The Concept of Security Sector Reform

Andrzej Karkoszka*

To all political and academic circles dealing already for some time with problems of reform of the states' security sector, the debate on Security Sector Reform, its relevance for conflict prevention, peace-building and development is a kind of a watershed. Though the concept emerged a few years ago and was a subject of discussion on a number of important occasions, most notably being analysed in depth in the UNDP's Human Development Report of 2002, it is for the first time reaching that high level of attention. The terms: "security", "conflict prevention", "peace building", "development", as well as other terms associated with the subject, like "good governance", "human rights", "civil society", "state building", "democracy", to name a few, indicate clearly we are looking into a central concept, linking together several fundamental concerns of today's international political, economic and social development. Hopefully, the concept of security sector reform, complex and controversial as it is, will become more familiar and understandable, and thus maybe more acceptable and useful to political decision-makers, as well as to the larger international political, academic, and social circles.

The origins of the security sector reform stem from several areas, particularly from the development community, who observed the functional relationship between the largely conceived security and the economic development and, separately, from the experiences of the post-authoritarian states, especially those of the East European ones, who transformed their civil-military relations during a general process of democratisation in the decade of 1990s. The term "security sector" has been defined in the widest sense in the above mentioned Human Development Report of 2002, enumerating several actors or elements, belonging to five large groups, namely organisations authorised to use force, civil management and oversight bodies, justice and law enforcement institutions, non-statutory security forces, and non-statutory civil society groups. Each of these five groups may consist of a number of institutions, actors, agencies, and forces depending on individual national circumstances and on a specific period of historical

* Dr. Andrzej Karkoszka is Senior Political Advisor to the Director, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), and former First Deputy Minister of Defense of Poland.
development of a given state. In still another way, and borrowing from one of the British writers on the subject, the security sector and its reform may be defined by its functional scope as a "provision of security within the state in an effective and efficient manner, and in the framework of democratic civilian control".\(^1\) That function changes and expands accordingly to the modern understanding of "security", encompassing not only classical concepts of state's security, but also social and human security.

Being relatively recently conceived, the notion of security sector reform is rapidly gaining a wider recognition, particularly in the debate about increasing the efficiency of economic assistance to the developing nations. The international community has been looking for years for a way out from its inability to increase the efficiency of international aid, to avert the poverty and destitution of millions in the least developing states. The fact is that during the decade between the world summits in Rio de Janeiro and in Johannesburg some eighty poorest nations lowered their per capita income. It is not enough to increase a nominal value of international financial aid. New methods of its application must be found. One of the possible answers to this problem may be security sector reform, executed in a particular regional context and according to specific national needs. The Monterrey Consensus, a document adopted in 2002 by the Monterrey conference on financing for development made good governance, that is one of core elements of security sector reform, a precondition for successful development. In the words of Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, the financial assistance must be a "reward of sound governance". The Johannesburg World Summit on sustainable development called "freedoms" and a wide social participation in political life of a state, which is a principal element of security sector reform, to be one of fundamental ways in economic development. The African Union introduced the promotion of democratic principles and institutions, including the security institutions, into the range of its goals.

The concept of security sector reform also gains a political acceptance in a large number of East European and post-Soviet states, which undertake efforts towards establishing democratic systems of government. This new approach is increasingly visible in the working of the European and transatlantic institutions of EU, OSCE, and NATO. The OSCE has been particularly helpful in these developments by adopting its Code of

---

Conduct of states in the security domain, in which democratic norms of relationships between the armed forces and other security forces on the one hand and the civilian authorities and society on the other were accepted by all member states. The European-based Code of Conduct gave rise recently to a similar effort in the African context.

The third area in which security sector reform has found growing acceptance is the Balkan region. The experience from the application of the Stability Pact shows beyond doubt that post-conflict recovery and stabilisation requires democratisation of all elements of states’ security apparatus and their relations with the society. Not only the armed forces were to be reduced, professionalised, re-integrated and put under civilian oversight but similar processes had to take place within police and paramilitary formations, in secret security services, and border guards. In short, the entire social and political fabrics of social involvement in the security policies of states had to be re-modelled.

Finally, the need to take up the issue of security sector reform at a larger international forum rose from the new requirements, created by the worldwide anti-terrorist campaign. Among the consequences of this campaign we can observe the blurring of the functional differences between the armed forces and various security institutions of states, the increase in budgetary outlays for these institutions, the creation of entirely new internal security organisations, the increase in the international security and intelligence organisations. The relative position of the specific elements of the security sector of states grows in importance, with uncertain consequences for the conditions of democratic oversight, civil liberties, and security of individual citizen.

Taking into account the existing experience of states from various regions with the security sector reforms, it can be described on the one hand as a convenient general paradigm for a theoretical analysis of democratisation processes and, on the other, as a rich instrument-box for a practical political action. In particular the security sector reform is an indispensable measure in the following areas:

1. Democratisation of a state, which seems impossible without a transformation of the sector’s institutions and methods of their oversight and control, so that they cannot act in a partisan way in the domestic politics;
2. Establishment of good governance practices, that is establishing a rule of elected representatives over all military and security institutions, representatives accountable to the society and functioning in a transparent manner, able to balance off various vested interests of social and political groups, free from corruption and organised crime, creating an affordable security for all citizens;

3. Economic development, the basis for which is a stable and politically predictable environment, with security sector consuming only those resources which are commensurate with the real needs of internal and external security of the state, operating on a transparent state budget and accountable for its implementation;

4. Internal and regional conflict prevention, requiring a security sector which facilitates the effective management of internal tensions and conflicts, provides for a security and justice equally to citizens and social groups and, by being transparent in its doctrine, organisation and arms procurement may act as an institution of confidence building with the neighbouring states;

5. Post-conflict recovery, made possible only by demobilisation of combatants and their re-integration into the society, by unification of various armed formations into a national security structure, by elimination of the existing light weapons stockpile, by prevention of privatisation of security services;

6. Professionalisation of armed and security forces that is providing for their clearly defined roles and functions structured accordingly to these functions, accepting the rule of law and the dominance of the democratically elected authorities, efficient in their actions aimed at protecting the state and its individual citizens.

The theoretical picture of security sector reform seems to indicate a substantial commonality among various methods of its reform. And, in fact, there exist a number of common characteristics, typical for any reformist action aimed at the democratic transformation of a security sector. These are well know norms and principles, such as a constitutional basis for the existence and functioning of the sector's elements, clear delineation of responsibilities and hierarchy of various services and organs, rationality of
budgetary outlays for the sector's existence, legitimacy of its existence, professional training and functioning of the sector's functionaries, transparency, accountability, civil oversight, protection of human rights, involvement of the civil society groups. These norms constitute the objectives and the end-state of a theoretical model of security sector. However, in the real world no common model of the security sector exists. Each national case is differently composed due to vastly different historic, cultural, ethnic, and social circumstances, due to different economic levels of development, and due to specific geopolitical ramifications, in which the national security sector has to function.

Where a degree of commonality among different national security sectors may be found is in the regional context. The post-communist states have such a common feature with their overblown military and oversized military industrial complex, as well as a robust network of various secret security agencies. In the African context, generally weak civilian state institutions, with the armed and security forces as the most powerful among them, are often based on tribal or ethnic connections and serve to preserve political superiority of an individual, ethnic group or a party. Also, the traditional norms and allegiances are often more influential here than the formal laws and restrictions. The Latin American context may be characterised by a large military autonomy, with a strong military culture and political influence. The East Asian case is strongly coloured by the fact that the military and the security forces are intermingled with the state administrative structures, often with their budgets left to their own care. In general, it may also be stated that where internal or interstate conflict exists there is no room for successful security sector reform.

As the Human Development Report of 2002 points out, of the 81 new democracies appearing during the last decade or so, only 47 are fully democratic, that is, with all characteristics of a well developed democratic system, including the democratically controlled security sector, in place. Overall, there are only 82 such countries among some 200 existing today.

As far as the security sector reform is concerned there are many reasons for such a slow progress. First, any reform of a security sector has a direct and immediate impact on the political power relationship in a given country. It can be executed only when there is a political will to undertake democratic reforms in general. Second, the reform of a security
sector in any country is a very complex undertaking. It requires a long-term program, wide human expertise, and ample financial resources. Third, it cannot be imported from the outside. To be effective and successful the internal political forces, according to real indigenous needs, must conceive it. It can only be assisted but not launched and implemented from the outside. Fourth, as the experiences of several states indicate, the reform of a security sector is a never-ending process, being particularly cumbersome and controversial at the beginning. Being a long-term and difficult undertaking, it may produce a reform fatigue on part of the society at large, and of the members of the security sector in particular. Fifth and the last, many international organisations still shy away from being fully involved in the propagation of, and assistance in, the democratic transformation of national security sectors, invoking a well-established norm of the non-intervention into the internal matters of states. This attitude, fortunately, seems gradually to fade away.