



DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

STRANDGADE 56 • 1401 COPENHAGEN K • DENMARK

TEL +45 32 69 87 87 • diis@diis.dk • www.diis.dk

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN FRAGILE STATES

Louise Andersen

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Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS

Strandgade 56, DK-1401 Copenhagen, Denmark

Ph: +45 32 69 87 87

Fax: +45 32 69 86 00

E-mails: diis@diis.dk

Web: www.diis.dk

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Louise Andersen, Research Fellow, Danish Institute for International Studies.

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Abstracts

ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

Questions of state weakness, fragility and failure have made it to the top of the international agenda in recent years. The absence of state control over the territory and the means of violence is increasingly seen to present a major threat to both human and international security. As part of this new agenda, donor agencies have recently begun focusing on how to rebuild or reform the security structures in fragile states. The paper explores two key policy concepts which are currently being developed within the OECD donor community on how to deal with security challenges in states with very weak governments. The paper argues that these policies may fail to produce the desired improvements in security because the approach remains too state-centric. The paper suggests looking beyond the formal state institutions and applying a more pragmatic, contextual approach that allows for building on informal and non-state security structures.

ABSTRACT IN DANISH

Spørgsmål om svage, skrøbelige og fejlslagne stater er i de seneste år rykket højt op på den internationale dagsorden. Fraværet af statskontrol over både landområder og voldsmidler opfattes i stigende grad som en alvorlig trussel for de mennesker, der bor i området, og for den bredere internationale sikkerhed. Som led i denne nye dagsorden, er vestlige donorer begyndt at interessere sig for, hvorledes stabile og demokratiske sikkerhedsstrukturer kan opbygges i svage stater. Dette papir belyser to af de centrale policy-begreber, som kredsen af OECD-donorer er i færd med at formulere for at afklare, hvordan de kan/skal forholde sig til denne udfordring i lande med meget svage regeringsapparater. Papiret hævder, at disse politikker er for stats-centrede og derfor ikke nødvendigvis vil føre til de ønskede forbedringer i sikkerheden. Papiret foreslår, at donorerne ser ud over de formelle statsinstitutioner og anvender en mere pragmatisk og kontekstuel tilgang, der i højere grad gør det muligt at inddrage uformelle og ikke-statslige sikkerhedsstrukturer.

Introduction

In recent years, a remarkable consensus has emerged among Western governments on seeing all kinds of threats and challenges as a consequence of state weakness.¹ Concerns over issues as diverse as terrorism, organised crime, mass violation of human rights, poverty, violent conflicts and migration are increasingly framed in a discourse of state weakness, state fragility or state failure - and weak, failed and fragile states are perceived by USA, the EU member states, and the international organisations they finance, as major threats to both human and international security.²

Throughout the 1990s, concerns over state weakness were formulated primarily in terms of promoting human rights, democracy and good governance. Today, the term 'state building' is gaining ground. This has been interpreted as a shift in focus from *improving* the state - making it more responsive to its citizens - to *strengthening* the state - making it capable of fulfilling its obligations.³ The shift is being linked to 11 September 2001 and the impact it has had on Western foreign and development policy.⁴ Clearly 11 September was perceived by many as a wake-up call, alerting world leaders that "it is no longer possible to ignore distant and mis-governed parts of a world without borders, where chaos is a potential neighbour anywhere from Africa to Afghanistan," as UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw put it.⁵ The difference between Western perceptions before and after 11 September should, however, not be overstated. Failed states were seen as threats to international security prior to the terrorist attacks on USA, and promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance remain core elements of the state-building discourse. The Western objective is not merely to build *strong* states, but rather to build *democratic* ones. 11 September has undoubtedly heightened the political attention paid to weak, fragile and failed states, but many of the policies formulated in

¹ Woodward (2004:1)

² White House (2002); EU (2003); Annan (2005)

³ The argument is e.g. made in Tschirgi (2003), who argues that following 11 September, the world has witnessed a shift away from human security and back towards national security. The validity of the claim depends to some degree on how prevalent one believes the governance and human security agenda had become prior to 11 September.

⁴ Beall et al. (2006)

⁵ Straw (2002:98)

response to the perceived threat largely build upon and reflect pre-11 September thinking on the linkages between development and security.

The Jack Straw remark highlights, however, that behind Western worries over failed states lurks the fear of the uncontrolled, the unregulated, the disorderly. Failed states are perceived as dangerous islands of chaos, anarchy and instability in an otherwise orderly and regulated sea of international relations. They are seen as states, where all kinds of violent and criminal behaviour - from terrorism to poppy production and trafficking in arms, humans and illegal goods - can operate freely and find safe havens because the government is unable (or unwilling) to control what goes on within its own territory. Following this logic, (re)establishing the government's authority and control is seen as the obvious solution, and state-building has hence become a key Western foreign policy objective; an outright imperative challenge⁶ Within this broader agenda, the security institutions of the state have emerged as a new arena for development co-operation. Donor agencies are increasingly working with institutions such as the police, the judiciary and the military which 5-10-15 years ago were considered strictly 'no-go areas' for development actors. Within the donor community, this new agenda is referred to as Security Sector Reform.

The suggestion in this paper is that the approach to Security Sector Reform, which the donor community is currently developing, may be ill-suited in countries where the central government has very little or no control and authority. In the weakest of the weak states, framing questions of security in largely technical and state-centred terms will not necessarily provide external actors with an understanding of the political dynamics at work, and may thus not lead to the expected improvements in human and international security. To substantiate this suggestion, the paper will, firstly, present the policy concepts of fragile states and security sector reform. Secondly, it will question some of the basic notions underpinning the policies, and, thirdly, it will outline a few possible implications for future policy.

⁶ Fukuyama (2004)

Policy concepts

The notion of ‘fragile states’ and the concept of ‘security sector reform’ are both sub-themes of the wider Security and Development Nexus, which has framed the debate on global development since the mid-1990s. According to this, security and development are inextricably linked. One cannot be pursued without the other. This implies, on the one hand, that violent conflict essentially is “development in reverse”⁷. It hinders economic growth and imposes substantial human, political and economic costs on societies. On the other hand, it implies that in a globalised world rich nations cannot isolate themselves from the effects of poverty, instability and conflict in poorer countries. To achieve security ‘at home’, Western governments must pursue development abroad.⁸

The Security and Development Nexus goes beyond state-centric notions of both security and development. It is concerned with human development and human security, yet it does not depart from the basic assumption that states are the fundamental unit in international politics. International order *and* human security are best achieved by improving existing states - not by overthrowing the system of states.⁹ Repression, corruption, lack of freedom and opportunity are seen as root causes of both poverty and violent conflicts. The promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance are therefore key element in policies inspired by the Security and Development Nexus. This also goes for the two policies of special concern to this paper: fragile states and security sector reform.

FRAGILE STATES

The collapse of Somalia’s central government in January 1991 and subsequent crises in e.g. Haiti, Zaïre/DRC, and Cambodia sparked both academic and political interest in the notion of ‘state failure’.¹⁰ Throughout the debate, the terms ‘state failure’ and ‘failed state’ have been contested by both academia and policy researchers.¹¹ The development community is now

⁷ World Bank (2003)

⁸ For a critical discussion of “The Merging of Development and Security” see Duffield (2001) and Beall et al. (2006).

⁹ This argument can be found in e.g. UN Secretary-General Annan’s report to the 2005-Summit “In Larger Freedom” and in the Canadian report on “Responsibility to Protect” ICISS (2001).

¹⁰ See Andersen (2005) for an overview of the debate.

¹¹ See Milliken and Krause (2002) for an overview.

applying the somewhat broader terms ‘fragile states’ and ‘state fragility’¹², but the term ‘failed states’ remains widely used in foreign and security policy circles. In the USA, the Pentagon and State Department thus tend to refer to failed states, while USAID prefers to speak of fragile states. The essence of both terms is related to the central government’s lack of control over significant parts of its territory and the inability to fulfil key functions associated with a modern state, most notably to provide security, safety and law and order. The British development agency, DFID, has been leading in translating this perception into poverty-oriented development lingo:

Fragile states are those where the government cannot and will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor. The most important functions for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves.¹³

This notion clearly reflects a Weberian/Hobbesian understanding of what a modern state is supposed to look like and how it is expected to perform.¹⁴ State fragility/failure is measured in terms of how well the state meets the normative ideal of a modern state. I.e., the extent to which it - in exchange for loyalty and support from the citizenry - holds a monopoly on legitimate violence and provides certain services to the population, including upholding law and order.¹⁵ It follows that the concept at its core is political. Determining who has the right

¹² Among donor agencies the term ‘fragile states’ is substituting terms such as ‘poor performers’, ‘low income countries under stress’, and ‘difficult partnerships’. The policy debate is primarily held in the “OECD Fragile States Group.” The forum’s website is found at: www.oecd.org/dac/fragilestates. Lead donors are USA, UK, and the World Bank.

¹³ DFID (2005:7)

¹⁴ The modern state is often portrayed as a universal and eternal model. In fact, the model emerged as the result of a bloody, protracted historical process of state formation in Europe - often the 1648-peace in Westphalia is highlighted as a key marker for the shift from medieval feudalism to modernity and the ‘birth’ of the modern state system. For a historical-sociological explanation of the European process of state formation, see e.g. Mann (1993) and Tilly (1985).

¹⁵ For analytical purposes it may be useful to distinguish between two dimensions of state fragility, one pertaining to the degree of institutional collapse, the other to the degree of functional failure (Milliken and Krause, 2002). Often the two will overlap - as they do in the particular type of countries considered in this paper - but a state may be a functional failure, i.e. not providing security, welfare, etc. to its citizens, without being institutionally collapsed. Rwanda at the time of the genocide springs to mind as an obvious candidate (Clapham, 2002), while present-time candidates may include countries such as Zimbabwe and North Korea.

to use violence, or what constitutes ‘vital services’ and how the central government should be involved in assuring these services, go to the heart of politics. The policy debate, however, is often pursued in technical terms - as a matter of finding (and mixing and sequencing) the right instruments needed to address the sources of state fragility. A potential side effect of this may be that factors such as values, interests, and perceptions tend to be overlooked or downplayed in the analysis. This argument is revisited later in the paper; for now focus remains on how the donor community perceives the problem.

A central part of the policy framework on failed and fragile states seeks to explain where these states come from: what are the sources of their fragility or failure? The prevailing answer is expressed in the USAID “Fragile States Strategy”:

Instability associated with fragile states is the product of *ineffective and illegitimate governance* (emphasis added). Effectiveness refers to the capability of the government to work with society to assure the provision of order and public goods and services. Legitimacy refers to the perception by important segments of society that the government is exercising state powers in ways that are reasonably fair and in the interests of the nation as a whole. Where both effectiveness and legitimacy are weak, conflict or state failure is likely to result.¹⁶

In keeping with the reasoning of the Security and Development Nexus, ‘bad governance’ is seen as the root cause of state failure. Good governance, democracy and the rule of law thus become the obvious remedies for state fragility - and state building accordingly a matter of building state institutions capable of effective and legitimate service delivery. This is, however, easier said than done - not least in failed or fragile states, which according to DFID are “the hardest countries in the world to help develop.”¹⁷ The donor community is therefore trying to find new and better ways of working in fragile states. One of the results so far has been the formulation of a set of principles for good international engagement in fragile states.¹⁸ The principles stipulate that “state-building should be the central objective” and that “the international engagement should maintain a tight focus on improving governance and capacity in

¹⁶ USAID (2005:3)

¹⁷ DFID (2005:5)

¹⁸ OECD (2005a:1)

the most basic security, justice, economic and social service delivery functions” in order to ensure “a durable exit from poverty and insecurity for the world’s most fragile states.”¹⁹

This need for prioritising and focusing assistance is perhaps the most innovative element in the fragile states policy. It marks a departure from the comprehensive and holistic development strategies of the 1990s. Instead of addressing all areas, issues and sectors in need of change, donors are encouraged to identify a highly focused reform agenda when working in fragile states.²⁰ The state-building objective and the emphasis on improving the state’s most basic security and justice functions warrants that the security sector will have a prominent position on any such reform agenda. It thus becomes relevant to look further into the policy guidance that donors rely on when attempting to work in this area. This brings us to the policy framework for Security Sector Reform (SSR).²¹

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Although the concept is fairly new, external engagement in the security sector of developing countries is anything but new.²² Many former colonies have maintained extensive military links to their former colonial powers, and during the Cold War both super powers developed military ties with their respective allies, providing them with arms, military training and other forms of assistance. Following the end of bipolarity, the strategic importance of such military assistance was reduced, and Western powers increasingly began using defence cooperation as a mean of pursuing wider foreign and security policy goals. Throughout the 1990s - primarily in relation to Eastern European states - military co-operation and assistance were used to promote democratic civilian control of armed forces as part of the wider efforts to support liberal democracy and good governance. The SSR policy framework reflects this transformation from a development perspective.

According to the OECD, SSR is one element in the attempt to “help partner countries establish appropriate structures and mechanism to manage change and resolve dispute through

¹⁹ OECD (2005a:1)

²⁰ The need to prioritise was initially formulated by the World Bank as a special approach for Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS), see World Bank (2002). The report has influenced much of the subsequent policy analysis on fragile states.

²¹ ‘Security Sector Reform’ remains a contested term. Alternative labels commonly used in the debate are: ‘Security System Reform’ or ‘Security Sector Governance’.

²² This paragraph is based on Cottey and Forster (2005)

democratic and peaceful means.”²³ This aim is considered relevant to all developing countries, and the SSR-framework is thus formulated as a generic policy intended to provide a shared international understanding of SSR issues, concepts and approaches - regardless of the state of the state, so to speak.

The key objective is to ensure that the security sector in a given country is capable of meeting the security needs of both state and people in a manner consistent with democratic norms, good governance and the rule of law. But what is actually meant by the term ‘security sector’? Who are the reforms aimed at? The OECD defines the security sector as encompassing all actors within four different categories:²⁴

- *Core Security Actors*: armed forces, police, gendarmeries, paramilitary forces, presidential guards, intelligence and security services, coast guards, border guards, custom authorities, reserve or local security units.
- *Security Management and Oversight Bodies*: the Executive, national security advisory bodies, legislature and legislative select committees, ministries of defence, internal affairs, foreign affairs, customary and traditional authorities, financial management bodies, and civil society organisations.
- *Justice and Law Enforcement Institutions*: judiciary, justice ministries, prisons, criminal investigation and prosecution services, human rights commissions and ombudsmen, customary and traditional justice systems.
- *Non-statutory Security Forces*: liberation armies, guerrilla armies, private body-guard units, private security companies, political party militias.

A country’s ability to meet its security needs in a manner consistent with democratic norms reflects the combined behaviour of all of these actors. In principle, reforms of the security sector thus involve all of these actors. The OECD guidelines, however, explicitly state that development agencies rarely engage with the non-statutory security forces, and most of the policy debate on SSR and the donor interventions designed as part of SSR-programmes focus on a few institutions which are considered key to human and state security: the armed forces,

²³ OECD (2005b:11)

²⁴ OECD (2005b:20-21)

the police, the judiciary and, to a lesser degree, the financial management bodies and civil society organisations.²⁵ This does not imply that non-statutory security forces are excluded from the reform efforts altogether. In fragile states, rebel forces and insurgency groups are often signatories to a peace agreement, which provides the framework for 'post-conflict' SSR. They furthermore often participate in the transitional government which is formed on the basis of the internationally mediated peace settlements. Some non-statutory security forces are thus involved in the security reform efforts in a fragile state. For the most part, however, the reforms explicitly aim at dismantling non-state armed forces by either integrating them into a unified national army and/or by convincing them to lay down arms through programmes of demobilisation and re-integration.

Reforming and revitalising the state's security institutions is thus the task at hand. The guidelines, however, explicitly hold that this is a task which can only be undertaken by the affected country itself. External partners can help, support and facilitate reform, but the process must be driven by local actors and guided by a national vision for reform. The principle of national ownership is crucial to successful SSR - legitimate security solutions cannot be imposed on a country. The guidelines strongly emphasise that "reform processes will not succeed in the absence of commitment of the part of those undertaking the reform... Given primary responsibility to the government and other local stakeholders is essential to locally-owned SSR."²⁶ Donors should support - rather than lead - local stakeholders as "they move down a path of reform"²⁷

The policy framework holds that there are "different paths to developing a transparent, accountable security system based on democratic norms and human rights,"²⁸ yet the direction of reform remains the same. This provides the SSR-policy with a sense of necessity and technicality. Formulating and implementing the national vision reform is portrayed as a matter of "assessing the needs" and "developing a strategy" for meeting them, rather than as a political process of negotiation between different power holders and their constituencies. The remaining part of the paper will discuss why this - along with other flaws - may limit the relevance of the SSR-framework in situations, where the central government has very little or no effective control over the territory.

²⁵ See e.g. DFID (2002) and UNDP (2003)

²⁶ OECD (2005b:34)

²⁷ OECD (2005b:34)

²⁸ OECD (2005b:34)

Flaws in the Framework?

When combining the policy on fragile states and the policy on SSR, an apparently coherent plan of action emerges: The problem is that the state has lost its monopoly on violence due to abuse and misconduct (bad governance); the solution accordingly is to rebuild this monopoly in a manner that prevents the state from misusing it (good governance). This logic is currently guiding ongoing post-conflict interventions in e.g. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan, where the international community is attempting to dismantle irregular militias that compete with the state (DDR-programs) and build new national security forces (restructuring of army and police).

It is still early days for policies on fragile states and SSR and definitely too early to come up with any kind of conclusive statements on what works, where, how and why. Yet based on achievements so far, it seems safe to forecast that the results in the foreseeable future will fall somewhat short of the stated objectives. In the policy debate on how to improve ongoing interventions and increase the chances of success, emphasis is often placed on the need for additional resources.²⁹ There is a tendency to argue that if more funds, personnel, time, political attention etc. were allocated to the task, the results would improve significantly. Clearly there is a mismatch between international ambitions and resources allocated to the task, but this need not imply that spending more and staying longer will necessarily lead to success. Perhaps something more fundamental is at stake. Perhaps the shortcomings and disappointing results in achieving lasting security improvements stem as much from deficiencies in the international strategy as from lack of resources.³⁰ This part of the paper will present three such possible flaws by questioning, firstly, the normative understanding of the state underpinning the donor approach; secondly, the manner in which donors define ownership in relation to SSR in fragile states; and thirdly, the question of whose perception of security is guiding the policy.

NORMATIVE AND HISTORIC NOTIONS OF STATES

As mentioned, policies on fragile states and security sector reform are underpinned by a Weberian/Hobbesian understanding of what a state is supposed to look like. To the extent

²⁹ See e.g. the UN Secretary General's report on Liberia, S/2005/764.

³⁰ For diverse accounts see e.g. Ellis (2005); Bilgin and Morton (2002); Ottaway and Mair (2004); Chandler (2004)

that this serves as guidance for the future state, which external actors desire to build, it may be perfectly logical. When the same normative understanding serves as a reference to the past, it is, however, more problematic. The normative state model provides a distorted image of ‘the state that was’ and may therefore produce a misleading understanding of the historical background and context for state failure. Most of the failed and fragile states, which are objects of current international state-building interventions, have never functioned as modern states in the Weberian sense of the word. They were ‘quasi-states’, recognised internationally as judicially sovereign and independent entities, but lacking empirical sovereignty or statehood.³¹ Yet, donor agencies tend to talk as though they can restore fragile or failed states to “a degree of efficiency that existed at some vague time in the past.”³²

In most parts of the world, the process of state formation differed widely from the process that led to the European state model, which serves as the normative standard against which all states today are measured. In Europe, rulers “struggled and negotiated with subjects who became citizens to extract resources to wage war against external threats.”³³ In post-colonial states, rulers struggled and negotiated with external powers to gain aid and capital to protect themselves from domestic threats.

Numerous studies have shown that such states function according to entirely different logics than the modern ideal type presupposes.³⁴ During the cold war dictatorial regimes, who used the state as a mechanism for personal gain, were effectively kept in power by either USA or USSR. These leaders had little interest in building efficient and independent institutions capable of controlling the Executive and delivering services to the populations. The formal state was thus personalised, privatised and relied on extensive patronage networks to maintain control.

³¹ Jackson (1990)

³² Ellis (2005)

³³ Rubin (2006:178), see Mann (1993) and Tilly (1985) for a historical sociological analysis of the process of state formation in Europe.

³⁴ Clapham (1996); Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999); Chabal and Daloz (1999); Reno (1998)

Under such circumstances, state fragility/failure/collapse cannot be ascribed to individual cases of ‘bad leadership’, corruption and repression. It is a wider phenomenon linked to changes in the global political economy. The end of the cold war, globalisation and liberalisation have reduced the formal state institutions’ relevance and usefulness as centres for resources and wealth - especially in economies lying in the periphery of world markets. The neo-patrimonial state - which was always weak in terms of delivering services - weakens further, when it is no longer able to secure privileged access to and control over resources - or rather when competing elites are able to uphold and maintain their own patron-client networks outside the realm of the state.³⁵ In some cases this led to a change of government and a fragile process of democratisation. In other cases, it led to further erosion of state institutions and in extreme cases to their collapse. Terms such as ‘warlord politics’ or ‘warlordism’ are increasingly used to describe the forms of authority which gradually takes over when the neo-patrimonial state fails.³⁶

For the purpose of this paper, the key point is that the benign notion of a “social contract” between the state and the citizens, which underpins the European state model, has limited relevance if the state primarily has been an instrument of fear and oppression and not a provider of public goods. Automatically associating the state with ‘order’ in a positive sense of the word, as the current donor framework does, is thus problematic. It may lead to analyses which overlook or vilify non-state forms of order and see them as chaotic, disorderly, anarchic - and dangerous. And may inspire interventions that fail to take into account the existent dynamics and realities on the ground. This brings us to the second problematic concept: the notion of national ownership and how it shapes donors’ perception of security sector reform.

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP?

In a failed state, the security sector is almost by definition extremely militarised - and extremely fragmented. The civilian institutions are non-existing or largely irrelevant. If some sort of formal ‘security management and oversight bodies’ or ‘justice and law enforcement institutions’ are in place, they hold next to nil political power. Instead, one finds a multitude of armed groups operating in different parts of the country. Some of these groups are governmental, whereas others are non-state. To the ordinary citizen, however, the difference may be negligible. Both compete for control over population, natural resources and territory and in

³⁵ Clapham, 1996; Reno, 1998; Keen, 1998; Nordstrom, 2000; Duffield, 2001

³⁶ Reno (1998); Jackson (2005); Giustozzi (2005)

doing so rely on a mixed strategy of ‘winning hearts and minds’ and sowing fear and hatred.³⁷ They prey on the civilian population by looting, yet they also provide some form of security and law and order in the territories, they control.³⁸ In such a situation, the distinction between ‘core security actors’ - i.e. the government armed forces - and ‘non-statutory security forces’ - i.e. rebel groups, insurgents and other non-state groups - can be quite artificial and difficult to uphold to foreigners and locals alike.

Nevertheless, the donor community emphasises the government as the legitimate power holder. It is the capacity and legitimacy of the government, which the donors wish to build and improve. This also means that the government often serves as the main interface between the international efforts and the needs of the population.³⁹ Often the formal government is a ‘transitional government’ formed by a peace agreement and consisting of the warring factions who are party to that agreement. It is this entity which is supposed to formulate a ‘national vision’ for reform, and it is with this entity that ‘national ownership’ is supposed to rest.

Former enemies, however, rarely decide to lay down arms, embrace and agree on a national process of democratic reconciliation. Not only may they still hold very different and antagonistic political points of view, they may also personally stand to lose from peace as their power and income often stems from war economies.⁴⁰ And even after a transitional government has been replaced by an elected government, the political elite of the country may continue to have little real interest in ending a culture of corruption and impunity, which have served them well for decades.⁴¹

The official interlocutor for the international community - the government - may thus not only be ineffective, it may also be counterproductive.⁴² It is therefore not surprising that the OECD has found that one of the main obstacles to successful SSR is the “weakness of national vision and capacity to formulate reform programmes.”⁴³ This often prompts the international community to formulate the strategies and visions themselves - more or less coordinated, and with more or less input from ‘local voices’. In the OECD guidelines this is

³⁷ Kaldor (1999)

³⁸ Reno (1998); Keen (1998)

³⁹ Kent (2005)

⁴⁰ Keen (1998)

⁴¹ Chabal and Daloz (1999); Clapham (1996); Ellis (2005)

⁴² Kent (2005:37)

⁴³ OECD (2005b:63)

referred to as “enhancing the democratic governance of the security system by facilitating a process for the development and implementation of a security system governance strategy.”⁴⁴ And it is argued that this solution may be necessary in countries where there is a “lack of local input into and ownership of reform.”⁴⁵

Under such an arrangement, the façade of national ownership is kept intact, but the real drivers of change reside in the donor agencies and not in the institutions undergoing ‘reforms’. The tendency to equate local ownership with government ownership may thus prompt donors to impose their own solutions and structures rather than supporting ‘home-grown processes’. The perception of reforms as ‘necessary’ and largely technical matters of ‘right-sizing’ and ‘professionalizing’ may further facilitate this tendency for donors to define ownership “pragmatically” and apply a “principle of dynamic ownership” that “increasingly broadens the circle of participation in, and support for, the reform agenda.”⁴⁶ Often the donor community will legitimize their taking the lead by referring to the human security needs of the ordinary citizens. According to the overall policy framework, both international and human security needs will be met by the SSR-agenda. But to what extent is this perception shared by the people in question?

PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

According to the Human Security Report 2005, the concerns of ordinary citizens are very rarely included in the formulation of security policies. When assessing threats to security, policy makers and governments often ignore the views of those directly threatened. Although it seems self-evident that human security policy should be informed by the concerns and priorities of individuals at risk, bottom-up perspectives are notably absent from both human security research and policy agendas.⁴⁷ Rarely, if ever, have security-related development interventions in fragile or failed states been guided by comprehensive surveys of how the affected people in question perceived their own security situation.

⁴⁴ OECD (2005b:34)

⁴⁵ OECD (2005b:34)

⁴⁶ UNDG/World Bank (2005)

⁴⁷ Human Security Report (2005:47)

One of the few studies that try to survey how ordinary people feel about security was commissioned by the UK NGO-Military Contact Group.⁴⁸ The study shows that perceptions of ‘security’ differ significantly among international actors and local populations, and that the voices of local communities are not being heard in the post-conflict transition. In all three cases [Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sierra Leone], the dominant voices were those of the military peace support operations and the civilian assistance agencies. Not the local communities.

This finding is supported by e.g. the World Bank’s “Voices of the Poor”⁴⁹ and an OECD-survey, which both found that “a desire for security in its “physical” sense is often more of a priority for local populations than other aspects of the “human security” agenda which is being actively promoted by development actors.”⁵⁰

This has led some observers to argue that the current SSR-policy does not coincide with the needs or wishes of the recipients of reform.⁵¹ They further hold that if “those who suffer the imprecations of insecurity on a daily basis are SSR’s ultimate clients, and the objective of SSR is to provide them with tangible, concrete improvements in their security [...] the current SSR agenda and the programmes it generates are at odds with each other.”⁵²

This discussion is sometimes framed in terms of legitimacy and efficiency. Should the donor community focus on improving the governance and human rights standard within the security sector, or should it focus on improving the sector’s operational capacity to provide security? A blend of critical and realist observers are arguing that the donor community currently is pre-occupied with establishing the formal arrangements for a democratically accountable security sector, when in fact they should be busy building on-the-ground capacity to provide physical security.⁵³ Opposed to this view stands the exact opposite claim made by observers who hold that although the international community may talk the talk of improving governance, they

⁴⁸ Donini et al. (2005)

⁴⁹ World Bank (1999)

⁵⁰ OECD (2005b:65)

⁵¹ Scheye and Peake (2005:300)

⁵² Scheye and Peake (2005:301)

⁵³ See e.g. Scheye and Peake (2005) and Ottaway and Mair (2004) on the general issue and Lilly (2005) on the specific process in DRC.

walk the walk of training and equipping armed forces.⁵⁴ This liberal group is often concerned that the 'War on Terror' is strengthening the discrepancy between rhetoric and practice with regard to Western policies towards the security sector in failed and fragile states.

When confronted with such diverse assessments of what is going on, the need for thorough empirical inquiries becomes evident. Firstly, there is a marked shortage of studies that compare Western engagement in the security sectors of fragile states before and after 11 September and explores whether the 'war on terror' has in fact shifted focus away from democratic reforms towards strengthening the security apparatus of the state. Secondly, there is an equally marked shortage of studies of popular perceptions and responses to security. Who do people turn to for security and protection? Who do they see as providers of security and who do they see as providers of insecurity? Given the brutal history of many of the states, which today are considered failed, the police and the army, which Western donors are focusing many of their efforts on, may not necessarily be regarded by the affected populations as the first-best choice on which to base the security of themselves, their family and their community.

Implications for Policy

The emphasis which donors place on boosting the central government has been equated with a set of 'legal blinders' that may prevent the international community from truly recognising the phenomenon of state failure.⁵⁵ The international community tends to see failed states as places where nothing works; where everything is chaos and anarchy. The collapse of state authority does, however, not necessarily mean the end of order. Basic human questions of how to ensure physical and economic security of oneself and one's dependants do not disappear because the state does.⁵⁶ Alternative - non-state - systems of order tend to evolve in the process of state decay. Some of the core functions associated with the state may be undertaken by different types of non-state actors. Warlords, traditional leaders, religious communities, neighbourhood or community groups etc. can - amid chaos and bloodshed - provide some form of security and stability, perhaps a rudimentary justice system or access to very

⁵⁴ See e.g. Ebo (2005) who argues that post-conflict reconstruction of the security sector in Liberia has so far focused almost exclusively on the efficiency aspect of reform, while the governance dimension has hardly been addressed. Tschirgi (2003) provides a more general liberal perspective.

⁵⁵ Herbst (2003)

⁵⁶ Chesterman, Ignatieff and Thakur (2004)

basic social services.⁵⁷ And as the case of Somalia demonstrates, protracted crises are also dynamic crises which may over time lead to the formation of a new form of relative peace and stability.⁵⁸

In the SSR-policy framework, alternate security providers such as warlords and community groups are referred to as non-statutory security forces. The OECD-guidelines explicitly point out that the international community rarely engages with such actors. This policy may need to be revisited, if sustainable solutions to the security dilemmas and challenges in failed states are to be found. As a minimum, international actors need to enhance their understanding of, why people may be reluctant to switching loyalty from the devil they know (e.g. a local warlord) to the devil they don't know (the internationally supported central government).

The focus on formal authority structures may prevent international actors from understanding and supporting informal systems, which often provide people living in failed states with a modicum of security and predictability. It may also prevent them from understanding the needs and perceptions of the people, they are trying to help. Often, ordinary citizens are seen as passive victims of state failure, when in fact they may be experts at the art of survival and adaptation.⁵⁹

The mechanisms for exercising power in failed states may be difficult to detect for 'outsiders', but that does not make them any less real. The current policy approach, however, relies on a pre-conceived notion of the shape, direction and content of reform, which leads to state-centric - and overly technical - perceptions of the dynamics. Despite the emphasis placed on human security, the policy framework pays very little attention to the question of how populations respond to security problems, where the reach of the state security system is weak. It furthermore largely ignores political factors, such as power and perceptions, which are key to any process of change.

Overcoming these limitations is bound to require looking beyond normative notions of what a state and its security sector are supposed to look like. One of the first steps towards addressing Western fears of the disorder in failed states may thus be to acknowledge that the

⁵⁷ Reno (1998); Little (2002); Menkhaus (2004a + b); Blom Hansen and Stepputat (2001)

⁵⁸ Little (2002); Menkhaus (2004a)

⁵⁹ Menkhaus (2004a)

Weberian/Hobbesian state model does not provide the only possible answer to problems of order and security.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO ENHANCED SECURITY?

Moving beyond normative notions and taking into account the reality on the ground does not necessarily imply supporting whoever power-holder currently in control of the territory – although real-politik may lead some to see this as the preferred option.⁶⁰ Rather it means taking an unprejudiced look at the coping mechanism of ordinary people and trying to work with them. There may be an untapped source of knowledge and capacity hidden in local structures and networks, which are informal - and therefore often invisible to the international community - but nonetheless very real. With specific reference to self-defence and vigilante groups, Stephen Ellis (2005) thus notes that:

One of the few hopeful developments to come out of Africa's many dysfunctional states is the way power vacuums have been spontaneously filled by new structures with deep roots in Africa's history. ... At present, UN administrators tend to ignore such networks and often spend an entire tour of duty patiently rebuilding formal new governments without noticing the alternate structures already in existence right under their noses. Administrators should learn to take advantage of such indigenous political institutions. .. Because certain deep-rooted local structures are not going to disappear, it makes sense to think about how they can play a role.

The concepts and analytical tools for formulating policy along this line are still at best considered 'work-in-progress'. Drawing on experiences mainly from policing reforms, it has been argued that the key challenge for donors is firstly to identify the different security institutions which exist, secondly to determine whether their "resources and energies can be harnessed in furtherance of public security."⁶¹ Relevant security institutions could be linked to e.g. religion, education, private enterprise (legal and illegal) and various community institutions. They could, however, also be linked to foreign investors who rely on their own security arrangements to protect their assets. Such arrangements may provide a "diffusion of benefits effects", such as

⁶⁰ Lieven and Ottaway (2002)

⁶¹ Dupont et al. (2002)

security for neighbouring residents and e.g. medical, welfare and infrastructure services.⁶² They may, however, also contribute to repression and exacerbation of local conflict. The point is that one needs to look at the reality on the ground, not on preconceived ideas of how things are supposed to work. What kind of security is provided, by whom and how can they contribute to building a stable and more inclusive provision of public security? In this respect, a necessary first step may be to move beyond a strict public/private distinction and acknowledge the extent to which people have come to rely on non-state providers for their day-to-day security needs.⁶³

In fact these ideas are quite similar to an ongoing debate in the donor community on social service delivery in 'difficult environments'.⁶⁴ When it comes to matters such as health and education, donors tend to keep an open mind towards non-state delivery.⁶⁵ The primary focus remains on ensuring that the services are actually delivered - not on whether it is done by the state or by NGOs (local or international). The desire to ensure uniform standards and national programming etc. tends to be approached as a secondary objective in fragile states, where the government's capacity and reach are very limited. The point to be made here is that the same could apply with regard to security. The option of 'scaling up' from fragmented and diverse configurations of service delivery may also be relevant to the provision of public safety, security and law and order, and not only in regard to 'soft services' such as health and education..

Keeping an open mind and working with a pragmatic down-to-earth approach may thus be best way to help improve the everyday security conditions for people living in failed states. Whether or not it will also succeed in overcoming or addressing Western fears of the disorder in failed states remains a different - and perhaps more difficult - question.

⁶² Dupont, Grabowsky and Shearing (2002)

⁶³ Abrahamsen and Williams (2006)

⁶⁴ Berry et al. (2004)

⁶⁵ Leader and Colenso (2004)

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