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## SUMMARY OF USAID-DFID SECURITY SECTOR REFORM PRACTITIONER'S CONFERENCE

USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance, in partnership with the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), sponsored a practitioners' conference on security sector reform (SSR) on November 9 – 10, 2005. Attended by leading interagency actors and USAID implementers, the purpose of the workshop was to review current thinking on SSR, build communities of practice in the SSR arena, and to explore possibilities for further interagency cooperation within the U.S. government.

The British government has been a leader in advancing SSR at both a policy level and in the field. Their "joined-up" or "whole of government" approach to SSR, whereby DfID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) jointly design and implement SSR programs, is a particularly noteworthy innovation. Accordingly, the co-facilitation of the conference sessions by British SSR experts made this event a valuable learning opportunity. (See *Course Introduction* PowerPoint/Audio and *SSR Ways & Means* PowerPoint/Audio for overview).

SSR is increasingly recognized as central to the development and security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—as prominently captured in the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy. SSR involves the transformation of security institutions so that they play an effective, legitimate, and democratically accountable role in providing external and internal security for their citizens.<sup>1</sup> Moving past traditional "train and equip" initiatives, the premise of SSR is that shortcomings in a country's security sector are often rooted in weak governance, poor management, and a lack of respect for the rule of law. Ineffective security forces are often a result of inadequate transparency and political accountability. Meaningful reforms in the security sector, accordingly, are dependent on addressing the underlying political and economic drivers to insecurity.

This broader conceptualization of security issues overlaps extensively with the economic development and democracy-building agenda of USAID. (See *SSR in the USAID Context* PowerPoint/Audio). Reflective of this developmental perspective, SSR encompasses not only a country's armed forces but the police, intelligence services, judicial and penal institutions, the civil authorities responsible for control and oversight (e.g. within parliament, the executive, and relevant ministries), as well as think tank and watchdog groups in civil society. To capture this broader emphasis, some prefer the term security *system* reform.

The conference included sessions on security and defense management, rule of law and judicial reform, intelligence oversight, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). This summary attempts to capture the key themes and challenges that emerged from these discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Clingendael Institute, Netherlands

Accordingly, if the United States and other donor governments are to realize the potential benefits of SSR, they will need to develop a repertoire of mechanisms by which they can engage reluctant governments in SSR initiatives.<sup>2</sup> This could take the form of building on existing capacity-enhancing initiatives, such as international military education and training (IMET) for example, but with a broadened emphasis on governance.

**Legal Restrictions.** As a practical matter, the USG must work through certain legal constraints in order to operationalize a more “joined-up” approach to security sector reform. USAID is restricted from financing any activities that are primarily intended to benefit the military—or that will subsidize or substantially enhance military capability. Similarly, USAID is prohibited from financing training for police or other law enforcement agencies.<sup>3</sup> The intent of such restrictions is unassailable. SSR proponents do not wish to inadvertently strengthen the coercive capacity of a repressive regime. Many of the contexts in which there is a need for USAID engagement in police or military reforms, however, are those that have historically had poor human-rights track records or are in need of strengthening the legitimacy of their security and political institutions. Congress and USAID will need to work together to ensure there is adequate flexibility in the interpretation of these restrictions so that USAID’s comparative expertise can be leveraged to address the complex development and security challenges of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Building Vehicles for Inter-Agency Cooperation.** A recurrent theme emerging from discussions of SSR is its cross-sectoral nature. The scope of these initiatives exceeds the expertise of any one agency or sector. Inter-agency coordination, therefore, is indispensable at all stages of the SSR process. There is a premium on innovative organizational models that maximize the complementary advantages of respective agencies.

The consensus from the British participants at the conference was that their “joined-up” approach, now five years old, has indeed improved the caliber and effectiveness of their SSR initiatives. Operationally, the UK now undertakes joint MOD/FCO/DfID projects, complete with shared budgets. But getting to this point has not been easy. It took two to three years to overcome the “transaction costs” involved in adapting this new approach. However, the process forced the respective government departments to develop a common language, goals, familiarity with key players, and understanding of how to build on one another’s strengths. They now have a shared operating platform that all sides agree is more effective. This is evidenced by more refined strategies as well as more decisive interventions (i.e., those that avoid the constant renegotiation of strategies during the course of implementation that marked earlier efforts).

**Need for Education within Donor Governments.** The British experience also has shown that there is as much need for educating donor country governments on the meaning and importance of SSR as there is in countries where these initiatives will be undertaken. Agencies can

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to diminish the value of undertaking SSR initiatives in countries that have already started down a democratic path. Indeed, these democratizing states may provide the bulk of the SSR workload. Ensuring their stable transition is a key element in the goal of creating a more democratic and peaceful international system. The most vexing challenges, however, are often getting to a stage where there is space for such reforms to take root.

<sup>3</sup> Exceptions exist for community-based police assistance under the control of democratic authorities or countries in transition.

dramatically increase their effectiveness (and reduce occasions where they are working at cross-purposes) if they recognize their overlapping interests. Ideally, this will enable each to focus more of their time on their comparative areas of expertise—and in the process limit the trade-offs they must make. For example, USAID's greater involvement in SSR activities may come at the expense of health, education, or water initiatives. A joined-up approach can help facilitate an inter-agency dialogue on priorities and how best to balance these trade-offs. More fundamentally, SSR encourages a developmental approach to security risks in the developing world. This challenges U.S. policymakers to weigh the security priorities of partner governments in addition to those dictated by U.S. national security interests.

**More Management and Time Intensive.** The reality of greater coordination is that it is more time-consuming, at least in the short term. More actors mean more meetings both within the USG and vis-à-vis partner governments. Rather than focusing solely on the vertical decision-making hierarchies within an individual agency or department, cross-cutting coordination necessitates that a horizontal network of contacts be established across all relevant agencies. DOD would not solely liaise with its MOD counterpart. Nor would USAID focus exclusively on its partnership with the Ministry of Health or Education. The embassy and defense attaché would play a more regular role in USAID activities. Parallel coordination mechanisms would be required in both the donor and host countries.

**Recommendations.** The United States government is still at an early stage of systematically coordinating its SSR-related activities across agencies. As with any new field, there are comparatively few individuals with recognized SSR expertise. Moreover, its interdisciplinary nature demands that a wider array of USG actors—many of whom have never worked together before—begin to collaborate. One of the benefits of the USAID-DfID conference, as well as a complementary workshop hosted earlier in the week by the DOD, is that they brought a number of these key actors together.

The workshop participants considered a range of methods to enhance interagency knowledge, practice, and collaboration. Specific follow-up recommendations included:

- Establish an ongoing interagency SSR policy working group to facilitate policy coordination of SSR-related activities currently sponsored by USG departments and agencies. The goal of this process would be to meld the disparate SSR efforts into a single USG SSR strategy. Sub-working groups could flesh out thematic areas—e.g. DDR, defense reform, rule of law, intelligence reform, policing.
- The policy working group might develop joint strategy papers to help create a common, or at least interlocking, policy framework regarding SSR. These policy papers, in turn, could inform specific SSR training requirements.
- Create several pilot country groups to develop unified USG SSR strategies. These country groups would liaise with the SSR policy working group to ensure key themes from the overarching effort were incorporated into these strategies. Creating joint funding pools for certain trial countries to reinforce the development of a common vision and strategy could also be considered.
- Take this interagency workshop process out into the field. This will expand awareness of SSR concepts as well as foster greater operational coordination in the short term.