Diagnosing the Failings of Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan

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Abstract: Security sector reform (SSR) is often described as the lynchpin of the Afghan state building project and the exit strategy of the NATO military mission. Yet despite the investment of billions of dollars into this comprehensive process that aims to transform the security and justice architecture of the country, its achievements have been limited. This can be attributed generally to the unsuitability of the SSR model to succeed in conflict-affected settings and more specifically to the failure of donors to adequately adapt SSR principles and best practices to the complexities of the Afghan context. In many ways, the Afghan case demonstrates the urgent need for reform of the SSR model itself, which has shown an inability in Afghanistan and beyond to translate its ambitious reform principles into tangible change on the ground.

1. Introduction

The target dates may shift but the international community's exit strategy in Afghanistan has remained constant, consisting of the development of an effective and self-sufficient Afghan security sector, a process known as security sector reform (SSR). As 2010 comes to a close, marking nine years of internationally supported state building in Afghanistan, the currently accepted end state for the process, when NATO military forces can hand over security responsibility to their Afghan counterparts and withdraw, is 2014. That date was only set at a NATO Summit in Lisbon in November 2010 after the previous end date of 2011 was acknowledged to be unachievable. In fact, the end date for the process has been a moving target since the inception of the state-building project, shortly after the Taliban's ouster in the fall of 2001. It illustrates as well as anything else the failures of the project and the unreasonable expectations that international donors have attached to it.

With the Afghan government and the international donor community hinging the success of state building on the outcome of SSR, it is important to understand why the process has thus far failed to achieve its objectives and meet its timelines. Moreover, is success – defined at minimum by the ability of the Afghan security sector to assert a monopoly over the use of force and provide equal access to justice in an accountable and rights-respecting fashion – even achievable? Looking beyond Afghanistan, is the orthodox model of SSR, replete with its ambitious liberal agenda and assumptions, even applicable in non-Western conflict-affected states? To answer these questions this paper will analyze the various challenges and dilemmas that have faced the Afghan SSR process, dividing them into two broad categories: conceptual and contextual.

The conceptual section will discuss the efficacy and suitability of the orthodox SSR model in the Afghan context. The contextual section will be divided into three parts, each outlining particular context-specific challenges to SSR in Afghanistan: socio-cultural and historical, political, and external. Taken together the two sections paint a picture of an environment highly inhospitable for conventional SSR. Attempts to contort and adjust the model to fit the Afghan context have paradoxically compounded the problems it has faced. The more the donor community has struggled to make the process work in the quicksand of Afghanistan, the further it has faltered. The Afghan case thus demonstrates as well as any other that new approaches, better able to adapt some of the core principles of SSR into context-relevant programming, are needed in order to advance SSR in conflict-affected states.

2. A Snapshot of Afghanistan's SSR Process in 2010

Although SSR is often treated solely as a process to train and equip the security forces, it is much more than that. In fact, one of the principal innovations of the SSR concept as compared to previous forms of donor security assistance is its holistic focus, recognizing the interconnections between the security, justice and governance spheres as well as the critical roles played by a wide range of societal actors in those areas, from traditional security institutions like the military and police, to civil society groups and non-state security and justice structures. The rationale behind the SSR concept is that the different arms of the security and justice systems are symbiotically connected and mutually interdependent. Military and police forces will have difficulty establishing order without a legal and judicial framework to lean on, just as security and justice institutions will be acutely vulnerable to corruption and mismanagement if not overseen by efficient and effective governance structures.

Although the intuitive logic of SSR is widely accepted by policy-makers and practitioners alike in Afghanistan, the

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levels of coordination, strategic coherence and contextual knowledge needed for implementation has been in short supply. Accordingly, the SSR process in 2010, as it has in every year since its launch, has largely been advanced in compartmentalized silos. This is partially a legacy of the donor support scheme initially established to underwrite the process. The lead nation support scheme divided the SSR process into five pillars and appointed a G8 state to oversee each: military reform (U.S.-lead), police reform (German-lead), justice reform (Italian-lead), counter-narcotics (UK-lead) and DDR (Japanese-lead). Designed to ensure sustained donor support across the SSR process, the scheme effectively territorialized it, fostering turf wars between donors. While the scheme would give way by 2006 to overarching U.S. leadership, the result has not vastly improved strategic coherence.[1]

A stated requirement of SSR, due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the concept, is a joined-up or whole-of-government approach by donors. Because of the wide range of donor government departments and agencies that must be engaged to effectively implement a holistic SSR process, there is a need for a comprehensive approach. The level of integration and coherence in U.S. government SSR programming in Afghanistan has not met the standard demanded by the SSR model. By 2010, the U.S. military had assumed broad control of the police and military reform processes, with support from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, but judicial and corrections reform is largely being advanced by the State Department, USAID and the Department of Justice, with little coordination or communication between the two reform areas. Moreover, other U.S. government agencies, like the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have stand-alone programs to support counter-narcotics and intelligence capacity building respectively, again largely independent of wider U.S.-led SSR efforts.

The sheer size of the U.S. security assistance program, and the multiplicity of agencies involved in it, has militated against coordination and formation of a truly comprehensive approach. It is telling that some U.S. agencies have better relations with other donor states than sister agencies and departments under the U.S. government umbrella. As a result, opportunities have been missed to leverage national investments in different areas of SSR.

A breakdown of the various components of the SSR process demonstrates the uphill battle that it has faced. The Afghan National Army (ANA) has traditionally been viewed as the 'bright light' of the process, an area where genuine progress has been made. The reputation of the ANA is certainly sterling, compared to the Afghan National Police (ANP) and even the National Directorate of Security – the country's intelligence agency – but its field performance has been questioned by some NATO trainers and military officials. The 2010 NATO operation in Marjah of Helmand province (Operation Moshtarak) demonstrated clearly that the ANA cannot operate in significant

numbers without Coalition leadership and support. Although the corruption prevalent in the ANA pales in comparison to that of the ANP, it does exist, with ANA personnel having been linked to the drug trade and the illegal sale of weapons. Perhaps the most significant problem affecting the ANA and its viability is that of personnel retention. High attrition rates, reaching 25% per year, remain a significant problem despite the implementation of a number of measures to address the issue, such as salary increases and the restructuring of leaves.[2] Just as concerning for ANA officials and the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) has been the low number of ANA soldiers that have opted to re-enlist in the force after the expiry of their initial three-year service contracts. The ANA cannot sustain itself unless it deals with these retention issues, which reflect the poor esprit de corps and morale within the force.

The police could be considered the basket case of the Afghan security sector. The majority of the force is involved in some form of corruption, whether petty in the form of illegal tolls and taxation on road, or grand, in the form of active engagement in the drug trade. Some of the statistics surrounding the ANP are startling: as of mid 2010, 75% of the force had not received any formal training[3]; 90% were illiterate[4]; up to 47% leave the force each year[5]; and up to 41% per cent are using illegal drugs.[6] The dire state of the police can be attributed to two factors: the slow start of the reform process, which really did not ramp up in earnest until 2003, and the decision to work with existing police personnel, largely former militia fighters who re-hatted after the fall of the Taliban, rather than build a new force from the ground up as in the case of the ANA. Compounding the problems confronting police development, the ANP has been one of the principal targets of Taliban insurgents, with police suffering more casualties than NATO and ANA forces combined, a factor that has contributed to the poor morale and high attrition rate. The Taliban has also heavily infiltrated the ANP and other militant groups, illustrated by a number of incidents where police officers have been engaged anti-government militant activity.[7]

While programming in judicial reform and corrections will never be as cost-intensive as the development of the security forces, the level of investment in the area has nonetheless been disproportionately low. Investment in justice and corrections reform has represented a fraction of all donor contributions to the security sector, typically less than 5%, making them the 'poor cousin' of the SSR family. Quite apart from the issue of money, judicial reform programming has been beset by problems of poor coordination and strategic deficits. Coordination among key justice sector donors has improved

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1 For a detailed description of the evolution of the Afghan SSR process see: Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan,* International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Adelphi Paper (London: Routledge, 2007).

2 Anthony Cordesman, *Afghan National Security Forces: What it Will Take to Implement the ISAF Strategy* (Washington, DC: CSIS), November 2010, p. 103.
3 Mark Hosenball, Ron Moreau and Mark Miller, "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight", *Newsweek,* 19 March 2010.
4 Ibid.
5 Cordesman, p. 45.
6 "Afghan Police Training Hampered by Illiteracy", Betrayal, *Fox News.com,* 30 November 2010.
7 In November 2010 an Afghan police officer killed six American soldiers during a training mission, the worst attack committed by an Afghan service member since the war began. It is believed that the assailant, a member of the Afghan Border Police, was linked to the Taliban (Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghan Killer of Six Americans Was Trusted Police Officer", *New York Times,* 30 November 2010).

since a major donor conference on the rule of law was held in Rome in 2007, but divisions, particularly between the largest donors, the U.S. and Italy, remain. One of the principal and most destructive manifestations of these divisions has been the promotion of contradictory legal systems, with the Italians advancing French civil code principles, consistent with its legal tradition, and the U.S. basing its programming on its own common law system. This has created tangible confusion among the Afghan judicial institutions.

Just as damaging as these contradictions in the content of assistance provided to the Afghan judicial system are the omissions and gaps, most prominently the informal legal system. Perhaps the greatest indictment of Afghanistan's formal legal system is the fact that more than 80% of disputes in the country are resolved through the informal system, primarily through local *jirgas* (assemblies) and *shuras* (village councils) as well as ad hoc mediation by local notables and elders.[8] The state legal system has long been viewed by much of the Afghan population as corrupt, expensive, ineffective and generally out of touch with local realities, sentiments that reform programming has done little to dispel. Despite the predominance of informal judicial structures and their relative effectiveness vis-à-vis the formal legal system, few donor-supported initiatives have been launched to engage and nurture it. The primary rationale behind this reticence has been the widely held notion that informal structures in Afghanistan uniformly violate international human rights standards. Not only has recent research shown that many of these structures are compatible with international human rights norms, but they have also demonstrated a capability and, indeed willingness to evolve and change in relation to those norms.[9] Despite some incipient programs to explore the interface between the formal and informal systems, this area remains under-explored to the detriment of efforts to expand access to justice in Afghanistan.[10]

 In November 2010 inmates in the main prison facility of the northern province of Balkh launched a series of hunger strikes in protest of inhumane conditions, largely caused by overcrowding.[11] This incident could have happened anywhere in Afghanistan, with the bulk of the country's prison facilities still well below international standards. While some progress has been made to reform and rehabilitate large prisons in Kabul and some provincial centers, most of the country's prison facilities feature deplorable conditions that are well known to the international community. Many donor states are encumbered from providing assistance to prisons due to restrictive domestic laws designed to prevent aid from being used by partner governments to repress innocent civilians and dissidents. This has been one contributing factor to a general

donor view in Afghanistan, and many other SSR settings, that prisons are secondary to the priority of standing up the police and military. This view misses the point that bad prisons become breeding grounds for criminality, militant recruitment and general resentment, not to mention, that they can be breached easily, providing immediate recruits to anti-government forces as witnessed with the Sarposa prison break in Kandahar province in 2008 where over 1,000 prisoners, including 400 Taliban militants, were set free when militants blew open the prison gates. Many security sector practitioners in Afghanistan describe justice and corrections reform as a luxury that cannot be afforded in an emergency period. A recent Chatham House report acutely demonstrated the danger of this mindset, showing that sentiments of injustice at the local level have been a major driver of insurgent recruitment.[12]

If the rule of law is the poor cousin of the SSR family in Afghanistan, governance is the reclusive uncle. Little attention has been directed at building the capacity of the Afghan state to manage its growing security and justice apparatus, whether it is building the capacity of the executive branch to develop coherent security policy, the Ministries that apply those policies efficiently and effectively, or parliamentary commissions that provide oversight of policy implementation. Critical institutions like the Ministry of Interior remain riddled with corruption, with many positions of influence available for sale to the highest bidder. Governance structures tend to be heavily factionalized, ethnicized and politicized, with bodies like the Office of the National Security Council acting more like a part of the Karzai political machine than a neutral bureaucratic body. Given that the SSR process is defined by its prioritization of good governance, anchored to the belief that a poorly governed security and justice architecture can foster instability and insecurity, Afghan SSR seems like a misnomer. The Afghan case resembles more a Cold War train and equip program – replete with its prioritization of militarized security force training and equipped with little focus on acclimating the force to its role within a democratic polity – than an SSR process. A number of specific challenges and conditions have driven the process in this direction, raising the question of whether SSR is even feasible in challenging conflict-affected contexts like Afghanistan.

3. Challenges to SSR in Afghanistan

3.1 Conceptual Challenges

The SSR model requires and even assumes the existence of certain preconditions for it to be effective. Very few of those preconditions were present in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's fall and are still absent today, more than nine years later. Accordingly, the SSR model as it is constructed in documents like the OECD-DAC Handbook on Security System Reform and the UN Secretary General's Report on *The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform*, is out of place in the Afghan context and will be hard-pressed to achieve

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8   United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2007 – Bridging Modernity and Tradition: The Rule of Law and the Search for Justice* (Kabul: UNDP, 2007).

9   Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), *Security Sector Reform Monitor: Afghanistan,* No. 4, September 2010.

10 See, for example, the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) project on "Relations Between State and Non-State Justice Systems in Afghanistan" at: http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/relations-between-state-and-non-state-justice-systems-afghanistan.

11 Abdul Latif Sahak. "Hunger Stroke Over Afghan Jail Conditions" *Institute fir War and Peace Reporting Afghanistan Recovery Report,* Issue 383, 2 December 2010.

12 Stephen Carter and Kate Clark. *No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan,* Chatham House, December 2010.

meaningful change until conditions evolve in favor of the process.[13] The ultimate result of implementing a program in an environment where enabling conditions are absent is that the process can mutate and potentially do harm. That is indeed what has happened in Afghanistan, with the process evolving from a more orthodox SSR approach to a train-and-equip strategy, "a slide toward expediency" in the reform process that can be seen in a number of comparable SSR cases like Iraq.[14]

It is important to identify some of these absent preconditions and chart how they have impacted the SSR process and its development. First, the model demands a base level of security and stability absent in Afghanistan. SSR is a long-term process of institutional reform intended to balance the imperatives of operational effectiveness and good governance. It is not a tool to address immediate sources of insecurity or instability, like the Taliban-led insurgency. When it is framed in such a manner, as we have seen in Afghanistan – effectively weaponizing SSR – the fundamental principles of the process tend to be undermined. The overwhelming focus on training and equipping the security forces has eclipsed any consideration for governance. Even within the train-and-equip process itself this imbalance favoring the hard security elements of the process – operational effectiveness – over soft security considerations – human rights and community outreach – will have deleterious long-term consequences for the security forces. The lion share of the training for the ANP is dedicated to paramilitary tactics, leaving little time for instruction on community engagement, human rights, non-violent techniques, and the intricacies of the Afghan legal system. To get Afghans into the fight as quickly as possible, the training period for police recruits has been gradually reduced, reaching a low of six weeks in 2010, down from nine weeks in previous years and significantly lower than the twelve weeks provided to police in Iraq. Reducing the length of police training as the going gets tough may seem counter-intuitive, but quantity over quality has been a guiding logic of security force development in Afghanistan. The SSR process as a whole has also become progressively more militarized, with the police being viewed more as "little soldiers" than community guardians. This may deliver some short-term gains against the Taliban insurgency, but over the medium and long term such a strategy risks creating bad police, prone to excessive violence and abuse of the population, something that will gradually undermine the legitimacy of the force. As a top U.S. Marine Commander, Lawrence D. Nicolson, astutely remarked in an interview with the Washington Post in March 2010: "I'd rather have no police than bad police, because bad police destroy local faith and confidence in their government and push [the locals] to the Taliban...No matter how hard the Marines and Afghan Army work to earn the public trust, bad police can unhinge those efforts in a heartbeat."[15]

Second, successful SSR programs, such as that seen in post-Apartheid South Africa, or some of the post-Communist transition states of Central and Eastern Europe, featured a high level of domestic elite consensus on the structure, content and direction of the reform process. Those SSR programs were clearly owned and led by domestic stakeholders. The same cannot be said of the Afghan process, where reforms are largely externally driven and, in some cases, designed as much to satisfy external security interests – such as the U.S. war on terrorism – as domestic ones. Different ethnic and factional groups in Afghanistan have different conceptions of the role of the security forces and the state itself, with Pashtuns – the largest ethnic group – viewing the security apparatus as a guardian of Pashtun dominance over the country, and ethnic minorities like the Tajiks, seeing it as a bulwark against such domination. Compounding this dilemma has been the ethnicization of key security institutions like the ANA, whose officer corps and senior leadership positions have been dominated by ethnic Tajiks, leading other ethnic groups like the Hazara, who are highly underrepresented in the force, to feel disenfranchised and skeptical of the entire SSR project. This combination of externally driven reform approaches and the co-option of large elements of the process by particular ethnic groups have undermined any sense of broad national ownership.

It is better for donors not to engage in SSR programs if they are not clearly owned and directed by a majority of the key stakeholders in the host country. The various blueprints of SSR may not be clear on this point, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to wholly manufacture ownership. The propensity of donors to rely on like-minded Western-oriented actors to meet an imaginary ownership quota, a practice common in Afghanistan, will not deliver the type of legitimate domestic leadership that is needed. Further complicating this picture, a certain level of capacity is required in the host government for it to adequately assert ownership over a process as complex as SSR. The dearth of human capacity – educated and experienced government officials or change agents capable of driving complex reform processes – was limited in Afghanistan following the collapse of the Taliban regime.

This leads us to our third precondition absent in the Afghan case, a basic level of human and institutional capacity. The character, scope and tempo of institutional change demanded by SSR programs is tantamount to societal engineering, and would be difficult for wealthy Western states to implement, let alone developing post-conflict countries. The model presupposes a basic level of institutional and human capacity in the host government and civil society that is characteristically absent. Afghanistan's main security and justice institutions lacked pencils and desks, let alone computers and filing systems after the Taliban's ouster, and were desperately short on educated and experienced personnel, most of whom were either killed during the 23-year civil war or fled the country. By contrast, South Africa and the states of the Former Soviet Union, who were able to advance comparatively successful SSR transitions, featured intact and in some cases very sophisticated institutions with entrenched bureaucratic traditions. In Afghanistan a foundation of human and institutional development must be built before the main elements of the SSR process can even

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13 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), *The OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR): Supporting Security and Justice* (Paris: OECD, 2007); UN Secretary-General, *Securing Peace and Development: the Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform*, A/62/659-S/2008/39 (New York: United Nations), 2008.
14 Mark Sedra, "Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: The Slide Toward Expediency", *International Peacekeeping*, 13:1, pp. 94-110, 2006.
15 Greg Jaffe, "Program aims to rebuild Afghan police force, repair its image", *Washington Post,* 12 March 2010. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/11/AR2010031103148.html.

be considered. The bottom line is that there was very little to reform in the Afghan security sector following the collapse of the Taliban regime.

When such a drastic gap in capacity exists, local ownership and leadership is characteristically scarce and donors show a greater propensity to impose structures and solutions rather than take the time to build sustainable bodies and norms from the ground up. The end result, as we have seen in Afghanistan, are security sector institutions that enjoy little public legitimacy and are unsustainable in economic, political and cultural terms.

Finally, some level of coordination and coherence in the interests, objectives and strategies of SSR donors is crucial for the success of the project. The multiplicity of actors engaged in the Afghan security space is only matched by the number of unique, and in many cases competing, interests at play. In all reform contexts there are a range of differing donor interests and approaches. Those differences can be destructive if either the capacity of local actors to demand coordination is lacking or if there is no common overarching objective to harness and channel donor energies. In the case of South Africa, the domestic government was able to assert a leadership role over the SSR process and direct the flow of international aid and assistance in accordance with its own domestically devised objectives. In the former Soviet Union, it was the goal of NATO and EU membership that imbued international assistance with a level of coherence that can only be dreamed of in cases like Afghanistan. Neither strong domestic government leadership to serve as a donor traffic cop, nor unifying transcendent objectives, are present in Afghanistan to inject some coherence and coordination into donor activities and practices.

What these four preconditions and their absence from Afghanistan tell us is that the conventional SSR model may simply be ill-equipped to succeed in complex conflict-affected environments and a variation of it, explicitly designed to manage the inherent risks and challenges of these contexts, may be required. However, even specialized post-conflict models cannot be universally applied, and will have to be tailored to local conditions in the recipient country. Even an ideally designed program to confront generic threats of conflict-affected states, would falter in a place like Afghanistan if not adapted to the country's litany of contextual peculiarities.

3.2 Contextual Challenges

The Afghan context presents particularly challenging conditions for the implementation of an SSR program. First and foremost, it would be difficult in 2010 to refer to Afghanistan as a post-conflict setting, with large parts of the country embroiled in an escalating insurgency. There are no provisions or prescriptions in the SSR model for conflict-time reforms; the model assumes the cessation of large-scale violence, even if some residual insecurity is inevitable. Experience in Afghanistan and other SSR cases have shown that high levels of insecurity and instability brought about by an active conflict can either distort or wholly undermine SSR.

Apart from the deteriorating security situation, the SSR process has experienced some difficulty effectively engaging Afghanistan's political and socio-cultural milieu. The process and its donor underwriters have shown a tendency, not inconsistent with the wider global experience with SSR, to work around local realities rather than with or through them. The result has been a generic and highly technical process largely ill suited to achieving meaningful change.

3.2.1 Socio-Cultural & Historical

Successful SSR, like any development or broader state-building project, depends on good assessments and knowledge of the recipient country and its needs. In Afghanistan, the pressure to achieve rapid change immediately after the fall of the Taliban regime seemingly overshadowed the need for rigorous data collection and analysis. This has handicapped the security sector reformers in their efforts to engage Afghanistan's unique socio-cultural and historical traditions.

Afghanistan features a multiplicity of different forms of power and authority, from tribal and religious to state and warlord, each deriving legitimacy from different sources, whether traditional, economic or coercive. Seeing as SSR fundamentally alters power relationships, it is imperative that the process engage these various types of authority so as to mitigate potential conflict. Afghanistan's security sector reformers, however, largely limited their engagement to formal state power, perhaps the least important form of power at present, with some limited contact with warlord and tribal authority.

When the process has engaged informal or non-state governance structures or processes, through efforts like the mobilization of non-state militia groups, it has done so in a clumsy and ill-informed fashion that has set back the SSR process. The litany of failed militia mobilization initiatives, from the Afghan National Auxiliary Police to the Afghan Public Protection Program, exemplifies this inability to effectively interact with local structures. A current scheme, the Village Stability Programme, has continued this trend with reports emerging at the end of 2010 of militiamen "harassing, robbing and even killing locals", thereby undermining trust in the state rather than reinforcing it.[16] The lack of progress to develop formal state structures has prompted donors to romanticize and instrumentalize traditional security practices, but a lack of donor knowledge of these practices and the power structures that sustain them has produced counterproductive results.

The SSR and state building processes as a whole have been advanced in a manner that contravenes political and power realities in Afghanistan with overwhelming attention being placed on building formal centralized state structures in a country where local power and forms of identity have always been preeminent, even at times when a functioning central state existed. This is not to say that no attention should be placed on building national level institutions, but the lack of attention on sub-national structures and the failure of the SSR process to adequately engage local power holders has diminished the

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16 Zia Ahmadi, "Afghan Village Militias Accused of Abuses", *Institute for War & Peace Reporting Afghanistan Recovery Report,* Issue 383, 3 December 2010.

impact of the process, and prevented it from improving access to security and justice for average Afghans. The Afghan socio-cultural and historical context presents a particularly complex case for SSR, but the proclivity to circumvent local realities to superimpose artificial institutional edifices has done little to overcome that complexity.

3.2.2 Political

SSR has been advanced in a largely apolitical manner in Afghanistan, despite the fact that the process is acutely political. By altering power dynamics SSR invariably creates winners and losers and requires sophisticated strategies of political engagement not only to enable local ownership, but to mitigate potential risks posed by spoilers. Instead of investing the necessary political capital in the process, engaging a wide range of power holders with influence in the security sphere, reformers took a technocratic approach and dealt almost exclusively with central government counterparts and like-minded actors. This centralized approach has had two impacts: First, it has provided ample room for favored local stakeholders to manipulate donor assistance for their own gain. The limited political outreach of donors has meant that local stakeholders could engage in corrupt practices and blatantly self-interested behavior with impunity. The decisions by early Defence Minister Fahim and the former Chief of the Army General Staff Bismillah Khan to fill the senior officer corps of the ANA with Tajiks, many from the Panjshir Valley with connections to their Shura-i Nezar political faction, exemplifies how aid recipients have been able to instrumentalize donor assistance. Second, the approach has inadvertently alienated non-favored political actors, like the former communists and traditional elites, who could make a major contribution to the process and facilitate the solidification of a broader consensus.

3.2.3 External

War in Afghanistan is rarely a national phenomenon, but takes on a regional character. External actors, either directly through military intervention or indirectly by sustaining proxy competition, have driven conflict dynamics. Addressing some of these dynamics, through state building and SSR, requires a strategy that looks beyond national borders. It is difficult for instance, to envision a sustainable solution to cross border smuggling and insurgent activity through border security development without engaging Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan's other neighbors. Yet this is precisely how these processes have been advanced with only limited regional cooperation on key SSR issues like border control and counter-narcotics.

Another external factor that has complicated Afghanistan's SSR process has been the conflicting interests of the donors

themselves. Whether the paramount interest of a particular donor is to advance the war on terror, curry favour with NATO allies, demonstrate the effectiveness of national aid programs or contain a regional power, a range of interests are at stake in Afghanistan, contributing, at times, to contradictory policies and programs. Such a charged geopolitical environment places an even greater premium on coordination.

4. Conclusion

SSR in Afghanistan and scores of other transition states is framed as a lynchpin for state building and stabilization. President Karzai has referred to it as the "basic pre-requisite to recreating the nation that today's parents hope to leave to future generations."[17] Perhaps the clearest sign of the perceived importance of the process is the tremendous scale of the resource investment by the international community (primarily the U.S.) in the vicinity of $30 billion by the end of 2010. If anything, however, the Afghan case has shown that a successful SSR program cannot be bought and that success can only be assured with careful adaption of the SSR concept to local realities, deep engagement in the local political field, and careful coordination of external interests and priorities. Perhaps what the process needs most is time for reforms and change to take hold and achieve societal acceptance. Unfortunately, time is rarely on the side of security sector reformers, constrained by short-term timelines dictated by their own political masters.

In some respects the SSR concept itself, designed with more stable contexts in mind, is ill equipped to succeed in challenging conflict-affected places like Afghanistan. This is not a call for donors to discard the SSR concept, but to redouble efforts to transform the model into one that is more adaptable to the conditions of today's broken states. It is clear that SSR needs to be less doctrinaire about its underlying liberal principles and more willing to accept non-traditional structures and solutions when they are functional, effective and broadly in line with international standards. Afghanistan shows that SSR programs must be rooted to outcomes, namely the provision of accountable and effective security and justice services to populations, rather than rigid liberal processes of institutional change. Regardless of its legacy in Afghanistan, SSR will remain an important concept going forward as it plays an indispensable role in conflict transitions, but if it is to deliver genuine rather than merely superficial change, a new reform mindset or even culture is needed. Considering that the concept is only a decade old, this can be seen as part of the model's natural evolution.

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17 Hodes and Sedra, p. 51.