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Conceptualizing UN support to security sector reform

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Introduction

Security sector reform (SSR) is a fundamentally national process. Nevertheless, many countries that are engaged in SSR processes draw on support from external actors offering financial resources, technical expertise, and lessons learned in various contexts. As a result, multilateral organizations have been influential in shaping SSR agendas, by developing normative frameworks and providing a wide range of SSR support on the ground.¹ This applies in particular to the United Nations (UN), which has undertaken a concerted institutional effort over the last decade to achieve a consolidated, organization-wide approach to SSR, starting from an initial narrow focus on post-conflict settings but later evolving to include broader peacebuilding and development perspectives.

Though the UN was involved in SSR support for many years, it took the initiative of Slovakia in 2006-2007, within the context of its non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council, to formally put SSR on the organization's agenda.² While the Security Council and the General Assembly emphasized the importance of developing a UN system-wide approach to SSR, the Secretariat concurrently initiated an inter-agency working group on SSR (which later became an inter-agency task force)³ and commissioned empirical studies on the involvement of the UN in SSR support activities.⁴ This formed the basis for the first Report of the Secretary-General on SSR in 2008, which set out a strategic framework for UN support to SSR.⁵ In 2013, the approach of the UN was further articulated in the Secretary-General's second report on SSR,⁶ and later in 2014, in Security Council resolution 2151 – the first dedicated, standalone resolution on SSR.⁷ In parallel to this policy development process, the Secretariat led the creation of a number of guidance tools for UN staff engaged in SSR support, most notably the SSR Integrated Technical Guidance Notes (ITGNs), the first set of which was issued in 2012.⁸

Increasingly guided by the ITGNs within this policy framework, operational support to SSR gained considerable traction across the UN. The number of explicit

and implicit SSR mandates and tasks that became a part of UN peacekeeping operations, special political missions (SPMs), and field presences in non-mission settings grew rapidly. Institutional capacities, such as SSR support structures (both at Headquarters and in the field) and inter-agency coordination mechanisms, were subsequently put in place; and partnerships with regional and other multilateral actors were, or are in the process of being, developed. Key political support to the role of the UN in SSR is provided by the informal UN Group of Friends of SSR, comprised of over 40 Member States.⁹

Table 1.1: Milestones in the development of a UN-wide approach to SSR

Year	Milestones
2007	Secretary-General's Policy Committee decision on SSR Security Council's first open debate on SSR (chaired by Slovakia) Creation of the UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force Creation of a Group of Friends of SSR among UN Member States
2008	First Report of the Secretary-General on SSR Security Council's second open debate on SSR (chaired by the United Kingdom)
2009	Creation of the SSR Unit within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations ¹⁰
2010	Creation of the UN roster of security sector reform experts
2011	Security Council's third open debate on SSR (chaired by Nigeria)
2012	Publication of the first set of Integrated Technical Guidance Notes on SSR Establishment of the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law ¹¹
2013	Second Report of the Secretary-General on SSR
2014	Security Council's fourth open debate on SSR (chaired by Nigeria); resolution 2151 on SSR adopted

More than ten years after the launch of the process that led to the development of a UN approach to SSR, and more than five years since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2151, now is an opportune time to review the role of the UN in supporting SSR. With this objective in mind, this volume shows that while there has been much progress, including in building commitment among Member States for UN SSR support and developing technical guidance, the organization has faced challenges in operationalizing many of the concepts outlined in its policy framework. Moreover, at a time when the UN is expected to reflect the main tenets of global policy agendas in its work, such as those of the sustaining peace and sustainable development agendas, questions remain as to how to best deliver SSR support in a much wider range of contexts than post-conflict settings. Hence, there is a need to look back at more than a decade of UN experience in supporting SSR across contexts, to examine what can be learned and to better understand the progress that

has already been made in concrete areas of support; such as in the development of national security policies, defence sector reform, and gender-responsive SSR. The reflections in this volume can be viewed as contributing towards an empirical basis for the organization going forward, to further bridge the gap between policy and practice.

The objective of this introductory chapter is to provide the conceptual framework and some benchmarks against which UN support to SSR, as discussed in this volume, can be better assessed. First, the concept of SSR will be discussed, with a particular focus on the UN context. This is followed by an examination of the UN approach to supporting SSR, particularly the organization's principles of engagement, normative and operational roles, and institutional capacities. The chapter concludes by briefly outlining the structure and contents of the book.

Understanding security sector reform¹²

SSR is still a relatively new concept, only first emerging in the late 1990s before spreading quickly across international policy agendas. Three main developments have contributed to the rise of SSR as an important policy concept: growing recognition among the donor community that security is a development issue; increasing appreciation of the crucial role played by security sectors in post-Cold War democratization processes; and the involvement of international peacekeeping and stabilization operations in post-conflict security sector reconstruction. It is this last development that triggered the emergence of a UN approach to SSR.

Notions of security

It is evident that the provision of security is central to SSR – but what kind of security? This is important, because security can be interpreted in several ways. For most of modern history, security was understood almost exclusively in military terms, and as referring to the security of a state. When the national survival in what some scholars call an “anarchical” international system was seen to be at risk, the security discourse attributed the central, if not exclusive, role of ensuring security to the state; the primacy of military power was largely uncontested. In more recent decades, however, the concept of security has broadened considerably in two ways, resulting in a shift from the traditional to the so-called “new” security agenda. First, the concept *widened* in terms of the policy dimensions it incorporates, and second, it *deepened* regarding the main beneficiaries of security.

This *widening* of the concept of security was well captured by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who noted in 1999 that:

“[...] security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratisation, disarmament and respect for human rights and the rule of law.”¹³

The *deepening* of the concept of security was also aptly expressed by Annan in the UN Millennium Report, in which he noted in 2000 that:

“Once synonymous with the defence of the territory from external attack, the requirements of security today have come to embrace the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence.”¹⁴

This new, broader understanding of security upon which the UN approach to SSR is based comprises both military *and* non-military dimensions (political, economic, societal, and environmental). In addition, it encompasses both state security *and* human security. In other words, as emphasized in the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, it concerns “security for the State and its peoples.”¹⁵

The scope of the security sector

Our understanding of security defines our vision of the security sector and how it should be shaped, and broadening our definition of security necessarily broadens our view of the security sector. While usage of the term “security sector” is widespread, there is no universal understanding of what the sector entails. This is particularly true regarding its scope, as different stakeholders variously embrace broader or narrower conceptions. Within the framework of the UN, the Secretary-General has acknowledged that “security sector” is “a broad term often used to describe the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for the management, provision and oversight of security in a country.”¹⁶ In his 2008 report on SSR, the Secretary-General divided the sector into four areas:

1. Defence, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services, and institutions responsible for border management, customs, and civil emergencies.
2. Elements of the judicial sector responsible for the adjudication of cases of alleged criminal conduct and misuse of force.
3. Actors that play a role in managing and overseeing the design and implementation of security, such as ministries, legislative bodies, and civil society groups.
4. Other non-State actors, namely customary or informal authorities and private security services.¹⁷

While this definition of the security sector appears to be rather expansive, some other international actors have developed even broader definitions, such as a widely-used definition introduced by the OECD DAC.¹⁸ By comparison, the Secretary-General’s

definition of the sector stands apart for neither fully encapsulating the role of the justice sector, nor the spectrum of non-state actors. Indeed, it refers only to those parts of the justice sector “responsible for the adjudication of cases of alleged criminal conduct and misuse of force”; names only civil society groups, customary and informal authorities, and private security services as non-state actors; and does not identify non-state armed groups, other than private security services, as a component part of the security sector.

The features of a well-governed security sector

While the security sector has unique characteristics given its central role in guaranteeing a state’s monopoly on the use of force, it also shares many common characteristics with other areas of public service delivery, and should “be subject to the same standards of efficiency, equity and accountability as any other public service.”¹⁹ Good governance of the security sector therefore means ensuring that the sector is subject to the same standards of good governance as all public services including, *inter alia*, accountability, transparency, the rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Because every security sector is different, no single or ideal model exists. Still, some institutional features of good governance are common to well-governed security sectors. According to the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, effective and accountable security sectors typically have:

- (a) “A legal and/or constitutional framework providing for the legitimate and accountable use of force in accordance with universally accepted human rights norms and standards, including sanctioning mechanisms for the use of force and setting out the roles and responsibilities of different actors;
- (b) An institutionalised system of governance and management: mechanisms for the direction and oversight of security provided by authorities and institutions, including systems for financial management and review, as well as protection of human rights;
- (c) Capacities: structures, personnel, equipment and resources to provide effective security;
- (d) Mechanisms for interaction among security actors: establishing transparent modalities for coordination and cooperation among different actors based on their respective constitutional/legal roles and responsibilities; [and]
- (e) [A] culture of service: promoting unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality and respect for human rights among security actors and shaping the manner in which they carry out their duties.”²⁰

Good governance of the sector includes a corpus of widely-recognized aspirational principles and good practices. While no country in the world matches these principles and practices entirely, they serve as the benchmark against which the actual practice of security governance can be measured. These principles and practices also define the overarching goal of SSR, namely a well-governed security sector.

Reforming the security sector

Poor governance of a security sector is the point of departure for SSR. With the aim to enhance security sector governance, SSR is designed to transform dysfunctional security institutions into functional institutions that can efficiently and effectively fulfil their statutory functions so as to deliver security to the state and its people. However, SSR is concerned with more than just the efficient and effective provision of security, which is necessary but not sufficient to enhance security sector governance. Security must also be provided in a manner that is accountable, inclusive, and transparent. In short, accountability and effectiveness are two sides of the same coin, and together, they constitute the normative core of SSR. This is why the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR refers to the reform process as one involving:

“... assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation led by national authorities that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.”²¹

Furthermore, the UN concept of SSR acknowledges that “effectiveness, accountability and democratic governance are mutually reinforcing elements of security.”²²

SSR can thus be viewed as a political and technical process of improving state and human security by increasing the effectiveness and accountability of security provision, management, and oversight within a framework of democratic governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights²³ – in other words, by enhancing security sector governance. SSR can include a wide range of different reform activities, including different actors and thematic areas, and delivered at different levels (strategic, organizational, and operational).

The UN differentiates between sector-wide and component-specific approaches to SSR. *Sector-wide SSR* seeks to enhance the governance and overall performance of an entire security sector and thereby address the foundations upon which security sector institutions in each component area are built. Sector-wide initiatives include, *inter alia*, national security dialogues; the development of national security policies, strategies, and plans; security sector reviews and mappings; the design of national SSR

strategies; management and oversight capacity building; the development of security sector legislation; and security sector public expenditure reviews.²⁴

Component-specific SSR focuses instead on one sub-sector such as defence, law enforcement, justice, corrections, intelligence, or border management. Component-specific reforms are essential for SSR so long as they are not conducted in isolation and are aligned with broader SSR efforts. These reforms must be designed and implemented with a full awareness of the complex interdependencies that characterize security sector governance. For example, it is important to recognize that the success of police reform is often dependent on progress in the area of criminal justice and corrections. In a similar vein, investments in training and equipping uniformed personnel may turn out to be counterproductive if important aspects of management and oversight have not been properly addressed. In an ideal situation, SSR processes begin with overarching, sector-wide reform activities that contribute towards developing a strong governance framework with the capacity to support component-specific activities.

In sum, the concept of SSR assumes both a broad notion of security itself (military *and* non-military dimensions; state *and* human security) and a broad understanding of what constitutes a security sector (security providing institutions *and* management and oversight bodies; state *and* non-state actors). Ultimately, as SSR is meant to enhance security sector governance, it encompasses any and all activities aimed at making the provision of state or human security more effective and accountable.

Supporting security sector reform

Many countries engaged in SSR processes draw on external support provided by international actors, such as donor states and multilateral organizations. The assistance of external actors – who bring financial resources, technical expertise, and SSR experiences from their own national contexts and/or other reform contexts – can be invaluable in making reforms more cost-efficient and effective, and their implementation more expeditious. However, the possibility always exists that tension may develop between the requirement of national ownership and the imposition of solutions by these external actors. There is often a fine balance between the need for broad-based national leadership of SSR and the best use of external assistance; and this poses a challenge to both domestic and external actors, including multilateral organizations such as the UN.

To address the challenges associated with externally assisted SSR, the UN, like many other multilateral organizations, has developed an extensive policy framework to guide its own support to national SSR processes. As noted above, this framework

is broadly based upon one Security Council resolution, two reports of the UN Secretary-General, and a body of guidance tools, with the ITGNs at its core. Together, these texts and tools outline a set of shared principles and standards, normative and operational roles in the context of SSR support, and the institutional capacities that enable the UN to support SSR processes.

Basic principles of engagement

The policy frameworks of both bilateral and multilateral actors include a number of similar principles and standards guiding their approaches to SSR support.²⁵ The UN approach is based on ten core guiding principles that establish the purpose and objectives of providing support to SSR processes.²⁶

The *first* of these principles embodies the key concepts behind UN engagement in SSR:

- (a) “The goal of the United Nations in security sector reform is to support States and societies in developing effective, inclusive and accountable security institutions so as to contribute to international peace and security, sustainable development and the enjoyment of human rights by all;”

This principle adheres to a broad notion of security (national and human), a normative understanding of the security sector based on the principle of good governance (effective, inclusive, and accountable institutions), and views SSR as a process that may be externally assisted but which always requires national (state) and local (community) ownership. Significantly, SSR is no longer narrowly understood as a component part of the UN’s peace and security pillar – which was its point of entry for the organization – but rather as a cross-cutting activity that encompasses all three UN pillars and thus contributes to sustainable development and the protection of human rights.

The *second* and *third* principles set clear limits to external, in this case UN, support to SSR:

- (b) “Security sector reform should be undertaken on the basis of a national decision, a Security Council mandate and/or a General Assembly resolution, the Charter of the United Nations and human rights laws and standards;”
- (c) “In order to be successful and sustainable, support in the area of security sector reform must be anchored on national ownership and the commitment of involved States and societies;”

In other words, SSR should be nationally led and nationally owned. Further, any UN engagement in support of national SSR processes must take place within the framework of the UN Charter and must be based on a clear mandate and/or request.

The *fourth* principle reflects the implicit recognition that SSR is a highly political process that must be placed in its specific national and regional context:

- (d) “A United Nations approach to security sector reform must be flexible and tailored to the country, region, and/or specific environment in which reform is taking place, as well as to the different needs of all stakeholders;”

This principle acknowledges that the political nature of SSR means that interventions must be context-specific, since each country engaged in SSR constitutes a special case and thus a different reform context. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. At the same time, the UN must be wary of attempts by the regime in power or other stakeholders to instrumentalize SSR support for partisan interests. To prevent this from occurring, UN SSR support must account for the different needs of *all* stakeholders in a given context.

The *fifth* principle emphasizes the necessity of a gender-sensitive approach to SSR:

- (e) “A United Nations approach to security sector reform must be gender-sensitive throughout its planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. It must also include the reform of recruitment processes and improvement in the delivery of security services to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence;”

This is one of the key cross-cutting issues in SSR. A gender-sensitive approach is necessary in order to promote the different security needs of women, girls, men, and boys. This principle is also an important recognition by the UN that security sector institutions play a critical role in addressing and preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

The *sixth* and *seventh* principles outline entry points for external SSR engagement:

- (f) “A security sector reform framework is essential in the planning and implementation of post-conflict activities. Ideally, security sector reform should begin at the outset of a peace process and should be incorporated into early recovery and development strategies;”
- (g) “A clearly defined strategy, including the identification of priorities, indicative timelines and partnerships, is required for the implementation of a security sector reform process;”

These principles implicitly define the ideal prerequisites and conditions for SSR engagement by external actors. In an ideal context, SSR should begin early in peace, recovery, and development processes, and should extend from a clearly defined strategy. In reality, however, these conditions are often met only partially. This contributes to some of the typical dilemmas faced on the ground by external actors, including the UN, especially in post-conflict contexts.

The *eighth*, *ninth*, and *tenth* principles refer to issues that may arise in the context of external assistance to national SSR processes:

- (h) “The effectiveness of international support for security sector reform will be shaped by the integrity of motive, the level of accountability and the amount of resources provided;”
- (i) “Coordination of national and international partners’ efforts is essential. Lead national entities and a designated international counterpart should be identified whenever possible;”
- (j) “Monitoring and regular evaluation against established principles and specific benchmarks are essential to track and maintain progress in security sector reform;”

These conditions impact the effectiveness of international support, the need for coordination between national and international partners (and *among* international partners), and the importance of systematically measuring progress. It must be emphasized that these three principles should be viewed in conjunction with the cardinal principle of national ownership, which is vital to the legitimacy and sustainability of any national SSR effort assisted by external actors.²⁷ Inclusion of the phrase “integrity of motive” in the eighth principle is particularly relevant, because external support to SSR should be provided for the benefit of a partner country and not driven by the interests of an external actor.

These ten principles define benchmarks for SSR support, and in theory, these standards and goals are largely uncontested. In practice, though, they are often subverted by a lack of appropriate operationalization, the tendency to apply technical solutions to essentially political problems, or conflicting interests among the actors involved in SSR.

Normative and operational roles

Given that the UN will never be the exclusive external actor in supporting SSR processes and will inevitably have to work alongside and in partnership with other bilateral and multilateral actors, the question is what role the UN can and should play in supporting SSR. Consequently, a range of normative and operational roles have been identified in which the UN may have comparative advantages over other external actors due to its legitimacy, political neutrality, and global character.

The *normative* role of the UN is aimed at building the foundations for effective delivery of SSR assistance. In this context, the UN sees its primary role in two main areas:

- Facilitating the establishment of common international principles and standards for support to SSR, as well as elaborating policies and guidelines for the implementation of SSR plans and programmes.
- Contributing to the generation of collective knowledge on SSR by providing a forum for international dialogue and assisting in the further development of best practices.²⁸

Security Council resolution 2151 (2014) contributed significantly to establishing common international principles and standards for external assistance to national SSR processes. Applicable to the UN and its Member States, these principles and standards are intended to provide the basis for a transparent and accountable partnership between the UN system, national authorities, and bilateral and multilateral actors. Prior to adoption of resolution 2151, this normative framework was outlined in the 2008 and 2013 reports of the Secretary-General on SSR. The principles and standards contained in these foundational UN documents have strongly influenced the policy frameworks of other actors, both bilateral and multilateral, engaged in SSR support.²⁹

Common among international actors involved in supporting SSR is the habit of developing policies and guidance that provide a link between broad principles and standards and operational implementation. Over the past decade, the ITGNs have been at the core of guidance developed by the UN for UN SSR practitioners. Launched in 2012, the first set of ITGNs covered issues of immediate and practical relevance to UN staff: an introduction to the UN approach to SSR, national ownership of SSR, gender-responsive SSR, peace processes and SSR, democratic governance of the security sector, and UN support to national security policy-making and strategy-making processes.³⁰ These early ITGNs have since been complemented by a 2016 note on SSR and transnational organized crime.³¹ While the ITGNs focus on sector-wide SSR, the UN also has some component-specific guidance tools, most notably the UN policy on defence sector reform (2011),³² which was conceptualized in the broader context of SSR. Additional guidance tools address links between SSR and related areas, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and small arms and light weapons (SALW) control, as well as cross-cutting topics such as gender and human rights (e.g., the 2011 Human Rights Due Diligence Policy and the 2018 Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Policy).³³

The UN views its other normative role as contributing to the generation and sharing of collective knowledge on SSR. The Security Council, the General Assembly, and other UN bodies, at both statutory and informal meetings, have repeatedly provided a forum for international dialogue on best practices of, and support to, SSR. The Inter-Agency SSR Task Force has played an important role in facilitating the development of system-wide policy and guidance, as well as developing a

number of sensitization and training products. Annual inter-agency workshops for practitioners bring together expertise from within and outside the UN system, and have developed into the core of a dedicated community of practice that exchanges experience and knowledge, policy analysis, and training. In pursuit of generating knowledge in this area, the UN has actively developed close working partnerships with other multilateral organizations, civil society networks, and a range of think tanks, particularly with the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) and DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.³⁴

The *operational* role of the UN in SSR is aimed at supporting national and regional reform processes. In this context, the UN is particularly well positioned to assist in certain areas. The following examples highlight some of these areas and serve as a starting point for exploring the different UN field experiences detailed in various chapters of this book.³⁵

- *Helping establish an enabling environment for SSR.* Any SSR process is heavily contingent on the national security, political, and development context. By influencing these overarching contextual factors, the UN can play an important role in helping to establish an enabling environment for SSR.³⁶ This could become manifest in the provision of security (where such a mandate exists), support to DDR, human rights monitoring, and support to national authorities in promoting good governance and reconciliation processes, among others.
- *Supporting needs assessments and strategic planning for SSR.* Comprehensive needs assessments and reviews are crucial to building an empirical evidence base to inform SSR processes. Assisting national authorities in conducting assessments and reviews related to the security sector and in developing national security strategies and SSR implementation plans has become a main feature of UN support on the ground.³⁷
- *Facilitating national dialogues on security.* By supporting dialogue that involves national and local authorities, representatives from security sector institutions and civil society, and the broader population, the UN can help Member States develop a more cohesive and inclusive security vision and thereby lay the foundation for national SSR processes that meet the needs of all stakeholders.³⁸
- *Providing technical advice and support to components of the security sector.* Component-specific support is in high demand from countries that are in the process of reforming security institutions. Although the UN is only one among many relevant external actors, it regularly provides specialized expertise to national authorities on the reform of specific components of the security sector, including of defence and law enforcement agencies, elements of the judicial sector and corrections system, and institutions responsible for border management, customs, and civil emergencies, among others. This support may include public

expenditure reviews (Liberia and Somalia³⁹), the vetting of personnel (Central African Republic, or CAR⁴⁰), efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (CAR and Democratic Republic of the Congo⁴¹), and initiatives to address organized crime (as in West Africa, through the West Africa Coast Initiative, or WACI⁴²). Component-specific support in the areas of police, justice and corrections is increasingly delivered through the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law (see below).

- *Supporting capacity development for oversight mechanisms.* Assisting national authorities with the development of executive, parliamentary, and independent oversight mechanisms, such as human rights and ombuds institutions, is a core component of the UN approach to SSR and thus a priority task. This includes strengthening the capacity of civil society, in particular human rights groups and community-based women's organizations, to support effective civilian oversight.⁴³
- *Supporting capacity development for coordination and resource mobilization.* National and regional authorities often face difficulties in mobilizing resources and coordinating external assistance to SSR, and supporting these authorities constitutes an important operational role for the UN. At the same time, UN-led coordination efforts may be hampered by a reluctance on the part of some international (and national) partners to engage in coordination efforts, often driven by a divergence of mandates and interests.⁴⁴
- *Supporting capacity development for monitoring and evaluation.* Monitoring and evaluation, and the review of progress made, are becoming increasingly important in the SSR context. Supporting national and international partners in this area is another operational role for the UN, which has so far focused on monitoring the implementation of national SSR strategies (where they exist), and in some contexts, on human rights monitoring as a key indicator of the impact of SSR (e.g., in Mali).⁴⁵

It is difficult to assess whether the normative and operational roles played by the UN in supporting SSR processes are truly representative of its comparative advantages vis-à-vis other external actors. A recent study on multilateral support for SSR – which examined the UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – noted a lack of sufficiently strong empirical evidence to prove such claims. Nevertheless, the study confirmed that the UN is generally most engaged in sector-wide support, and that “it has an important role to play in supporting the identification of strategic priorities for SSR and in taking the lead in coordination efforts to ensure that a comprehensive approach to reform is supported by the international community.”⁴⁶ Indeed, as the contributions to this volume clearly demonstrate, the UN can and should focus on supporting national actors in defining areas of reform, as well as their specific needs

in terms of external support, and in taking the lead in coordinating international support to national SSR processes.

Institutional capacities

Like many other international actors, the UN has had to adapt the way it organizes the human, material, and financial resources at its disposal in order to effectively support national SSR processes, as well as the internal procedures that allocate and deploy these resources. For that purpose, the UN has been creating additional institutional capacities for SSR support since 2007, both at headquarters and in the field. These primarily include two types of capacities:

- Cross-institutional mechanisms, such as the UN Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force (IASSRTF) and the Global Focal Point for Rule of Law (GFP).
- Dedicated SSR teams, such as the SSR Unit (SSRU) within the Department of Peace Operations (DPO)⁴⁷ at Headquarters, as well as a number of SSR structures in the field.

The IASSRTF was formed in 2007 and is composed of 14 UN entities that address different dimensions of SSR support.⁴⁸ Co-chaired by DPO and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and reflecting the UN's broad understanding of SSR ("peace and development"), this inter-agency mechanism promotes a common and coordinated UN approach to SSR. Its core functions include developing sector-wide guidance for SSR practitioners, facilitating regional partnerships for SSR, engaging in SSR policy dialogue and consultations with UN Member States, and maintaining a UN roster of SSR experts. The sector-wide perspective of the IASSRTF is complemented by the component-specific focus of the GFP.⁴⁹ Created in 2012, the GFP concentrates on providing joint component-specific support in the areas of police, justice, and corrections.

The SSRU, established in 2009 within the DPO's Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, serves as the focal point and technical resource capacity on SSR for the entire UN system as well as for national and international partners. Led by a Principal SSR Officer and composed of half a dozen professional staff, the SSRU also acts as the Secretariat of the IASSRTF. Over the years, demand for support services of the SSRU has risen dramatically. While the SSRU has a system-wide mandate and takes a sector-wide perspective on SSR, there are also a number of structures within the UN system dedicated to component-specific elements of SSR support. For instance, the DPO's Justice and Corrections Service and the UNDP's Rule of Law Unit may both be engaged in supporting judicial reform under the auspices of the GFP.⁵⁰

The number of dedicated SSR structures providing sector-wide SSR support at the field level has witnessed a marked increase over the years, alongside structures focusing on component-specific SSR support particularly in the areas of police, justice, and corrections reform.⁵¹ Compared to other multilateral institutions, the institutional capacities of the UN to support SSR are quite impressive. In most of its field missions and increasingly in non-mission contexts, the UN maintains SSR structures that are supported by system-wide structures at headquarters. At the same time, dedicated SSR capacities at headquarters and in the field remain quite small, and a number of thematic SSR areas lack corresponding institutional structures, including defence sector reform, intelligence reform, and border management. A recent study on multilateral support for SSR (mentioned above) noted the need “to ensure that capacities match needs in terms of dedicated structures and number of staff, including by ensuring that SSR is adequately reflected in planning teams that feed into programme/mission budget development.”⁵²

In sum, the UN has developed a strong normative framework that outlines the basic principles of engagement and the normative and operational roles it should play in SSR support. While many capacity constraints remain, there are now structures in place to enable implementation of the main tenets of UN policy in this area. However, a number of challenges remain when it comes to linking institutional policy and operational practice, many of which will be elaborated in this volume.

Linking the policy and practice of UN SSR support

The UN SSR agenda has both progressed and expanded since the Security Council’s first open debate on SSR in 2007. Drawing from the experience of UN practitioners, combined with that of external experts on SSR, this volume presents a range of perspectives on UN support to SSR, past and present, with a focus on institutional policy and operational practice and linkages between the two.

This volume brings together 18 contributions and is divided into five parts. Part I discusses the importance of understanding the complexity of individual political contexts for SSR (Chapter 2) as well as how the UN approaches SSR support in broad contexts such as development (Chapter 3) and peacebuilding (Chapter 4). Part II presents case studies on UN support to SSR in practice, reflecting on field experiences in West Africa (Chapter 5), Côte d’Ivoire (Chapter 6), and CAR (Chapter 7). Part III is dedicated to the elaboration of various key themes in UN SSR support, including the importance of national security policies, strategies, and plans (Chapter 8), defence sector reform (Chapter 9), the nexus between SSR and DDR (Chapter 10), the protection of civilians (Chapter 11), the role of public financial management (Chapter 12), human rights-based approaches to SSR

(Chapter 13), and gender-responsive SSR (Chapter 14). Part IV emphasizes the importance of partnerships in UN SSR support, covering topics such as national ownership (Chapter 15), inter-agency coordination within the UN (Chapter 16), and partnering with regional organizations (Chapter 17).

In Part V, this volume concludes with a review of how SSR has moved from the periphery to the centre of the UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding agenda, as well as how the organization has moved from developing policy frameworks and guidance to providing field support and building partnerships. In this context, the suggestion is put forth that the UN approach to SSR should be further emancipated from its initial, narrow focus on post-conflict settings and fully integrated into the sustaining peace and prevention agenda – a proposal substantiated by an analysis of remaining gaps and challenges alongside recommendations for future action.

Together, the chapters of this volume provide a multi-faceted review of the normative and operational roles of the UN in supporting SSR over the past decade. These contributions make a strong case, explicitly or implicitly, that the UN approach to SSR should be echoed across all three pillars of the organization (peace and security, development, and human rights); that the focus of SSR support should be further broadened from its peacekeeping origins in line with the sustaining peace and prevention agenda; and, most importantly, that UN involvement in SSR support should be concentrated on bridging the remaining gaps between policy and practice.

Notes

- ¹ See DCAF, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform: A Mapping Study covering the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (Geneva: DCAF 2018).
- ² UN Security Council, “Statement by the President of the Security Council” (S/PRST/2007/3*), 21 February 2007. See also Matúš Korba, “The Performance of the SR in the UN Security Council” in *Yearbook of Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic 2006*, edited by Peter Brezáni (Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association 2007); and Peter Burian, “Slovak Republic’s Performance in the UN Security Council (2006-2007)” in *Yearbook of Slovakia’s Foreign Policy 2007*, edited by Peter Brezáni (Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association 2008).
- ³ United Nations, Decision of the Secretary-General, 16 February 2007 Policy Committee Meeting, No. 2007/11, 16 February 2007.
- ⁴ For example, see Heiner Hänggi and Vincenza Scherrer, *Security Sector Reform and UN Integrated Missions: Experience from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, and Kosovo* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2008).
- ⁵ Report of the Secretary-General, “Securing Peace and Development: The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform” (A/62/659–S/2008/39), 23 January 2008 (henceforth, the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR).

- ⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, “Securing States and Societies: Strengthening the United Nations Comprehensive Support to Security Sector Reform” (A/67/970–S/2013/480), 13 August 2013 (henceforth, the 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR).
- ⁷ UN Security Council, Resolution 2151 (S/RES/2151), 28 April 2014.
- ⁸ United Nations SSR Task Force, *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes* (United Nations 2012). Also, see *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes – Transnational Organized Crime and Security Sector Reform* (United Nations 2016). Collectively, these are referred to as the ITGNs.
- ⁹ The informal UN Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, established in 2007 at the initiative of Slovakia and currently co-chaired by Slovakia and South Africa, “has proved vital in helping to develop a consensus on the United Nations security sector reform agenda.” 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, para. 42.
- ¹⁰ Now called the Department of Peace Operations, or DPO.
- ¹¹ Previously called the Global Focal Point (GFP) for Police, Justice and Corrections Areas in the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict and Other Situations.
- ¹² This section draws upon previous publications by the author, most notably Heiner Hänggi, “Security Sector Reform – Concepts and Contexts” in *Transformation: A Security Sector Reform Reader* (Pasig City: INCITEGov, 2011).
- ¹³ Kofi Annan, “Towards a culture of peace,” in *Letters to future generations* (UNESCO, 1999), 15.
- ¹⁴ Kofi Annan, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century* (“The Millennium Report of the Secretary-General”) (New York: United Nations, 2000), 43.
- ¹⁵ 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, para. 17.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 14.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ OECD, *Security System Reform and Governance*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series (Paris: OECD Publishing 2005), 20–21.
- ¹⁹ Kofi Annan, “Peace and Development – One Struggle, Two Fronts,” address of the United Nations Secretary-General to World Bank Staff, 19 October 1999.
- ²⁰ 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, para. 15.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 17.
- ²² *Ibid.*, para. 18.
- ²³ DCAF, *Security Sector Reform*, SSR Backgrounder Series (Geneva: DCAF 2015), 2.
- ²⁴ UNSC Resolution 2151 (2014), para. 9. Also, see 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, paras. 17 and 61(e).
- ²⁵ For example, see DCAF, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform*, 29–31.
- ²⁶ See the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, para. 45.
- ²⁷ UN SSR Task Force, ITGNs, 13–34. Also, see Chapter 15 of this volume, “National ownership and SSR: Towards a common framework for action.”
- ²⁸ See the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, paras. 47–49; the 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, paras. 21–25; and UN SSR Task Force, ITGNs, p. 4.
- ²⁹ For example, the UN and the European Union (EU) have supported the development of a policy framework for SSR in the African Union (AU); and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has repeatedly drawn on UN experience in developing its own approach to security sector governance and reform (SSG/R).
- ³⁰ UN SSR Task Force, ITGNs.
- ³¹ UN SSR Task Force, *ITGN – Transnational Organized Crime and Security Sector Reform*.
- ³² United Nations, “Defence Sector Reform,” Policy no. 2011.17, 27 June 2011.
- ³³ United Nations Secretary-General, “Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces” (A/67/775–S/2013/110), 5 March 2013; United

- Nations, “Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” Policy no. 2018.01, 1 February 2018, para. 39.
- ³⁴ 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, para. 45. In the case of DCAF, since 2017, its partnership with the UN has been additionally strengthened by a strategic framework agreement with the SSRU and consecutive annual work plans.
- ³⁵ This categorization of operational roles follows the approach adopted in the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR. See para. 50. Also, see the 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR, paras. 26–41; and UN SSR Task Force, ITGNs, 5–6.
- ³⁶ While helping to establish an enabling environment for SSR is not the same thing as supporting SSR, it is listed as an operational role in the 2008 Report of the Secretary-General on SSR.
- ³⁷ For example, see details of the UN engagement in Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic (CAR), discussed in Chapter 5 of this volume, “Sustaining peace in West Africa: UN SSR support in non-mission settings.”
- ³⁸ For example, see details of the UN engagement in CAR, discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume, “UN support to SSR in peacekeeping contexts: A case study of the Central African Republic.”
- ³⁹ See Chapter 12 of this volume, “Following the money: The role of public financial management in SSR.”
- ⁴⁰ See Chapter 7 of this volume, “UN support to SSR in peacekeeping contexts: A case study of the Central African Republic.”
- ⁴¹ See Chapter 13 of this volume, “Human rights and UN engagement with SSR.”
- ⁴² Developed by UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), UNOWAS (United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel), DPA (Department of Political Affairs, now Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs), DPO (Department of Peace Operations), and INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization), WACI supports the implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan, which addresses the growing problem of drug trafficking, organized crime, and drug abuse in West Africa.
- ⁴³ See Chapter 14 of this volume, “The UN approach to gender-responsive SSR.”
- ⁴⁴ This was the case, for example, in Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone. See Chapter 17 of this volume, “Better together: Partnering with regional organisations in SSR.”
- ⁴⁵ For example, see Chapter 15 of this volume, “National ownership and SSR: Towards a common framework for action.”
- ⁴⁶ DCAF, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform*, 10.
- ⁴⁷ Formerly, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, or DPKO.
- ⁴⁸ The Task Force includes representatives from DPPA (Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs), DPO, OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), PBSO (Peacebuilding Support Office), UNDP, UN Women, UNODC, UNODA (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs), UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services), OSAA (Office of the Special Adviser on Africa), OSRSG-SVC (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict), UNICEF (*United Nations Children’s Fund*), UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research), and UNPF (United Nations Population Fund).
- ⁴⁹ The GFP comprises DPO, UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNODC, UNOPS, and the EOSG.
- ⁵⁰ DCAF, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform*, 44.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.