Living Apart Together?
On the Difficult Linkage between DDR and SSR in Post-Conflict Environments

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Linking DDR and SSR in post-conflict environments is desirable but often not feasible. A lack of long-term perspectives and trust between parties after a peace agreement, an absence of state capacity for reform, staffing issues and an absence of sustainable security sector funding make far-reaching linkage of DDR and SSR problematic. A result hereof is that post-conflict DDR processes will generally neither be driven by an analysis of security threats and needs, nor contribute to a security sector that performs better and in a more accountable manner. In fact, they may temporarily reduce performance and accountability.

Introduction

A key objective of *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration* (DDR)[1] processes in the immediate aftermath of conflict is to help create an environment in which the peace process can take root by targeting a fairly narrow range of political and security objectives. Important elements of DDR in this context are dismantling existing command structures of armed groups, reducing the size of the fighting forces of former conflict parties (by preparing combatants for a return to civilian life) and, where possible, merging them into new national security forces. *Security Sector Reform* (SSR)[2] is a process aiming at the transformation of non-effective, under-governed, unprofessional and often unstable security bodies into professional, effective and democratically accountable ones. Several sources have suggested both processes can and should be linked in post-conflict environments, particularly in the immediate aftermath of a peace agreement.[3] A DDR process could, for instance, help form new security forces in a manner that would benefit longer-term SSR.

Although this policy brief agrees with the desirability of such linkage, it questions its actual feasibility. Instead, it suggests that DDR and SSR processes are likely to remain largely unconnected. Regrettably, attempts to design, implement and resource these two processes jointly are quite likely to fail. This is the case because effectively linking DDR and SSR requires agreement on a longer-term political process that can guide decisions on the role, size, composition and control of security forces in line with the internal and external security threats that a country faces. However, in post-conflict settings DDR design and implementation tend to take place during, or shortly after, peace negotiations. It is practically impossible to obtain agreement on a longer-term political process during this period for four reasons. First, time, trust and a long-term perspective are lacking. Second, state bodies or structures with the legitimacy or ability to realize deep changes in the security architec-

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1 For a more complete definition: United Nations, *The UN Approach to DDR: Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*, New York, 2006.

2 For a more complete definition: OECD, *Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR): Supporting Security and Justice, Paris, 2007*; UNSG, *Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*, Report of the Secretary General, New York, A/62/659–S/2008/39, 2008.

3 For instance: United Nations, "DDR and Security Sector Reform", *in: Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), Operational Guidance Note 6.10*, 14 December 2009; McFate (S.), "The Link Between DDR and SSR in Conflict-Affected Countries", USIP, *Special Report 238*, Washington, May 2010 It should be noted that neither DDR nor SSR are limited to post-conflict surroundings.

ture often do not exist yet. Third, ensuring that only qualified staff joins the new security forces is nearly impossible. Fourth, there usually is a lack of (clarity on) funding available to engage in longer-term, sustainable reform. In the absence of such a political agreement, DDR and SSR processes risk either creating structures that are not fit for purpose, or cutting expenses at the cost of the ability to meet real security needs.

An Ideal Sequence of Events

'DDR' is a broad label for a cluster of interventions focused mostly on short-term stabilization by way of two processes.[4] First, it aims to reduce the number of combatants and volume of weapons in 'circulation' to decrease the ability of parties to re-engage in violence and minimize the risk of 'trigger-incidents' in combustible environments[5]. Second, it generally aims to defuse the post-conflict situation by merging elements of the state's regular forces with elements of former rebel groups and militias, thus creating a new "national" security apparatus. Whether this actually works depends to a large extent on the effective dismantling of command structures and on creating clarity on the roles of various former rebel leaders in the new security apparatus. Ideally these parallel processes of reduction and amalgamation (DDR) are informed by an analysis of the actual security threats

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4 James Pugel, *Measuring Reintegration in Liberia: assessing the gap between outputs and outcomes, in Robert Muggah (ed.): Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: dealing with fighters in the aftermath of war*, Routledge London/New York 2009, pp. 70-102. The rich discussion about the "short-term stability" vs. "long-term development" oriented nature of DDR (including its reintegration component) is left outside the scope of this policy brief.
5 The result of such disarmament, however, tends to be that weaponry is (temporarily) taken out of circulation rather than being handed over to the international community or a disarmament commission. Few rebel groups will hand in their weapons without some minimal guarantees for their own protection. As neither the international community nor the national government may be able to provide these, the DDR process chiefly provides incentives to leave weapons *untouched* for a while. The more attractive the reward scheme for former fighters that is put in place, the more time can be bought to set up longer term peacebuilding activities to capitalize on this temporary stability.
6 Often, SSR programs seek to improve the quality of internal and external oversight over security institutions and forces, of their strategies and policies, of their way of operating, of their personnel as well as of their operational capabilities with the aim of incremental improvement in the face of glaring operational shortcomings instead of on the basis of a clear set of policy objectives.

and needs of the country in question, and hence what volume and type of capacity it would need to face these threats effectively and accountably (SSR)[6]. A common way to do so is to conduct a security threat and needs assessment, the findings of which are reflected in – for instance – a national security policy. Such a policy can, in turn, be translated into a national security strategy containing more operational objectives (including subsectors such as the military, police and justice).

The decisions that must be made in such a process are to a high degree based on political assessments of who and what is considered a threat or in need, how to deal with these and at which financial and political costs. This requires at least a first outline of a functioning and capable governance- and operational structure for the security sector that has a reasonable degree of legitimacy. If available, it would be possible to effectively link DDR and SSD. However, in post-conflict situations these conditions are not typically in place for a number of reasons.

The Consequences of Distrust and 'Short-termism'

First, the high pressure, distrustful nature and fast dynamics of peace negotiations rarely allow for longer term perspectives of the security governance setup of a country. The focus is often limited to the short term objectives of establishing or formalizing a cease fire, and creating some sort of stability in the political standoff by facilitating the entry of former foes into the political decision-making process of the country. DDR is part of that process, by providing opportunities to former combatants to return to civilian life or to obtain a position in the formal security bodies of the country. This process is already a huge challenge in itself and does not provide much time or opportunity for conducting comprehensive assessments of security threats or needs, nor is it known for its participatory character by engaging in extensive consultations with important parts of society. The focus, both for the parties involved and for the international community, often lies on reaching agreement as soon as possible. However, external influence on parties to a conflict is limited and what in the end becomes the peace agreement can only to a modest extent be imposed. Parties know they are the key players and have immediate interests in the here and now, which often determine what they are willing to compromise on (consider, for instance, the Darfur

Peace Agreement or the Dayton agreements)[7]. Experience shows that during peace negotiations, parties struggle to work out the conditions and concessions required for peace whilst trying to manage the substantial mistrust between themselves that is fed by a history of conflict. Discussions on the "security architecture to be" tend to be a bridge too far under these circumstances.

The Benefits of Inadequate Governance

Second, it is often not yet in the interest of parties to create effective and transparent governance- and oversight structures for the security sector shortly after a peace agreement has been concluded. In a post-conflict environment, one of the main challenges of DDR is to determine which former combatants will join the new security forces and which ones can be demobilized. SSR, however, is not just about mixing various groups of combatants, nor about numbers per se. Instead, the key to successful and sustainable SSR is adequate governance and oversight, which could build on – and yet lies above and beyond – a unified command structure. Adequate governance is also the hardest objective to achieve: while in a post-conflict situation it is difficult to tackle the issue of DDR, it is more difficult to set up new operational structures for the security sector and it is challenging in the extreme to achieve substantial agreement on governance related issues as this touches on the fundamental question of who is in charge of the instruments of violence. In the aftermath of a peace agreement, mistrust is high and early peace dividends unlikely to amount to much. Hence, formerly warring parties will probably attempt to retain the ability to mobilize significant support within the newly

established security forces as a way of bringing political pressure to bear in case of need: a form of "life insurance". After all, the risk of fragile peace processes relapsing into conflict is by now a well-known fact[8].

Moreover, nominally unified but in reality fragmented command and control structures make it possible to use security forces as private armies, which for instance can control illicit trade and territory. In the DRC for instance, the army was never allowed to become too powerful, certainly not in comparison to the presidential guard, since it might become a competitive source of power and start fulfilling a praetorian 'president making role'[9]. In Burundi, existing patronage networks in the police and intelligence agencies seem to make lucrative (but illicit) business deals possible, thereby neatly fusing political, private and business interests[10] – a phenomenon that can also be observed in Pakistan and Yemen for example. Such circumstances limit the effectiveness and impact of DDR to stabilize a political volatile situation whilst making SSR, which aims to contribute to accountable and transparent security sector governance, virtually impossible. Both processes are likely to be actively opposed by powerful political players. As a result linking DDR and SSR becomes problematic. A more fundamental discussion on governance arrangements is probably more fruitfully started once political tensions have settled somewhat, elites have found alternative sources of power, societal expectations and mindsets have changed, and trust between former foes and civil society has increased. In the meantime, whatever exists, however imperfect will have to be used. 'Muddling through' combined with incremental improvement is likely to be the only way forward.

Getting the Right People for the Right Job

Third, vetting issues, patronage considerations and the lack of livelihood alternatives make it difficult to ensure that only properly qualified former combatants join the new security forces. Effective and accountable security forces require staff that act with professionalism and integrity. This requires, inter alia, appropriate vetting of former combatants who seek to join the new security forces. Therefore, vetting could form an important link between DDR and SSR processes. DDR processes often include vetting procedures. Common criteria are the level of training, professionalism and, most

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7   For instance: Prunier (G.), Darfur, the Ambiguous Genocide, Cornell University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 176-184; Silber (L.) and Little (A.), *The Death of Yugoslavia*, Penguin, London, 1996, pp. 364-379

8   See for example: Collier (P.), *The Bottom Billion*, Oxford University Press, 2007

9   Boshoff (H.) et al., Supporting SSR in the DRC: Between a Rock and a Hard Place, an Analysis of the Donor Approach to Supporting Security Sector Reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Clingendael Institute, April 2010; Clark (J.), ed, The African Stakes of the Congo War, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2002.

10 UN Group of Experts, Reports Pursuant to Resolution 1533 (2004) Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular: "Interim report of the Group of Experts on the DRC", submitted in accordance with paragraph 6 of Security Council resolution 1896 (2009), S/2010/252, 25 May 2010

importantly, the human rights track record of former combatants since this in particular pertains to their credibility with the population. The challenge, however, is to apply such criteria in practice. In Iraq, for instance, the process of vetting resulted in excluding all former Baath party members from the security forces. This created a vacuum in which insecurity prevailed whilst the security sector was being rebuilt from scratch.[11] In Afghanistan, it has proven difficult to even introduce the process of vetting as it could undermine the position of various key players (in politics as well as in the security forces) and thereby aggravate an already volatile political situation.[12] A lack of vetting, however, is also likely to be counterproductive. In Haiti, for example, demobilized military forces migrated en masse to the police force without ever being vetted on human rights abuses, which caused serious problems later on.[13] The lack of strong governance structures and effective and independent oversight bodies in national politics can seriously undermine vetting processes. As such structures and bodies are rarely available in immediate post-conflict settings, one has to be realistic about the effect of vetting attempts and the extent to which they are beneficial to an SSR process.

In addition, patronage factors such as tribal, ethnical or political affiliation may influence the composition of the security forces and trump criteria like competence, merit and performance.[14] As a result, a DDR intervention may lead to a smaller security force without much improvement in its actual

effectiveness. This further reduces the possibilities for effectively linking DDR and SSR.

Finally, in most post-conflict settings there are not many economic alternatives available to a job in the security forces[15]. Consequentially, these jobs are attractive and when former combatants are given a choice, they are likely to opt for either joining the security forces (regardless of their true preferences or qualifications), or they will probably be reluctant to leave the armed forces for lack of a better alternative. This helps explain why the civil service, in particular the security forces, tends to be largest employer in many post-conflict countries. Such economic imperatives and the resulting loss of focus and quality further hinder DDR-SSR linkage. It also highlights the need to take a holistic approach to post-conflict reconstruction in which political, security, economic and social recovery proceed in tandem.[16]

Money Matters

Fourth, in early post-conflict environments there is little clarity on the funds required or available to engage in longer-term reform. Ideally, a link between DDR and SSR would ensure that both processes work towards the same end products, i.e. a (financially) sustainable new security apparatus and architecture. Unfortunately, after conflict a country's economy is likely to be in shambles, tax revenue low and donor dependency high. The resulting lack of (clarity about) financial resources makes it difficult to meaningfully link up DDR and SSR processes. It needs to be noted that neither DDR nor SSR amount to simply reducing security spending. What is required, or perceived as necessary, follows from a political decision-making process based on a good threat assessment and discussions on how to interpret and weigh the threats in relation to country capabilities, including their financial dimension. In some cases, the ability to meet national security demands and threats might actually require expansion rather than reduction of the security sector. Donors, however, do not always seem to recognize that developing countries face legitimate threats that may require significant spending on security forces. They tend to press for reduced military spending in favor of more pro-poor spending and poverty alleviation. This is understandable, but risks turning DDR and SSR into cost-cutting exercises without adequate attention to security threats or needs and without considering what a country might be willing and able to spend on security.

[11] International Crisis Group (ICG), Iraq: *building a new security structure*, Middle East report no 20, 23 December 2003.

[12] ICG, *A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army*, Asia report no 190, 12 May 2010.

[13] ICG, *Reforming Haiti's Security Sector*, Latin America/Caribbean Report no 28, 18 September 2008.

[14] For instance: Chabal (P.) and Daloz (J-P.), *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, James Currey, Indiana University Press, pp 95-109.

[15] As a result, too rigorous DDR can actually backfire by buying some short-term budget alleviation and stability at the price of medium-term destabilization. For instance: Brethfeld (J.), "Unrealistic Expectations: Current Challenges to Reintegration in Southern Sudan", Small Arms Survey, *HSBA working paper 21*, June 2010, pp. 21-23.

[16] As for example laid out in: OECD, "Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility to Resilience", OECD/DAC Discussion Paper, in: *Off-print of the Journal on Development*, Volume 9, No. 3, 2008.

Conclusion:
Try to Link DDR and SSR, Be Pragmatic and Don't Expect Much

Based on the above, one can conclude that attempts can and should be made to pragmatically link DDR and SSR processes where feasible, but that great synergies or deep linkage should not be expected nor strived for. Other ways will have to be found to optimize the conditions under which DDR and SSR initiatives can be successful. The difficulties in linking DDR and SSR in post-conflict environments discussed above have a number of implications for international support:

- **Be aware that both DDR and SSR processes are very political in nature but otherwise quite different.** The technical complexity of these processes should not distract would-be supporters from the need to understand, respect and use underlying political dynamics and the real intentions of parties involved. Both processes play against different timelines and on different levels. Different conditions need to be met for either process to be successful.

- **A fundamental overhaul of security governance structures will not happen early on.** Arrangements for the governance of the security sector may be more fruitfully discussed when political tensions have settled a bit, elites have found alternative sources of power, societal expectations and mind-sets have changed, and trust between former foes has increased.

- **Minimize the degree to which short-term DDR arrangements in peace agreements compromise the functionality of the security architecture that has to be put in place afterwards.** Compromises will be necessary but should not create structures that can only be broken down with great difficulty as part of costly reform processes. Their temporary nature should be clear to indicate that a process of change and reform will follow later on.

- **Accept that developing countries also face real security threats and have legitimate security needs that may require significant force levels and security spending.** SSR is not about expenditure cuts per se, but about the effective control over, and performance of, accountable security forces. The focus of dialogue on SSR should be underpinned by an assessment, analysis and discussion (for instance in parliament) that establish what force posture, levels and spending fit the profile of the country, rather than enforcing reduction on the basis of financial criteria only. It is not likely that this discussion can take place in an adequate or effective way during a DDR process.

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