. Displaced by violence in the rural areas, many arrive in urban areas under suspicion of collaborating with the very armed groups they have tried to escape.

[6] IAGs in areas where their control is tenuous have high mortality rates as groups constantly battle for control. Members find themselves caught between expectations of the IAG's codes and the desire to move out of the dangerous lifestyle. Leaving an IAG is dangerous. A senior CHF staffer in Cali estimates that 85% of the hundreds of IAG members that he has interviewed would prefer to opt out if a safe alternative was available.

[7] *Consejera de Desarrollo, Convivencia y Paz*. This organisation was set up in Cali to address issues that erode peace and coexistence, and inspired other Colombian communities to develop similar programmes.

[8] CHF International worked with four CSTs in Cali and Medellin. CSTs exist in other urban areas, but are often informal entities. No accurate count exists of CSTs nationwide.

[9] See Skolnick (1999) for a discussion of how 'para-police' can improve police effectiveness and morale.

[10] See the Global Security website, www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lurd.htm

[11] Interview with the chief of Zorzor town during a trip to the Maimu IDP camp, 2005.

[12] This was observed to be true particularly in Saliyea town, where a LURD leader played the role of chief for a short period but was clearly ineffective (and seemed to have an acute drug habit).

[13] This discussion uses the term 'rules' to refer to the guidelines, regulations and edicts that guide the activities of informal public security forces as well as informal adjudication mechanisms.

[14] This is not uncommon in the experience of the past two decades. The reasons why a professional police force loses its credibility and professionalism are varied, and include the breakdown of the government that supports them (as in Somalia in 1992-3), financial pressures combined with potential profit from extortion, or political pressure to overlook human rights abuses as in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s (Fernando 1999). Professionalism is often the goal of post-conflict police training, but is an ill-defined concept (Neild 1999).

[15] A centralised state police force charged with local security issues is common in most developing nations. Stable developed nations have both centralised and decentralised policing structures.

[16] It is not difficult to find instances of police corruption in the developed world. Accounts of bribery investigations in Seattle can be found in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporter* of 26 July 2003; corruption in the New York City Police Department was the focus of the Knapp Commission created by New York Mayor John Lindsay.

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