

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

That the subject of governance in the security sector is being addressed in the context of rebuilding Afghanistan is, I believe, a reflection of two important shifts in development thinking over the last decade. First, it is now widely acknowledged that without a safe and secure environment, there can be neither sustainable, poverty reducing economic and social development nor political development. Additionally, there is growing appreciation of the fact that sound governance of the security sector is critical to achieving that safe and secure environment.

This paper begins by defining three concepts central to sound governance in the security sector: security sector; security community; and sound governance in the security sector. It then identifies seven of the key issues for external actors interested in promoting sound security-sector governance: security as a public good; comprehensive approach to security sector transformation; coherent external interventions; commitment of national leadership to a reform process; local ownership and capacity; confidence building measures; and importance of a long-term perspective. The paper concludes by considering encouraging the development of a contextual approach to external assistance.

KEY CONCEPTS

In thinking about how best to achieve democratic governance of the security sector, it is important to define several concepts: security sector, security community, sound governance in the security sector.

Security Sector and Security Community¹

The totality of the actors that affect the security of the state and its population constitutes the “security community.” The official actors within the security community comprise the “security sector.” The security sector can be divided into three main groupings: organizations authorized to use force; civil management and oversight bodies; and justice and law enforcement institutions. Two non-statutory groups of actors affect the ability of the state to create a safe and secure environment and are thus part of the security community: non-statutory security force institutions and non-statutory civil society bodies. Box 1 lists the groups most commonly found in each of these five categories but is not intended to be exhaustive.

Not all of these actors have as their primary objective enhancing state and individual security. Rather, as in the case of warlords, criminal gangs, and repressive or predatory governments, their existence and activities are a major cause of insecurity. Additionally, the same type of actor can play different roles, even within the same

¹ This definition derives from Ball, Nicole, J. ‘Kayode Fayemi, ‘Funmi Olonisakin, and Rocklyn Williams, with Martin Rupiya, *Security Sector Governance*, forthcoming and Dylan Hendrickson and Andrzej Karkoszka, “The security sector and the challenges of its transformation,” in *World Armament and Disarmament. Sipri Yearbook 2002*, London: Oxford University Press, 2002 Chapter 4.

country. For example, there is a tendency to view civil society organizations as an unalloyed “good” while private security firms are generally viewed in a negative light. In fact, both can enhance the security of states and their populations and both can undermine it.



Sound Governance in the Security Sector

Sound governance in the security sector implies that the sector is a) guided by the principles of democratic governance, b) controlled by the civil authorities, and c) operates according to a peacebuilding approach to security. Table 1 summarizes the principles of democratic governance as applied to the security sector and the main objectives of a peacebuilding approach to security.

A country where the security sector is well governed exhibits the following characteristics:

Table 1. Defining Good Governance in the Security Sector and a Peacebuilding Approach to Security

Main Objectives of a Peacebuilding Approach to Security	Principles of Good Governance in the Security Sector
<p>A peacebuilding approach to security is based on the recognition that although guaranteeing the security of the state against external aggression remains an important consideration in the 21st century, many societies face threats that either derive from internal causes or are transnational and collective in nature. Security policy should, therefore, be focused on finding nonviolent solutions to disputes at the sub-national, national, regional and international levels. As far as the roles of the security forces are concerned, they should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protection against external aggression. ▪ Maintenance of law and order. ▪ Ability to counter internal threats to the constitutional order. ▪ Ability to participate in regional defense; ▪ Protection of borders and national waters. ▪ Ability to use security forces to promote foreign policy objectives, including participation in peace operations. ▪ Creation of an environment conducive to poverty-reducing, environmentally sound development strategies. ▪ Attention to regional and subregional issues that may create conflict such as AIDS, allocation of water resources, citizenship, and transnational crime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accountability of security forces to elected civil authorities and civil society. ▪ Adherence of security forces to international law and domestic constitutional law. ▪ Transparency security-related matters; ▪ Adherence of security sector to the same principles of public-expenditure management as non-security sectors. ▪ Acceptance of clear hierarchy of authority between civil authorities and security forces, clear statement of mutual rights and obligations between civil authorities and security forces. ▪ Capacity among civil authorities to exercise political control and constitutional oversight of security sector. ▪ Capacity within civil society to monitor security sector and provide constructive input into political debate on security policies. ▪ Political environment conducive to an active role on the part of civil society. ▪ Access of security forces to professional training consistent with requirements of democratic societies. ▪ High priority accorded to regional and sub-regional peace and security by policy makers.

- **Accountable and professional security forces.** While professional security forces are, by themselves, no guarantee that democratic, civil control will be established or maintained, building the professional capacity of the security forces is a critical part of the equation. Professionalization should encompass doctrinal development, skill development, rule orientation, internal democratization, and technical modernization. It should emphasize the importance of accountability both to the elected civil authorities and to civil society and the necessity of adhering to democratic principles and the rule of law. Officers need to possess a strong management capacity to ensure that the armed forces operate in a manner consistent with democratic practices. Doctrine, skills, and materiel should support a peacebuilding approach to security.

- **Capable and responsible civil authorities.** It is vital that the relevant civil authorities in the executive and legislative branches of government have the capacity to develop security policy and manage the security sector. To begin with, the relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions must exist and function proficiently -- including ministries of defense, justice, and internal or home affairs; independent ombudsmen's offices; civilian review boards; penal and correction institutions, legislatures; budget offices, audit units, and finance ministries. They must also act responsibly, in accordance with democratic principles and the rule of law.
- **High priority to human rights protection.** Respect for human rights must exist among both civilians and security-force personnel. While the security forces are frequently the bodies responsible for carrying out violations of human rights, they are not infrequently working at the behest of civilian élites who seek to maintain or acquire positions of power. Additionally, both civilians and security force personnel may promote the creation of paramilitary groups whose function is to repress the civilian population or specific subgroups of civilians and prevent significant political or economic change. The creation of local militias in East Timor, Aceh and Irian Jaya by the Indonesian armed forces, the TNI, is an example of this latter type of activity.²
- **Capable and responsible civil society.** Civil society encompasses a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, professional associations (including trade unions), research and advocacy bodies, the media and religious groups. The importance of an effective civil society in promoting economic and political development is well established. Civil society also must be capable of monitoring security sector policies and activities and acting as a resource for the security community.

In its monitoring or watchdog function, civil society can engage the government on topics such as overall defense policy, expenditure and procurement proposals and decisions; the doctrine, size, structure and deployment of different security forces; training of foreign security forces; and, where relevant, the sale of weapons or weapon technology abroad and foreign deployments of national troops. Such independent analyses are meant not only to challenge government policies but also to inform the debate and provide useful input into decision-making processes. The media often play an important role in transmitting new ideas and encouraging debate.

Civil society acts as a resource for the security sector in a number of ways. Most fundamentally, it can provide a pool of knowledgeable individuals to fill government positions in relevant agencies. It also can provide specialized skills, such as human

² See for example, International Crisis Group, *Aceh: A Slim Chance for Peace*, Indonesia Briefing, Jakarta/Brussels, 27 March 2002, www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=596; International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: Ending Repression in Irian Jaya*, Asia Report no. 23, Jakarta/Brussels, 20 September 2001, <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=414>.

rights trainers, legal experts, financial experts and the like, either as adjuncts to specific programs or as military civil-affairs advisers. Civilians should also have the capacity to staff review boards and other oversight bodies, conduct investigations for the government in research and analysis units, and take part in special panels created by the government or by quasi-governmental institutions to examine specific policy options and decisions.

In carrying out these various activities, civil society must act responsibly, for example by avoiding the pursuit of narrow, sectarian objectives and ensuring that their operations are fiscally accountable.

- **Transparency.** Access to information on a broad range of subjects is critical to the effective and efficient operation of the public sector. Information about security policies, planning and resourcing is, however, often tightly held, including such basic information as the number of soldiers under arms, the type of weaponry in a country's arsenal, and the share of the country's budget allocated to the security sector. Although there are legitimate reasons to keep some information about the security sector confidential, basic information should be accessible both to the civil authorities and to members of the public. The need for confidentiality should never be allowed to undermine civil oversight.

Insufficient transparency risks undermining economic stability by facilitating the misallocation of resources. Therefore, expenditures on the armed forces, police, intelligence and other security-related items must be treated like other forms of public expenditure in terms of planning, preparation and legislative approval. All security-related expenditures must be on-budget and security budgets should be subject to rigorous audits. Finance ministries and budget offices should have the capacity to analyze security spending. The legislature must have an independent capacity to evaluate the security environment and budget requests from the security forces. Legislators need to have access to relevant information in a timely fashion so that they can analyze and debate proposals before their adoption. Budget and audit documents should be in the public domain. Even information that is properly kept confidential must be shared with some members of the executive and legislative branches of government, and mechanisms need to be established to enable such reviews to occur.

Similarly, the security planning process should be as transparent as possible. Security policies should be subject to legislative debate and comments from the public. Defense programs in particular need to be reviewed from time to time, particularly when major changes in the internal or external security environment occur. Input from civil society will strengthen these reviews, and their findings should be made public. The central elements of security policies and policies on civil-military and civil-police relationships need to be enacted into law, along with disciplinary codes for the security forces.

- **Regional approaches.** Developing civil management and oversight of the security forces, achieving transparency in military affairs, and attaining sustainable levels of security expenditure are all challenges confronted by many states. Consequently, there is considerable potential for countries with shared problems and experiences

within the same geographic area to promote the main objectives of sound security sector governance by working together to reduce tensions and enhance mutual security. For example, experience has shown that when part of a regional process of confidence building, providing neighbors with access to information on military strategy, national procedures for planning, institutions involved in the decision-making process, force size, equipment, and procurement plans can have a beneficial effect on a country's external security environment. Similarly, small arms proliferation may be most effectively addressed in a regional context.

Regional and subregional dialogues and structures for security and cooperation can also enhance the internal security of participating countries. By increasing transparency and making it easier for the civil authorities to oversee the activities of the security forces, regional confidence building measures can help improve security sector governance within individual countries. Additionally, when the information collected through regional and subregional mechanisms is made public, domestic transparency can benefit as well. This suggests that it is important for regional mechanisms to make public the information they gather.

ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN PROMOTING SOUND GOVERNANCE IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

Experience indicates that three factors are especially important to efforts to transform the security sector in a manner consistent with democratic, civil control of the security forces. These are:

1. The national leadership must be committed to a significant transformation process.
2. The principles, policies, laws, and structures developed during the transformation process must be rooted in the reforming country's history, culture, legal framework and institutions.
3. The transformation process should be consultative both within government and between government and civil and political society.

At the same time, experience suggests that appropriately designed and delivered external support can significantly benefit domestic efforts to transform the security sector. Such support can be provided by security actors, development/financial actors, and non-state actors.

In order to improve the quality of external assistance to countries transforming their security sectors, the donors of this assistance need to prioritize the following objectives: 1) Acknowledge that countries have legitimate security needs and that security is a public good; 2) Develop a comprehensive approach to security-sector transformation; 3) Improve the coherence of external interventions; 4) Work to develop the commitment of national leadership to a transformation process; 5) Build on what exists locally and take local ownership seriously; 6) Make ample use of confidence-building measures, and 7) Adopt a long-term perspective.

Security as a Public Good

Some members of the international community have provided assistance to support reforms of the security sector. For the most part, these have been security actors. Until very recently, the development actors characterized expenditure in the security sector as “unproductive.” While aid donors now recognize that sustainable, poverty-reducing development requires a safe and secure environment and therefore that some level of state resources need to be allocated to developing and maintaining statutory security forces, they continue to attempt to dictate levels of expenditure. Governance of the security sector has, by and large, not been a major concern for these actors.

It is legitimate for donors to be concerned that their development assistance may be used to support activities in the security sector of which they do not approve. At the same time, donors need to understand that they do not have the capacity to determine how much any country should spend in the security sector. What is more, the focus on levels creates distrust among their development partners and incentives for disguising expenditure or keeping it off-budget entirely. Donors should rather encourage governments to undertake a comprehensive review of their security needs and work with them to determine how best to meet their security needs within the country’s overall budget framework and constraints.

It is also important that ways be found to protect the state’s monopoly over the use of force. In this respect, one of the very clear lessons of Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Kosovo is the importance of the willingness of the international community to engage in peace enforcement. This does not mean that resorting to the use or threat of the use of force should be the first option. It does mean that it is very important to have effective forces available to raise the cost to local stakeholders of choosing violence over dialogue and compromise in conflict-affected countries.

Comprehensive Approach to Security Sector Transformation

In the past, efforts to support security sector reform and transformation have been atomized. Attention has focused either on the armed forces or on the police. Insufficient attention has been given to intelligence, the role of civil society, the capacities of the civil oversight authorities, or the overall reform process. External actors need to help reforming governments understand the components of security sector transformation and how these fit together. In particular, the distinctions between internal and external security need to be clarified and reflected in the tasking of the different security organizations. They also need to help governments develop workable plans for strengthening security sector governance.

The broad objectives of support provided by external actors to security sector transformation should be to:

- help create an enabling environment for a transformation process or space for

debate where incentives for such a process are lacking;

- assist local actors to understand the components of good governance in the security sector and to define the process by which they will achieve this objective;
- assist local actors in developing and institutionalizing mechanisms for developing, managing, and monitoring security policy;
- strengthen the capacity of the civil authorities to participate fully in the process of managing and monitoring the security sector, including ministries of defense, justice, foreign affairs, and internal or home affairs; the finance ministry, budget office, and office of the auditor general; legislatures; independent ombudsmen's offices; civilian review boards;
- strengthen the capacity of non-governmental and community-based actors such as professional organizations, research and advocacy institute, and universities to participate fully in the process of managing and monitoring the security sector;
- professionalize civilians through training, mentoring, and monitoring activities;
- pursue professional development of the security forces that imbues their members with an understanding of democratic, civilian accountability and strengthens their internal management capacity to implement and sustain reforms.

In early February 2002, the Afghanistan Interim Administration announced plans

Box 2. National Armed Forces for Afghanistan or Well-Trained Militias?

"We know that Afghans are well-armed, and we know there are a lot of soldiers, and we know they know how to fight,' Rumsfeld said. 'One would think that at some point we may be fortunate enough that they'll decide that it's in their interest to have a national army . . . rather than simply various provinces having their own military forces.'

"But a number of Afghan and military specialists have expressed doubts about the prospect of creating an effective national force.

"Nobody could be against the idea of a national army in the long run, but I really distrust this mad rush to sort out Afghanistan and then get out of there,' said Anatol Lieven, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who has just returned from Afghanistan. 'If this place falls back into full-scale civil war, then we have basically lost.'

"The first problem the Pentagon must overcome in training a national force, Lieven said, is hostility on the part of many provincial commanders to the interim government's defense minister, Gen. Mohammed Fahim, an ethnic Tajik. Beyond their mistrust of Fahim, Lieven said, these leaders have been given little incentive by U.S. commanders for taking part in a national army.

"The U.S. Army is still arming and subsidizing a lot of local warlords in its fight against the Taliban and al Qaeda," Lieven said. "For the Pentagon, on one hand, to be doing this in the region, while at the same time saying it wants to build up [a] national army, is to put it mildly somewhat contradictory."

Source: Bradley Graham and Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Special Forces to Train Recruits for Afghan Army," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2002.

to have a 70,000 person-strong national police force in place within a year.³ This is clearly an ambitious plan, since international experience in developing police forces indicates that a five-to-ten year timeframe is desirable. At the same time, several Western governments, including the United States, Germany and the UK, are training and equipping members of existing Afghani militias as the first step in creating a national armed forces for Afghanistan (Box 2).

None of this is based on strategic planning. Nor is it clear how these governments intend to prevent any Afghan military force created rapidly in the aftermath of the defeat of the Taliban from becoming any more than a collection of well-armed warlord factions. While it is evident that Afghanistan has a serious security problem, it is not evident that the situation will be significantly improved by rapidly fielding tens of thousands of poorly trained security force personnel or to develop national police and military forces without assessing the country's needs or its ability to support large forces financially over the medium- and long-term.

Coherent External Interventions

As we have seen, effective external support for security-sector transformation requires the collaboration of a wide range of actors – national, regional and international; governmental and non-governmental. Individuals with expertise in defense, policing, intelligence, managing security forces, defense budgeting, public-sector and fiscal management, foreign policy, the legislative process, development, and human rights need to develop methods of working together productively. This requires not only blending different types of expertise, but also engaging a wide variety of organizations with different goals and operating cultures. While such collaborations are not easy, they are vital to the success of a multidimensional transformation such as that required in the security sector.

For such collaboration to be effective, external actors need to be in agreement on the policy to be pursued vis-à-vis individual reforming governments. The organizations that provide assistance need to be transparent about the activities they are supporting so that both reforming governments and other external actors can understand the full range of programs underway.

Additionally, donor governments and multilateral organizations that provide a range of assistance (security, political, development) need to be in agreement internally. This agreement needs to cover both conceptual issues and specific activities. There have been numerous disconnects within bilateral governments: the financial and political imperatives of arms sales versus the objective of maximizing resources for development; balancing the need to improve military-related skills of armed forces with human rights considerations, and so on.

While these potential contradictions will never disappear entirely, it is important for governments and multi-task organizations such as the United Nations to discuss the

³ Doug Struck, "National Police Force Sought in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, February 5, 2002, p. 8.

problems in a frank and open manner and make good faith efforts to coordinate policies and programs. To facilitate this process, governments and multilateral organizations need a comprehensive view of security-sector transformation and a policy outlining the principles underlying assistance they are willing to provide. They also need to delineate the areas in which they are to be involved. In order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to first of all develop formal and informal channels of communication that function effectively within and between departments and secondly to build personal relationships that can transcend departmental or substantive divides.

At the international level, priority should be given to including issues pertaining to good governance in the security sector in coordination fora and mechanisms such as the World Bank-led Consultative Groups, UNDP-led Round Tables, and peacekeeping missions. Close cooperation between aid missions and the diplomatic community, including defense attachés and other security missions is also essential. Embassies and foreign ministries need to make as much use of aid missions as possible, rather than fencing off security-related issues as has generally been the practice to date. For their part, development actors need to be open to such collaboration. The creation of Defence Advisory Teams by the UK which include both development assistance and ministry of defense personnel are a welcome move in this direction. Regional organizations and consortia of civil society organizations should also be viewed as key partners.

To date, however, external actors have frequently not had a comprehensive view of needs in the security sector and have provided a patchwork of assistance that fails to systematically address governance shortfalls in that sector. These problems are likely only to be magnified in Afghanistan given the pre-eminent role of the United States, the disinclination of the Bush Administration to collaborate in any endeavor, the weakness of institutional and human capacity, and the complexity of the environment in which external actors are working.

Commitment of National Leadership to a Reform Process

Without the commitment of national leadership, efforts to transform the security sector will fail. It is not necessary, however, for all relevant stakeholders to favor reforms before external actors broach the subject. As long as there are a number of well-placed, influential allies (including in civil society), external actors can do much to increase understanding of the transformation process and reduce opposition to it. Security-sector transformation should be a regular component of policy dialogue with governments in order to identify entry points for a transformation process. Ministries of finance are often eager to gain greater control over the resources allocated to the security sector. Reviews of how to improve the efficiency of resource use in the security sector can begin to engage members of the security forces in broader discussions of organizational, institutional, and human-resource requirements for democratic, civilian-controlled security sectors.

External actors can provide incentives for governments to engage in security sector transformation, varying from situation to situation. Some governments may be

attracted by the opportunity to work with advisers – especially military and police advisers – from particular OECD countries. Others may accept additional resources to include the security sector in ongoing state reform processes such as efforts to strengthen the management of the public sector as a whole or the budgeting process in particular or the ability of legislative committees to function more effectively.

Much donor discourse has focused on conditionality. Such conditionality generally relates to the level or composition of military expenditure or agreements to not raid non-military budget lines for increases in military spending. It is often counterproductive, encouraging governments to conceal portions of their defense spending. It is unlikely, however, that donors will forego conditionality in the near future. Thus, process-oriented conditions might be more productive than those based on expenditure levels or composition. For example, a country where preliminary dialogue has identified a base of support for improving security-sector governance might be required to include the security sector in public expenditure reviews or undertake an in-depth policy development and planning process in the security sector (Box 3).

Box 3. Uganda Defense Review

Uganda has chafed under the 2 percent GDP cap imposed on its defense budget several years ago by the donor community, and there are reasons to believe that this cap has not encouraged the Ugandan government to be fully transparent in reporting defense-related expenditure. In an effort to lift the 2 percent cap, Uganda has now agreed to undertake a defense review process. For their part, Uganda's donors have agreed that if such a review demonstrates a credible need for raising defense spending above 2 percent of GDP, Uganda will be allowed to do so.

Source: Author's interviews.

Local Ownership and Capacity

External stakeholders experience a greater degree of success to the extent that they avoid imposing specific organizational structures and modes of operation. They must accept that there are different ways to achieve the end states of transparency, accountability, and civil management and oversight. The objective should be to empower governments to discover what will work best for them and to strengthen civil society's ability to participate effectively in the process.

It is important for local stakeholders to have every opportunity to learn by doing, rather than having teams of external consultants develop and implement strategies. It is therefore desirable for external actors to provide technical assistance that will support efforts by local stakeholders to learn about different management systems and structures for the security sector and to plan local transformation processes. If such technical assistance is provided, continuity is highly important. Local stakeholders are extremely pressed for time to reflect. Conflict-affected countries in particular face a myriad of urgent problems that are very difficult to prioritize and a limited number of people with the requisite interest and skills. Therefore, it is desirable to provide such

countries with on-site personnel who can act as mentors to local stakeholders – in both the public and non-governmental sectors. Such individuals should, however, have a clear understanding of the differences between mentoring someone undertaking a particular activity and assuming responsibility for the activity themselves.

Confidence-building Measures

Members of the security forces and civilians are often suspicious of each other's motivations and objectives. The former may believe that civilians have no appreciation of security matters and will be unable to make decisions that are in the best interest of the security forces. Where security forces have been involved in human rights abuses or have pursued economic policies and corrupt practices that have severely weakened a country's economy, leaders of those forces are concerned that they will suffer retribution should civilian opponents gain power. Security force officers who have benefited personally from opportunities to engage in corrupt behavior may strongly resist the institution of democratic practices and genuine civil oversight. Additionally, with the introduction of good governance principles and practices, members of the security forces often fear that their budgetary allocation will decline and, as a direct consequence, that they will lose the ability to deliver what is expected of them.

For their part, civilians who have lived in repressive societies fear the security forces and often find it difficult to interact with them. The fact that they are frequently at a disadvantage in terms of knowledge of defense, intelligence, and policing matters further adds to the reticence of civilians to interact with representatives of the security forces. In such circumstances, there may be a role for externally-mediated stakeholder dialogues to build trust between civilians and security-force personnel. Where there is a

Box 4. South Africa-Nigeria Round Table on Security Sector Governance and Transformation

In September 2000, the Centre for Democracy and Development /Nigeria, in collaboration with the Centre for Defence and Security Management of Witswatersrand University/South Africa and the Institute of Development Studies/UK, organized a roundtable on the democratic control of the security sector. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the processes and mechanisms through which democratic control can be established. It was hoped that such discussions would contribute to agreement on procedures for greater democratic accountability, transparency and control over the armed forces and other security services – by government, parliament and the political and civil society – especially in Nigeria, which had emerged from prolonged military rule in 1999. Participants included security scholars, military and civilian defence officials, parliamentarians and civil society actors. The meeting was funded by the Ford Foundation and the UK Department for International Development.

Source: "Roundtable on Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Nigeria and South Africa, 20-23 September 2000, Johannesburg. Summary Report," London/Lagos, CDD, http://www.cdd.org.uk/democratic_control.htm

strong civil society capable of playing this mediating role, external financial support may suffice to get such a dialogue off the ground (Box 4).

It is critical that external stakeholders proceed cautiously in their interactions with civilian and security-force actors and not assume a degree of familiarity and a relationship that exists in many OECD countries. It is also critical to structure all activities relating to security-sector reform so that they build confidence among local actors.

Importance of a Long-term Perspective

Once embarked upon, it is critical that security-sector transformation be viewed as a long-term process, with the nature of progress shaped and conditioned by the pace of social and political change. Many police advisers, for example, speak of ten to fifteen-year transformation processes. In reality, the time frame for institutional transformation should probably be calculated in terms of a generation. Some donors are able to commit to three-year, and sometimes five-year, programs. Many others operate on one-year time frames. As institutional development and transformation take center stage, it will be preferable to think in terms of five-year, rolling forward-planning cycles. External actors will need to consider at the outset whether they are able to commit to an end-state strategy of assisting governments to achieve a sufficient degree of reform so that the transformation is sustainable.

DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

Very weak states pose particular challenges to the providers of external assistance aimed at strengthening security sector governance. The ability to implement the principles of good governance in the security sector is reliant on the existence of well-functioning institutions and capable human resources. Improving security sector governance may therefore seem impossible in very weak states given their substantial institutional and human resource deficits.

However, since poor security sector governance has contributed in no small measure to the decline of economic and political governance in these states, it is impossible to strengthen overall governance – which is key to the ability to generate poverty-reducing development – without attention to the security sector. In fact, the agenda for strengthening security sector governance is very much a human and institutional capacity-building agenda, and by definition recognizes that states seeking to implement the agenda do not have strong institutions or abundant human resources. Thus, all of the issues for external actors described above are relevant for weak states but conditions in weak states, and particularly very weak states, may be such that a good deal of time needs to be devoted to preparatory work.

All of this is especially important in a country such as Afghanistan, which currently has no official armed forces or police service but a wealth of unofficial forces

and where the very existence of a central government remains contested. In such an environment, particular attention ought to be devoted to creating the space in which debate and dialogue about the security sector can occur. Such debate is critical to the development of a consensus on how a country is to meet its security needs. It is unclear if such debate and dialogue is possible in Afghanistan under current circumstances.

In addition to dialogue, human capacity development, in both government and civil society, is an activity that can and must be pursued irrespective of how weak or strong a state may be. In weak states, it will be difficult for personnel to go abroad for training, and the international community should think in terms of providing technical assistance in the form of mentors. Continuity of this assistance is extremely important in weak states. External actors are giving attention to training police and military formations, but there is no evidence of corresponding attention to developing the capacity of the civil authorities. Nor is it clear whether the training being provided to security force personnel includes information on their role in democratic societies.

The issue of time frame is also critical for weak states. The weaker the state, the more important it is for external actors to commit to sustained assistance for a very long period of long time.

Having stressed several priorities for weak states, it is not advisable to try to fit Afghanistan, or any other country, exclusively into pre-existing categories such as “weak state” or “conflict-affected state.” It is of course true that Afghanistan is both weak and conflict-affected. But not all weak states share the same characteristics. Similarly not all conflict-affected states share the same characteristics.

As part of ongoing work within UNDP on developing an approach to security sector governance assistance, the issue of how to distinguish among different types of countries arose. Countries were initially viewed in traditional categories: conflict-affected countries, countries emerging from conflict, countries in transition to democracy and so on. It turned out, however, to be extremely difficult to capture the full range of responses to country situations when countries were defined in this way. An alternative approach, one which defines ways of approaching the problem of inadequate security sector governance in terms of contextual criteria rather than categories of countries is proving more successful.

Six contextual categories have been identified

- Political context
- Normative context
- Institutional context
- Societal capacity
- Economic context
- Geopolitical context.

Within each of these six categories, it is possible to identify a range of subcategories and for each subcategory, suggestions for possible forms of assistance from the international community.

While this approach remains quite preliminary at this writing (March 2002), there are indications that it is a useful way of thinking about the needs of any individual country and thus the types of assistance that will be most helpful. To be fully effective, however, all relevant international instruments must be employed. As far as creating the safe and secure environment for economic, political and social development in a country like Afghanistan is concerned, it is particularly important to consider the role of peace enforcement. If we only consider what development assistance agencies can do to get Afghanistan back on its feet, we will fail.

Under the best of conditions, helping countries recover from years of violent conflict is not an easy task. Afghanistan is far from “the best of conditions.”

The international community is showing the signs of not having learned a central lesson of Kosovo, Bosnia, and Sierra Leone, namely that peace enforcement is a necessary component of any strategy to promote the economic, social and political recovery of countries ravaged by long wars and periods of political and economic discrimination. Placing the burden for overcoming the problems of a country like Afghanistan on the development community is setting the development community up for failure. In reality, however, any such failure will be the failure of the collective will of the international community and especially the most powerful members of that community to help create the conditions under which development actors and reform-minded local stakeholders can operate effectively.