

## CHAPTER 5

# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES FOR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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### **Introduction**

In the past decade, security has emerged as a vital component of national and international policy in conflict-affected societies. The end of the Cold War had a tremendous impact on the concepts of governance, democracy and security. This is partly because the threat of a world war, conventional or nuclear, was greatly reduced and broad issues of human security, particularly democracy, became the new focus. As the limitations of military-based security arrangements become more evident, it underscored the need for new approaches to security that avoid the conflicts of the past between the security interests of states and the security interests of their populations. These developments have resulted in growing recognition of the need for the international community to address the twin imperatives of security and development through more integrated policies and programmes (A survey of security sector system reform and donor policy 2003). This has also given rise to a range of new normative developments, policy initiatives and operational programmes which are aimed at preventing and resolving violent conflicts, consolidating peace following war, and facilitating reconstruction so as to avoid renewed violence. The security sector reform (SSR) agenda is largely rooted in the search for solutions to the challenges faced by multilateral and bilateral donors concerned with development and peace consolidation in the aftermath of the cold war.

SSR has its origins within these peace-building initiatives and is designed to link the development and security agenda at the policy and programming levels. European regional institutions emerged as key players in the re-conceptualisation of the security-development trade-off, partly as a consequence of their involvement in peace processes, but also as a direct result of the fact that changing regional relationships affected their own security concerns. Discussions about the enlargement of the EU and Nato were instrumental in raising the profile of SSR, mainly because the reform of candidate members' security establishments was a condition for eventual membership (Caparini 2003; Chanaa 2002). The new thinking resulted in a change in global governance approaches, especially on the polarised African

continent. Governments were faced with the challenges of establishing democratic accountability and the control of the security apparatus (Ball & Fayemi 2004).

Recently the place of the security sector has come under intense, but legitimate scrutiny in Africa. SSR as an emerging field of theory and practice is increasingly serving as a powerful organising force among African academics and international actors dedicated to conflict prevention and poverty reduction. There is a growing appreciation for the links between SSR and broader issues of development, good governance and conflict resolution. National governments, intergovernmental bodies and international actors have taken on board the view that addressing conflicts on the continent requires a security sector that has a more nuanced understanding of security issues (Ferguson & Isima 2004). The Horn of Africa region is one of the most unstable and conflict-prone areas in the world and SSR is critical to alleviating this instability. Indeed, an abiding theme in this paper is that most of the problems of peace and governance in the region are in many ways linked to the nature, history, culture and conduct of the security systems.

The Horn of Africa region has rarely known peace, prosperity or democracy. This could be explained largely by its history and geography. The challenge of identifying obstacles for SSR in the Horn of Africa is thus the challenge of undoing the legacies of recent conflicts and wars. The main contextual variables are the constitutional and legislative provisions that deal with governance in general and security in particular, and the historical development of the state and the security services. In this regard some fundamental questions about the nature of states and society in the region must be raised and answered, which will be the main focus of this paper.

The paper begins with the premise that any strategy for SSR in the Horn must be based on a comprehensive and accurate analysis of the overall regional and national contexts. Crude, simplistic and incomplete analyses are unproductive and have the potential to undermine the whole process of reform.

The first section highlights the most obvious obstacles to SSR in developing countries, which are also relevant to many African countries. The second section deals with the unique problems of the situation in the Horn of Africa and a diagnostic framework for analysing and overcoming the obstacles is presented. By so doing it informs not only the debate on how to design a workable strategy for SSR but also indicates the general approaches and specific directions that need to be adopted to resolve the conflicts in the region. The purpose of the final section is to facilitate a comprehensive view

of the most obvious obstacles to SSR in the Horn of Africa region. It is a framework for analysis, not a checklist.

### **Obstacles to security sector reform in developing countries**

Many developing countries are characterised by some or all of the following phenomena:

- Weak governance (lacking authority, power, capacity and resources)
- Absence of a democratic culture and weak institutions of democracy
- Internal security threats (insurgency, militia forces, a culture of warlords and gangs, violent crime, etc)
- Lack of staff (weak or no civilian departments, etc)
- Lack of knowledge (the operational dimensions of civil–military relations, etc)
- Lack of functional skills (planning, budgeting, or financial control, etc)
- Lack of advanced skills (threat analysis, formulation of policy, doctrine and legislation, etc)
- Lack of resources (communications, salaries, computers, etc)

In developing countries where SSR is on the agenda, there is a tendency to attribute the slow pace or lack of reform to incompetence and/or political resistance on the part of governments (A survey of security sector system reform and donor policy 2003). Outsiders frequently underestimate the complexity and long-term nature of SSR processes for the development and transition of states. They then attribute the lack of reform to a failure of political will. This may be a contributing factor, but other considerations may play a role too. In such an incomplete and narrow perspective the difficulties and complexities of SSR are ignored and there is a failure to distinguish between ideological, personal, organisational and structural obstacles to change. Such distinctions are important because different types of obstacles require different types of responses. The dangers of incomplete and crude analyses are that donors may apply inappropriate pressure on the government, for example pushing governments to move more quickly than is sound.

Understandably, the obstacles in most new democracies are immensely complex and multi-layered. A large number of policies have to be transformed; the required changes are likely to be substantial and radical given the undemocratic and militarist nature of security policy under authoritarian rule; and the reforms require significant changes in the organisational structure and the expertise, skills, disposition and behaviour of staff (Nathan 2006).

The complexity is increased by the general lack of skills and expertise on managerial, planning, financial and policy levels in the new governments. Even though their intentions may be good, members of the executives and parliaments might be unfamiliar with contemporary debates on security and with the range of policy options that are open to them. A tendency towards conservatism and a reliance on traditional security perspectives are natural in these circumstances. After all, good governance in the security and other sectors is not limited to adherence to the fundamental principles of democracy. It also entails efficiency and effectiveness in performing the functions of the state. Most developing countries lack the skills, expertise, infrastructure and resources to meet the welfare and security needs of citizens. Without the requisite institutional capacity, the values and principles of democracy cannot be 'operationalised' and insecurity remains the pervasive sentiment. Thus, the main question is to what extent have poverty, under-development, poor infrastructure and fragile social groupings become an obstacle to reform and good governance. What can be done to advance SSR alongside efforts to mitigate poverty in the Horn of Africa region?

### **The nature of the state in the Horn of Africa**

Most of the states in the region do not represent the interests and character of their populations (Tadesse 2003). Transforming the nature and identity of the state will greatly advance the cause of peace and democracy, hence facilitating SSR. Therefore, what is required is democratic transformation of the state. To this effect SSR must be understood and pursued as a democratising process, which is to say that it must form part of the struggle to construct and entrench democracy, a project largely denied or delayed in the Horn of Africa region. The problem largely centres on a failure to abide by the general principles of democratic governance. In fact, the very nature of the state is at the heart of the conflicts in the region. Governments run by small elite groups with partisan agendas and a militarised conception of security are sources of turmoil and difficult to reform (Tadesse 2003). Such regimes do not know (or do not care to know) where their true national interests lie. They are incapable of designing a broad-based and long-term national security strategy.

Indeed, an enduring factor that contributes to conflict is the unpredictability in the determination of the national interests of the state. Most African governments are unpredictable, in part because security policy is centralised within a small group of political and military leaders with short-term perspectives. Unless African governments are encouraged and supported to acquire the capacity to design long-term and broad-based national security strategies (a major pre-requisite for successful SSR), they will continue to be unpredictable and prone to conflict and instability. Security systems are at the heart of the political process in the region, but efforts to reform them have proved to be extremely difficult.

Resistance to and lack of political will and leadership for reform is often encountered in various actors that should be driving the process and is characterised by the following:

- Opposition to democratisation and change by national political leaders
- Opposition to change by faction and local level leaders
- Personal considerations (maintaining positions of power, influence and patronage)
- Organisational considerations (for example fear of change, institutional inertia, conflicting views, misunderstanding and confusion)

The problems mentioned above are common to most developing and African countries. Experience has shown that substantial policy and organisational transformation is regarded as an inherently threatening process and as such generally gives rise to resistance and conflict. Resistance, inertia and confusion are inevitable where security services officials are expected to implement (and often design) new policies that are completely at odds with their training, experience and world view.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true if new policies represent wholly new paradigms. The inertia mainly stems from the capacity problems mentioned above.

### **External obstacles to security sector reform in the Horn of Africa**

External actors seeking to encourage or support a holistic, people-centred approach to security can maximise their impact in various ways. There must be a willingness to countenance a significant degree of local control in determining how security is provided and in determining the priorities

for reform. Support strategies should also be based on a comprehensive assessment of the political, institutional and economic factors that influence the security environment and the functioning of the security system. The lack of experience on the part of the donors could be an obstacle in itself. There are very few examples of integrated international assistance programmes in which development and security participants cooperate to inform policy and programme components.

Development and security assistance should be integrated so as to facilitate national strategic reform efforts. SSR is relatively new, particularly in the Horn of Africa, and has not yet been fully integrated into donor country policies and programming. Because of the parochial security interests of the major donor countries, assistance strategies remain overwhelmingly focused on the reform, often operational, of traditional security agencies (the military, police and intelligence services) while its governance dimension is downplayed (A survey of security sector system reform and donor policy 2003). The war on terror, which has significantly contributed to this problem, will be discussed separately below.

General difficulties experienced in SSR processes driven by donors include the following:

- Failure to link conflict resolution with SSR programmes
- Conflicting donor policies in the security domain
- Donors who pursue partisan political agendas
- Donor effort which is not coordinated
- Donors who impose solutions and undermine local ownership
- External actors who promote counter-terrorist measures that prevent or weaken democratic reform

In almost all developing countries undergoing SSR, the problems listed above are likely to exist to some extent. But the countries of the Horn of Africa region do face some unique challenges.

One of the particular challenges in all the countries that form the Horn of Africa, except Kenya and Somaliland, concerns how to initiate and sustain an SSR programme where former liberation movements and military regimes are

in power and simultaneously assist with the transformation to democratically controlled national institutions. Therefore each of the problems listed below should be considered in terms of the extent to which they exist in each country in the Horn of Africa, what form they take and how severe they are, rather than in terms of a simple 'yes' or 'no'. If they have a thorough understanding of blockages and constraints, it will enable agents of SSR to deal with every problem. A major theme of this paper is that if it is possible for SSR strategists to deal with the political culture of militarisation on a case by case (or country by country) basis, conflicts will be pre-empted and over time peace will prevail in the Horn of Africa region. Ultimately, the solution is to dismantle the prevailing armed consciousness in the region.

### **Heavy militarisation**

North East Africa is a heavily militarised area. The countries of the region maintain substantial armed forces and security organisations, and many of their leaders have emerged from a background in the army or a liberation front. The most obvious legacy of former regional conflicts is weaponry, the availability of which is a given. Arguably, demilitarisation depends on the resolution of these structural problems and the consolidation of democratic and stable governance. In mainstream disarmament circles, a positive causal relationship is advocated between disarmament and security, by means of development. In reality, the relationship starts with democratic and effective governance, which leads to disarmament by means of security.<sup>2</sup> The higher the level of instability and violence in the national and regional arenas, the less likely it is that disarmament and other anti-militarist reforms will be accepted. The impact of militarisation on peace and reform in the Horn, however, goes beyond its structural dimensions, military spending and the availability of arms, for it is a reflection of the political cultures of the leaders and society.

### **Political culture of militarism**

With the exception of Kenya, the governments of the IGAD region all have their roots in militarism. Militarisation in the Horn, as in many developing countries, is partly a product of structural conditions that constitute a crisis for human security and the state. These conditions include a history of civil wars, authoritarian rule, the exclusion of minorities from government, socio-economic inequity and deprivation, and weak governments that are unable to manage normal societal conflict in a stable and consensual

fashion. These conditions create a security vacuum that the state, groups and individuals seek to fill through the use of violence, sometimes in an organised and sustained fashion and at other times in a spontaneous and sporadic manner. Many of the ruling parties in the region, for example in Eritrea, Uganda and Ethiopia, came to power in the 1980s and 1990s after years of protracted armed struggle. These countries have thus never known democracy.

Even in earlier times most of these countries evolved a culture which gave precedence to martial values and short shrift to compromises, trade and civic values. Although they engaged in a popular struggle, supported social transformation of their peoples, sought justice for their marginalised communities, and called for democratic transformation, the ruling parties have proved to be true heirs to the militarised history of their respective countries. Moreover, notwithstanding their years in power, they still retain the perspective of a liberation movement with a security orientation. As a result most of them have failed to evolve into parties with democratic ideologies and have been equally unsuccessful in bringing about a democratic transformation of their countries (Tadesse & Young 2005).

In any challenge to their power or push for pluralism, these ruling parties resort to force with their leaders vowing to crush their opponents, removing parliamentary immunity even from members of their party who voice dissent, and sending the army on to the streets to deal with protesters. In the event of any political crisis, these parties all proved to be unable to make a political response and instead drew on their traditions as a liberation movement and defined the problem as a security issue that could be dealt by security measures.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, they consider use of force a legitimate option at any time for any problem, rather than a last resort. The use of force, which is regarded as a characteristic of swift and decisive decision-making, to deal with political demands has been a defining element in their *modus operandi*, spiralling manageable tensions to violent conflicts.

At the heart of all these states are small elite groups consisting of security officers and military commanders who hold the reins of power and make the most important decisions without reference to legislatures or civilian colleagues in government. It is fair to say that most of these individuals make no distinction between politics and security, and the use of force is not a last resort but rather an intrinsic part of the political calculus. True, most of the ruling parties have in this regard only proved to be true heirs to their respective countries' militarised history, but they gave it new life by adopting extreme political agendas.



The political culture of militarism is encountered at state or national level as well as at local level, as is reflected by militarised ethnic, tribal and youth groups.

Whether in its extreme nationalist form in Eritrea, in the form of a radical Islamist security state in Sudan, or with a leftist tinge in Ethiopia, or with both leftist and populist trends in Uganda, post-liberation militarisation is being used to construct an impressive security apparatus to protect those in power and block the transition to democracy (Tadesse 2005). This represents a huge and unique challenge to SSR in the Horn of Africa region, and is a complicated and under-researched phenomenon.

It is in the nature of liberation movements to operate covertly, maintain high levels of secrecy, be pre-occupied with internal and external security, place great emphasis on organisation, advocate dogmatic military and political philosophies, and give respect to authority and hierarchy. Equally intrinsic to liberation movements is a concern with force, both outwardly directed at the enemy (which is all too frequently defined as any organised group which does not give it support) and as the ultimate means for maintaining the discipline of its members. Martial values, in particular strength, fighting ability and bravery, are highly esteemed.

Moreover, in the highly ethnically conscious Horn of Africa, tribes invariably serve as the most useful elements for purposes of mobilisation. Useful though these values are during times of war, they may well become obstacles when the liberation movement assumes state power. Moreover, none of these values are conducive to democratic ideals. Thus the complexity of this problem is compounded by the militarisation of whole communities mainly along national borders of the IGAD countries. Throughout the Horn, from Darfur to Somalia, certain ethnic groups have literally become tribes in arms, their social structure and even sense of identity closely bound with their military organisation and the AK-47 (De Waal 2005).

Can progress towards peace and democracy be achieved in governments controlled by former liberation fronts? If so, how might this impact on the prospects of initiating an SSR programme? The challenge of identifying the obstacles which stand in the way of SSR in the Horn is one of undoing the legacies of the wars of liberation, and this study represents an attempt to point the way for such a strategy.

Militarism is blended with a strong commitment to political agendas to create ideologies in arms. Here ideology refers to the distinctively Marxist

(and in the case of the Sudan, Islamist) intellectual frame of reference of the leading members of most of these governments (with the exception of Kenya), and to its influence on many of their attitudes and policies. In fact, this is not unique to the current leaders of the Horn countries and it is certainly the case that almost all educated Africans of their generation held the same views.

For many of those who remained in the towns, Marxism lost its allure as a result of the brutality and appalling acts committed in its name. But for the leaders with a background of liberation wars, who adapted it as an ideology of a successful insurgent warfare, their deeply held Marxist precepts were reinforced by their eventual triumph.<sup>4</sup> While some hold Marxism to be essentially a methodology or a means to understand social reality, Marxism increasingly became a dogma to some leaders. Instead of creative leadership, these leaders referred to Marxism for 'correct' answers to problems. And once these answers had been found, the debate was over. What started out as an ideological approach to problem-solving became something close to a religious undertaking, with all the certainty that implies.

The post-liberation militarisation legacy of liberation wars led to an over-emphasis on secrecy, the right to rule (one-party rule or dominant-party democracy), regimentation and the right to monopoly of power. It contributed to weaknesses in civil administration and dispute resolution because it weakened civilian society, led to a decline in intercommunity dispute resolution mechanisms, resulted in poor civil administration at all levels, and excluded traditional leadership, amongst others.

It is no accident that almost all these ruling parties, particularly their leaders, are only nominally committed to liberal democracy, which they may plausibly be assumed to have adopted largely to appease outside donors. Their own preference is for a very different form of 'democracy'; one founded on essentially Leninist concepts of representation, in which a democratic government is one which authentically represents the interests of the broad masses of the population, and rival parties – which can not by definition represent those interests – are judged to be illegitimate. With this mindset there is little prospect of these governments demonstrating the necessary political will for reform and permitting themselves to be challenged by strong and independent civil/political institutions.

Despite their evident success in adapting to the changed global situation since the end of the Cold War, these precepts, in the view of the author,

continue to inform their behaviour – from their views of their right to rule to their attitude to political dissent; from the claim that they are the sole proponents of the correct line to the intrinsic suspicion towards civilian society and the ‘democratic centralist’ organisation of their party structures.

### **The war on terror and security sector reform**

The dramatic changes in the international environment which followed the events of 11 September 2001 have also led to a reordering of priorities and a redefinition of interests and national security agendas in the region. Reports on similar studies in other regions underscore the need for careful analysis of the way in which the ‘war on terror’ is affecting international efforts to respond in a more integrated manner to security and development problems (Tadesse 2004).<sup>5</sup> The US’s ‘global war on terror’ has the potential both to reinforce the search for stability and undermine it. It does also have to compete with other stated policy objectives, such as democratisation, conflict resolution, peace and security, and human rights, particularly when it comes to funding.

The above should draw the attention of scholars and policy-makers to what can be called the collateral damage of the ‘war on terror’ on SSR and the way that ‘security’ is being conceptualised and understood both among donor countries and their partner states. There are already signs that issues of governance is receiving less attention; the emphasis is shifting from ‘soft’ or ‘human’ security to traditional or ‘hard’ security; Cold War partnerships with dictatorial regimes are being revived; and local opposition is being suppressed and local struggles for group rights being undermined by labelling them terror. Unfortunately, the Horn of Africa has become one of the major centres for the war on terror.

Until the war on terror, the major challenges to peace and security in the Horn stemmed from problems of governance, resources and ethnicity. However, since 9/11 many of these problems have been set aside in the interests of the counter-terrorism agenda. Clearly, the global war on terror has led to the intelligence and internal security capacities of partner states being increased, which raises the issue of operational effectiveness versus transparency, accountability and democratic control. Thus strategies for SSR will have to be re-evaluated in the light of the influence of the war on terror on democracy, civil society and demilitarisation in the Horn of Africa as a region.

## Conclusion: Overcoming the challenges

The discussion so far has shown that the basic preconditions for implementing SSR in the region have not been met. The necessary political will and space for reform with regard to the security sector is lacking. However, it may be possible to develop a different route for SSR that reflects the unique problems, challenges and opportunities in the IGAD region. It would be possible to initiate a process to influence the SSR agenda in the region that would create a constituency for SSR at national and regional levels during the next couple of years. The context dictates that the best way to approach the SSR agenda is to start by increasing the understanding of the security sector and stimulating open debate on national security strategies. The peace processes in Somalia and Sudan also provide unique opportunities for an SSR agenda. Regardless of difficulties that there may be, there is no other alternative than to engage the current governments.

In particular, these regimes cannot be induced to change their fundamental beliefs by threats of withholding aid, nor could they be maintained in power indefinitely by maintaining or increasing aid. The aims of SSR should rather be to engage them for as long as they remain in power, unless they block reform altogether and commit further extreme acts of repression. This is not to suggest that the SSR ideals of peace, development and democracy should be set aside, but it is vital that these governments remain within the international community. As long as they are not ostracised, they may be dissuaded from actively pursuing anti-SSR policies (partly for fear of losing international support) and there is then the potential that they might be persuaded to open up and/or step down peacefully once their weaknesses had been sufficiently exposed. The individual reform activities currently being undertaken in some of the countries could also form essential entry points and building blocks for more ambitious SSR programmes.

An essential element of SSR in the context of the Horn of Africa is that SSR programmes should be developed that are based on an empirical understanding of the political, institutional, structural and cultural context in which reforms are being conceived and promoted. There is a need for *realism*, *flexibility* and *sustainability*. To achieve this:

- Programmes should be realistic in scope and recognise the risks inherent in them
- Reforms should be sustainable financially and in terms of local capacity

- Programmes must be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances
- Reforms should be based on a long-term commitment and a flexible plan of action

Creating and nurturing popular pressure for SSR is a vital aspect of developing political will. This will require the engagement of civil society and the international community acting in concert. The following are some recommendations to achieve this:<sup>6</sup>

- Take a long-term view
- Build a critical mass and a popular constituency for reform
- Support the development of national security strategies
- Encourage local ownership
- Ensure that the process of reform is consultative
- Use vocabulary that is politically less sensitive than 'reform', for example 'governance', 'modernisation' or 'improvement'
- Link capacity support to governance reform
- Ensure donor coordination
- Identify soft sources of leverage: legal frameworks, constitutional obligations and international standards
- Distinguish between 'sceptics' and 'spoilers'
- Target opponents of change and the 'indifferent majority'

As was stated in the introduction, the Horn of Africa region is one of the most unstable and conflict-prone areas in the world and most of the problems of peace and governance in the region are linked to the nature, history, culture and conduct of the regional security systems. The achievement of sustainable peace and stability thus requires a fundamental re-look at the security establishments of the region. SSR is central to peace and stability in the Horn. While SSR is a critical issue, it needs to be grounded in an understanding of regional realities, both past and present. Any strategy for

SSR in the Horn must be based on a comprehensive and accurate analysis of the overall regional and national contexts. This will require a concerted effort by all stakeholders working in a participative and collaborative manner.

## Notes

- 1 Key ideas were taken from my discussion on issues of SSR at Bradford University in the UK, in January-April 2005. Laurie Nathan and many others have made similar observations.
- 2 This section also benefited much from the discussions I had with experts on SSR at various international conferences.
- 3 How the three ruling parties treated opposition leaders and splinters from their ranks in the years 2000, 2001 and 2005 proves this point.
- 4 Some Ethiopianists, particularly Christopher Clapham and John Young, attribute the difficulties of democratic transition in the countries in question partly to the legacy of Marxist armed insurgency.
- 5 Presentations by the same author on human security and SSR in Maputo (2003), Benin (2004), Nairobi and Kampala (2005) also highlighted the potential impact of the 'war on terror' on human security in the region. Other documents, such as 'A survey on security sector reform and donor policy: views from non-OECD countries 2003, have raised the concern of the potential impact of the 'war on terror' on global security agendas.
- 6 The ideas outlining the strategy greatly benefited from the presentations at Bradford University in the UK, and particularly those by Christopher Cushing (28 March 2006) and Dr Ann Fitzgerald (29 March 2006) on designing and evaluating SSR.

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