

BOOK REVIEW

Meeting the challenges of security sector reform

Reviewed by Vanessa E Shields¹

Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peace Building

Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Ehrhart (eds)

Tokyo: United Nations Press, 2005

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Nearly fifteen years has passed since UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced his *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and yet the inherent complexities of post-conflict peacebuilding – which include, but are not limited to economic, political, social, security and psycho-social components – continue to challenge local, national, regional and international academics, practitioners and multi-national forces alike. Albrecht Schnable and Hans-Georg Ehrhart's edited book, *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, evaluates the role of 'local and external actors – with a focus on military forces – in meeting challenges of sustainable post-conflict security sector reform' (p. 1) by providing general recommendations for the international and donor communities through an evaluation of SSR successes and failures written by those who have been, or are, involved.

The book provides an overview of general and thematic SSR issues – through an evaluation of 14 case studies written by academics and practitioners from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America – with the aim of being a resource not only for local, national and regional actors but also for international actors. The main theme of the book is that SSR, and post-conflict peacebuilding in general, has been a steep learning curve for both external and internal military forces as well as the donor community. The changing nature of peacebuilding operations require external military forces to consider the impact their actions have in political and cultural contexts. External forces – be they military or from the donor community – have the responsibility to protect and 'create the political processes which require local actors to take over responsibility both for rebuilding their society and for creating patterns of cooperation between antagonistic groups' (p.2). External forces must ensure that the internal security sector – comprised of border guards, coast guard, customs service, intelligence, military, paramilitaries, presidential guards, police, judicial and penal systems – is transformed, legitimate, accountable and democratic.

A number of the book's case studies highlight similar obstacles to achieving comprehensive and lasting reform of the security sector in post-conflict states. For example, in Chapter 8, David Darchiashvili argues that Georgian SSR has not yet been realized due to inefficient societal consensus. In other words, the ideology of good governance and rule of law has not yet been embraced. Therefore, ethnic nationalism and feudal traditions maintain inefficient and corrupt civil-military relations. Likewise, in Stefan Wolff's Chapter 9 evaluation of post-Good Friday SSR in Northern Ireland, he sees reform hampered by the 'politics of fear and intimidation' which are not necessarily driven by ideology but instead by a strategic view, held by some dissident Republican and Loyalist 'spoilers', that reform is incompatible with their agendas (p. 201).

Biljana Vankovska (Chapter 5) observed that intra-state conflict can be influenced by economic, historical, military, political, psychological and societal experiences. She concluded that Macedonia's peacebuilding experience was motivated not by democracy building but instead by local, national and regional efforts focused on ethnic reconciliation. The importance of 'trust' was also reinforced in Chapter 7 when Ekaterina A. Stepanova argued that SSR in Russia is internally seen as a necessary component of establishing secure and stable civil-military relations however external assistance for this should *not* be spearheaded by NATO – for obvious historical reasons – but instead should come directly from the UN.

There are some common approaches taken by external actors during SSR which correlate to the success and/or failure of post-conflict peacebuilding. However, as illustrated in William Maley's Chapter 15 analysis of international force and political reconstruction in Cambodia, East Timor and Afghanistan, the only normative common approach is a commitment to sustainable peacebuilding. This normative approach is supported by the *Brahimi Report* (2000), which addressed the need for reform of the UN's capacity to undertake peacebuilding operations; and the 2002 Swedish report on the *Challenges of*

Peace Operations, which evaluated and explored the difficulties inherent in current peacebuilding operations.

The conclusion, written by the editors Schnabel and Ehrhart, provides a list of ten recommendations for the international community to implement during peacebuilding operations which build upon the external community's commitment to sustainable post-conflict peacebuilding. However, due to the number of intrastate conflicts the book covers and the fact that the book is divided into regions as opposed to thematic areas – the recommendations come across as disjointed. In spite of this criticism – which deals more with the structure of the book as opposed to its substance – this study is a useful resource for those interested in meeting the challenge of SSR through developing an understanding of SSR as integral component of post-conflict peacebuilding. ■