What are the main features of a post-conflict environment?

Post-conflict generally describes the period after intra- or interstate hostilities have ceased, although violence may continue. Post-conflict usually follows a cease-fire or the signing of a formal peace agreement, whereby the major warring factions register their commitment to end hostilities and begin the process of reconstruction. External actors can play an important role in a post-conflict environment. That role is the subject of this Backgrounder.

There are a number of challenges that are particular to a post-conflict environment.

1. The security situation remains unstable, making security provision by external actors a top priority and a necessary pre-condition for the successful implementation of security sector programmes.

2. Security sector programmes that grow out of international peace support operations (PSOs) tend to have a strong military component that may be inclined to prioritise security capacity-building over security governance. In other words, programmes focus on training and equipping the country's security forces while neglecting to build systems to help ensure the transparency and democratic accountability of the security sector.

3. State institutions are usually weak or illegitimate and civil society tends to be marginalised. This magnifies the governance challenges, particularly in countries that may have had little or no experience with democracy and the rule of law.

4. Socio-economic conditions tend to be precarious; typically low pre-conflict levels of development are exacerbated during conflict by the destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of economic institutions and the discrediting or decimation of local elites.

5. A shortage of local managerial capacity means external actors often need to assume broad governance responsibilities in the immediate post-conflict phase. This often results in weak local ownership of SSR efforts that may prove difficult
to correct once local circumstances have stabilised.

6. Post-conflict environments can attract huge numbers of external actors, creating daunting management and coordination problems.

7. At the same time, external actors often apply short term approaches to challenges that require sustained commitment. This may be one of the main reasons why there is a risk of resumption of conflict, as happened in Afghanistan after 2006.

The circumstances under which SSR is carried out as part of post-conflict peacebuilding are therefore, in many respects, distinct from those prevailing in a peaceful environment.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan's level of development and recent history of conflict has made implementing successful reconstruction programmes a daunting task. Additional factors have also undercut stabilisation efforts and may explain why, from 2006 onwards, large parts of its territory have once again become conflict zones. These include:

- overshadowing of SSR efforts by the War on Terror agenda
- fragmentation of the international community into separate US and NATO commands and the failure of donor countries to ensure effective coordination of their efforts
- a relative lack of resources deployed by the international community
- the weak role played in the reconstruction process of such governance concerns as judicial reform, transparency, accountability and the inclusiveness of state institutions
- rampant corruption, especially as concerns the Afghan National Police (ANP).
- the reliance of coalition forces on aerial bombing, which has exacted a heavy toll in civilian casualties

What are the main security-related activities carried out in post-conflict peacebuilding?

Recent post-conflict peacebuilding experiences indicate that peace is likely to be lasting only if the security needs of the population are addressed in parallel with the political and socio-economic aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. External actors, including the UN, regional organisations or alliances, other states, or private military and security companies (PMSCs) often directly provide basic security, a pre-condition for the implementation of all other post-conflict reconstruction activities. At the same time, they work with local actors to build up the domestic capacity to provide security. These tasks often include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Security Sector Reform, which includes:
   - the reconstruction or construction of security sector institutions
   - the strengthening or establishment of civilian control and democratic oversight of the security sector. (For an overview of SSR, see the DCAF Backgrounder on Security Sector Governance and Reform)

2. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of combatants. The DDR process involves the return of former combatants to civilian life by collecting their weapons, dissolving their units, and ensuring that they are integrated into the civilian economy to the extent possible. DDR goals include:
helping the state to establish a monopoly of force by disarming and/or integrating non-statutory actors into the statutory sector
• downsizing the state's security forces in order to conserve scarce resources

3. **Mine action**, which includes mine risk education, humanitarian demining, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy. While thinking about the relationship between mine action and other SSR processes is still evolving, a number of connections between these two areas can be identified. For example, mine action:
• offers one of the earliest entry points for international involvement in post-conflict situations
• serves as a confidence-building measure between former warring parties, through the revelation of information related to stockpiles and minefields, ideally as part of a peace agreement
• can support other SSR activities, such as DDR, by providing essential jobs for former combatants

4. **Weapons reduction programmes**, particularly small arms and light weapons (SALW). Post-conflict is characterised by the proliferation and easy availability of small arms and light weapons. Post-conflict peacebuilding increasingly includes programmes that seek to reduce SALW, since experience shows that the number of civilian deaths from firearms either remains unchanged or increases in post-conflict environments. This results from the absence of effective and legitimate statutory security actors and the widespread possession of SALW as a means of self-protection.

5. **Transitional justice.** This refers to strategies for addressing war-related crimes and ending a culture of impunity. Transitional justice programmes are particularly challenging to implement in post-conflict contexts where the pre-war legal framework has often entirely disappeared and where justice institutions are inexistent or ineffective. This task may involve:
• prosecuting perpetrators in national, international, or “hybrid” courts or tribunals
• revealing the truth about past crimes
• providing victims with reparations
• promoting reconciliation
• reforming abusive institutions

6. **Lustration** involves the vetting of individuals for war crimes and other past criminal offences. In general, priority should be given to vetting the officer class and upper ranks of the security forces. However, depending on available resources, it may be desirable to vet lower ranks as well. Accordingly, rigorous and transparent vetting procedures should be applied during the demobilisation of former combatants prior to their integration (along with new recruits) into new security forces. Effective vetting policies are critically important in restoring popular trust in the country’s statutory security providers. (For further information, see the DCAF Backgrounder on Vetting and the Security Sector).

7. **Gender mainstreaming.** Gender roles undergo significant change during conflict, exposing many to gender-based risks and threats. Exposure to conflict may also result in men and women taking on new roles and responsibilities. This can open up opportunities for the greater involvement of women in public life, including within security institutions and in security decision-making. But, at the same time, there is often pressure to return to traditional roles.

**Why is it important to integrate SSR in peace agreements?**

Peace agreements are instrumental in:
• marking the end of hostilities
• establishing compromise in areas of dispute
• providing a workable political framework for transition to lasting peace
Such a framework often includes:

- principles and procedures for the implementation of SSR
- provisions for the establishment of a transitional government
- the drafting of a new constitution; the holding of post-conflict elections, etc.

Because they often result from direct talks between all relevant parties to the conflict, peace agreements provide an ideal opportunity to address fundamental security issues, such as: DDR, the restructuring of new statutory security forces, and the establishment of democratic oversight of the security apparatus.

Who are the main actors delivering SSR programmes in post-conflict peacebuilding?

Several categories of actors engage in SSR activities:

- national actors in the affected country
- intergovernmental organisations such as the UN and regional organisations or alliances
- lead nation(s) involved in a military intervention or peace support operations (PSOs) in the affected country
- other bilateral donor countries
- non-state national or transnational actors
- PMSCs.

The complexity in just one country’s involvement is underscored by the graph on page 5 that shows the various actors through which Canada develops its Afghan policies.

How are SSR programmes delivered as part of post-conflict peacebuilding?

There are generally three models of SSR implementation in post-conflict peacebuilding:

1. The **UN as lead agency** (e.g., in Kosovo in the lead up to the declaration of independence). The UN leads efforts to build the managerial and oversight capacity of national actors, to restructure the new police forces and to implement DDR, mine action, transitional justice and SALW reduction. At the same time, it delegates restructuring and integration of the new armed forces to other actors (in this case to regional actors such as NATO and the EU, or to states).

2. A **regional organisation** as lead agency (e.g., NATO and the EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The organisation leads on certain SSR tasks, such as police and/or armed forces restructuring, and shares other tasks with the UN, other regional organisations or alliances, or lead nations.

3. A **state as lead nation** (e.g., the UK in Sierra Leone, the US in Liberia). The lead nation leads on certain tasks, such as police and/or armed forces restructuring, and shares...
Government departments in Canada
- the Prime Minister
- ministries (Defence, Foreign Affairs, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Justice, Public Safety, Finance)
- Correctional Service of Canada
- Ombudsperson
- The Afghanistan Task Force
- Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (START) of MFA
- SSR Working Group

Legislative bodies in Canada
- Parliament and its special committee on Afghanistan

Canadian statutory security services in Afghanistan
- Canadian Forces
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Canadian Border Services

Canada &
Afghanistan

Civil society organisations in Afghanistan
- NGOs involved in developing policy advice and disseminating information
- think tanks
- media (domestic and international)
- academic institutions
- the business community

IGOs through which Canada delivers programmes
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- UN
- World Bank
- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- Group of Eight (G8)
- Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Multilateral coordination mechanisms in Afghanistan*
- Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB)
- Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOFTA)
- Policy Action Group (PAG)
- Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC–A)

Canadian representation in Afghanistan*
- Embassy
- Joint Task Force–Afghanistan (JTF–AFG)
- Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)
- Operation Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT)
- Strategic Advisory Team–Afghanistan (SAT–A)
- Canadian Afghan National Training Centre Detachment (CANTC Det.)

other responsibilities with the UN, regional organisations or alliances, other bilateral donors, and even PMSCs.

In all the situations described above, the UN has played a vital mandating role, even if the initial phase of external intervention may have taken place in the absence of such a mandate as, for example, in Kosovo and Iraq.

In all three models, recent experience shows that external actors face problems coordinating their efforts on different levels:

- internally, across different departments at headquarters and in the field
- vis-à-vis one another
- with domestic actors in the affected states

The design and implementation of SSR programmes is often formally directed by a national SSR commission, chaired by national political leaders and including key external actors providing SSR assistance. Yet, SSR programmes are unevenly successful at promoting genuine local ownership of the reform process. There are mainly two reasons for this:

- external actors often find that transferring ownership to national actors is costly and time-consuming
- domestic actors often lack the managerial capacity to design and implement reforms

However, an early transfer of ownership to local actors is not necessarily desirable in every context, particularly in the early post-conflict phase, since local elites can be tainted with responsibility for the outbreak of war and for abuses committed during conflict.

What are the key factors determining the success of SSR processes in post-conflict peacebuilding?

A number of local factors are likely to affect the likelihood of success of SSR in post-conflict peacebuilding. Briefly stated, the SSR process is likely to succeed if:

1. There is a nucleus of local leadership capable of and determined to take the SSR process forward.
2. A major power has a vested interest in the success of the SSR effort and is willing to invest political capital and resources to facilitate this process.
3. Neighbouring states are supportive of the peace process generally, and the SSR process specifically, or at least refrain from undermining them.
4. There are few or no easily exportable or “lootable” natural resources, whose control provides an incentive for further conflict, or which can be used by the warring parties to fund future hostilities.
5. The number of warring parties is small, thus diminishing the likelihood of major armed factions reneging on their commitments under the peace agreement and the SSR process.

Furthermore, the successful outcome of SSR programmes would seem to depend on a number of considerations relating to the role of international actors. International actors may foster an environment that is conducive to the success of SSR efforts if:

SSR in Kosovo:
Commissioned by UNMIK in 2005, the Internal Security Sector Review process (ISSR) was the first holistic examination of security provision in Kosovo and one of the most extensive of its kind. It covered areas from policing to parliamentary oversight, and even including such issues as healthcare and the economy. The ISSR was structured around an eight-stage consultative and analytical process involving the participation of a wide variety of representatives from Kosovo, as well as members of the international community. The review was transparent and encouraged all communities, to participate. The process was accompanied by an information and public outreach campaign designed to generate interest and support among the public and other stakeholders.

Notwithstanding the political and diplomatic difficulties surrounding its elaboration, the ISSR is seen as the main reference point for ongoing SSR in Kosovo. One of its most important findings is the acknowledgement that the greatest security challenge for the people of Kosovo, including its minorities, is constituted by neither external threats nor inter-ethnic tension, but by unemployment, economic instability and poverty.
1. They have a viable understanding of local conditions and aspirations.
2. They are perceived by national and regional actors as having a legitimate right to intervene in the affected country, use force, and pursue an agenda for change in the security sector.
3. They have a strategic and balanced plan to guide their SSR efforts.
4. They have the necessary leadership, organisational and decision-making structures to support the implementation of their strategy.
5. They are prepared and able to invest sufficient and appropriate human and financial resources to ensure the success of their programmes.

How do we measure success? This is an inexact science. But again the answers to five questions may provide the key indicators.

1. To what extent have levels of violence been reduced?
2. Has there been economic growth and how much? Is growth due to local, sustainable factors or generated by the time-limited presence of the international community?
3. Is there improved professionalism on the part of the security forces?
4. Have local forces assumed control of the national security sector? Has local ownership been secured?

5. Is there greater public confidence in the security forces?

Further information


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