

## MARITIME SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: LESSONS FROM THE MAINSTREAM

---

**Timothy Edmunds, *University of Bristol***

### SUMMARY

*Security sector reform (SSR) has become an important component of international peacebuilding, stabilisation and democratisation efforts since 2000. However, and until recently, its impact on the maritime sector has been limited. This paper explores the lessons learned from past or ‘mainstream’ SSR initiatives, and considers their relevance for maritime capacity building and the Capacity Building Coordination Group (CBCG) of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS).<sup>1</sup> It argues that the maritime sector presents some novel challenges to the SSR project, including the transnational nature of the maritime security environment, its jurisdictional and organisational complexity, and the often fragmented nature of the political communities in which it is conducted. Even so, it argues that important lessons can be learned from SSR experiences elsewhere. These include the importance and meaning of local ownership, the inherently political nature of the reform process itself, the dangers of externally-driven and overly technocratic responses, and the consequent need to work with rather than against local governance*

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper draws in part on Edmunds, T. (2012), ‘Security Sector Reform’, in Bruneau T. and Matei, C. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations* Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, pp. 48-60s.

*structures and practices. Ultimately, it argues for an adaptive, politically sensitive and ultimately problem-driven approach to Maritime SSR, and warns against the adoption of formulaic models of ‘best practice’, imposed from outside.*

### MARITIME SECURITY AND INSECURITY

Problems of maritime insecurity form an increasingly significant component of western and international security thinking. They also feature prominently in the local security concerns of many states in the developing world, with a particularly sharp focus in those regions – such as the Horn of Africa or the Gulf of Guinea – that have been affected by piracy. However, piracy itself is merely one component of a series of inter-linked maritime security challenges.<sup>2</sup> These include a range of different issues, from the safety and security of sea lanes, to the protection and exploitation of maritime resources and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), the prevention of

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Roach, J.A. (2004). ‘Initiatives to Enhance Maritime Security at Sea,’ *Marine Policy* 28:1, pp. 41–66 and Vreÿ, F. (2013). ‘Turning the Tide: Revisiting African Maritime Security’, *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 41: 2, pp. 1–23.

illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the protection of the maritime environment from pollution and other environmental damage, combatting smuggling and trafficking at sea, ensuring the security of ports and other facilities, and meeting the everyday security needs of communities living in coastal regions.<sup>3</sup>

Generally speaking, maritime insecurities are exacerbated in environments where local political communities (in most cases the state or state-like entity) lack the capacity, will or resources to assert effective control over their maritime territories and interests, and in which alternative – often informal or even criminal – practices emerge to fill the gap. In Somalia for example, the disintegration of the state in the early 1990s was accompanied by a collapse in policing and coastguard capacities, opening up its maritime resources to vigorous forms of exploitation and predation, including IUU fishing and the dumping of toxic waste by boats from more developed states. Piracy in the region appears to have emerged in part, and at least initially, a response to these pressures, with local fishermen (and often former coastguards) turning to such methods to replace lost livelihoods and assert a measure of local agency over the activities of foreign vessels in un-policed local waters.<sup>4</sup>

Maritime security sector reform (MSSR) sets out to meet these gaps in security governance by strengthening or rebuilding lo-

cal security institutions. However, it does so in an environment in which the apparently straightforward problem of providing good order at sea is often complicated by a range of interlocking challenges of security governance. Five dimensions of complexity stand out in particular, all of which are of specific relevance to the nature, purpose and practice of MSSR:

1. Maritime insecurity is closely linked to, and often dependent on wider challenges of governance and insecurity on land. In the Somali case, maritime security problems, whether they are linked to piracy or IUU fishing, are largely a product of the collapse of state governance structures on land. In the absence of a functioning state to police the maritime environment, opportunities for predation – external or internal – become endemic. At the same time, patterns of political authority on the ground can fragment around informal practices and networks; some of which may be implicated in piracy themselves.
2. Land is integral to maritime security in other ways too. The effective governance and security of port facilities is often key to managing such challenges as smuggling, robbery and corruption. Similarly, the ‘back end’ of piracy – that is the manner in which such activities are organised, sustained and funded, and the mechanisms through which profits are laundered and spent – primarily take place on land.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> African Union (AU) (2012), *2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy*, [http://pages.au.int/sites/default/files/2050%20AIM%20Strategy%20%28Eng%29\\_0.pdf](http://pages.au.int/sites/default/files/2050%20AIM%20Strategy%20%28Eng%29_0.pdf) [Accessed 5 August 2014], pp. 10-12; Wambua, P.M. (2010), ‘Enhancing Regional Maritime Cooperation in Africa: The Planned End State’, *African Security Review*, 18: 3, pp. 48-9.

<sup>4</sup> Samatar, A.I. Lindberg, M. and Mahayni, B. (2010) ‘The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia: The Rich versus the Poor’, *Third World Quarterly*, 31: 8, pp. 1381-3.

<sup>5</sup> Hastings, J.V. (2009) ‘Geographies of state failure and sophistication in maritime piracy hijackings’, *Political Geography*, 28, pp. 215-6.

3. Piracy at least is made possible by the specific political and moral economies of the coastal communities themselves.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the collapse of the Somali economy at large and the degradation of local fishing economies due to external predation created a substantial body of socially and economically dislocated young men, whose primary ‘saleable’ skills were linked to fishing or violence. On the other, piracy appears to have been tolerated by local communities due to a strong defensive or moral narrative that portrayed it as a legitimate response to international predation.<sup>7</sup>
4. Maritime security issues often transcend clear boundaries of governmental responsibility or state competence. The high seas are, by definition, a transnational environment, over which sovereignty is shared and where the state is but one actor among many. In this context, the management of maritime insecurity must inevitably incorporate a range of different actors and agendas, including those of the littoral state or states concerned, multinational or regional naval coalitions, local communities and fishermen, multinational ship-

ping or fishing interests, and sometimes private security companies.<sup>8</sup>

5. Similarly, and by extension, maritime security is inherently cross-jurisdictional, or at least jurisdictionally complex.<sup>9</sup> At an international level, piracy on the high seas has been tackled primarily as a problem of naval (law) enforcement, governed by international maritime law. Yet this raises a range of practical questions, such as of how captured pirates should be dealt with, including where they should be tried and potentially incarcerated.<sup>10</sup> Even within territorial waters, there may be significant jurisdictional overlap or tensions between law-enforcement, naval and development-driven security imperatives.

The maritime security environment thus presents a distinct series of challenges from those faced by security sector reformers on land. Even so, there are a number of past SSR practices that speak directly to the complexities outlined above. There are also a series of pitfalls that mainstream SSR projects have fallen into, and which provide a salutary guide for the emergent field of MSSR.

<sup>6</sup> Vaag, J. (1995), ‘Rough Seas? Contemporary Piracy in South East Asia’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 35: 1, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a report by the United Nations even goes so far as to include a quote describing piracy as ‘a clash between the first and the fourth world’. Leymarie, P. Rekacewicz, P. and Stienne, A. (2013), *UNOSAT Global Report on Maritime Piracy: A Geospatial Analysis, 1995-2013*, Geneva: United National Institute for Training and Research, p. 12. For a deconstruction of the narrative see Bueger, C. (2013), ‘Practice, Pirates and Coastguards: The Grand Narrative of Somali Piracy’, *Third World Quarterly* 34: 10, pp. 1811-1827.

<sup>8</sup> Cullen, P. (2010), ‘Private Security Companies in the Malacca Straits: Mapping New Patterns of Security Governance’, in Colas, A. and Mabee, B. *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context* (London: Hurst & Company), pp. 187-212.

<sup>9</sup> See Kraska, J. and Pedrozzo, R. *International Maritime Security Law* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff).

<sup>10</sup> Guilfoyle, D. (2010), ‘Counter-Piracy Law Enforcement and Human Rights’, *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 59: 1, pp. 141-69.

## MARITIME SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

SSR differs from earlier approaches – such as Cold War-era military assistance for example – in that it attempts to understand the ‘security sector’ holistically, as a linked institutional complex rather than a series of distinct organisational domains. It is also explicit in its ambition to link security provision to good governance and human rights, and in particular to emphasise the security of individuals and communities as well as (and in relation to) that of the state itself. SSR has been promoted as a new mechanism for addressing the problems of insecurity, development and democratisation in states undergoing processes of political transformation and is an increasingly important component of a range of different activities by western states and international organisations, from development assistance, to democracy promotion, to stabilisation operations, peacekeeping and even counter-insurgency.

There are many extant practical frameworks and guidelines for implementing SSR on the ground.<sup>11</sup> All share certain broad normative benchmarks for success,

<sup>11</sup> Ball, N. (1998), *Spreading Good Practices in Security Sector Reform: Policy options for the British government*, London: Saferworld; DFID (2002) *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform*, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/supportingsecurity\[1\].pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/supportingsecurity[1].pdf) [Accessed 5 August 2014]; Edmunds, T. (2007), *Security Sector Reform in Transforming Societies: Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; OECD DAC (2007) *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*, <http://www.oecd.org/development/incaf/38406485.pdf> [Accessed 5 August 2014]; UNDP (2002) *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*, [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2002\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2002_EN_Complete.pdf) [Accessed 5 August 2014].

and incorporate both political and organisational elements.

At the political level, SSR focuses on issues of security governance and control over security sector institutions, and tends to be most relevant in those countries undergoing processes of democratic transition or other forms of political change.<sup>12</sup> At the organisational level, SSR addresses reform within the security sector itself; including the armed forces, police, coast-guard and so on. It tends to focus on issues of organisational effectiveness, efficiency, affordability and professional conduct. In weak states or those emerging from conflict, the principle aim of organisational level SSR is often to establish or consolidate the capacity of the state to provide physical security for its citizens and interests in the first place<sup>13</sup>, while SSR may also be interlinked with issues of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants.<sup>14</sup> SSR also generally includes an important international dimension. It is about how donor states can encourage and promote reform in the security sector through activities such as technical assistance programmes or conditionality.

In the maritime sphere, the concept of SSR remains relatively new and underdeveloped. Indeed, despite various West African SSR initiatives making occasional reference over the years to the need for brown-

<sup>12</sup> Edmunds, *Security Sector Reform in Transforming Societies*, pp. 27-34.

<sup>13</sup> OECD DAC (2005) *Security System Reform and Governance*, <http://www.oecd.org/development/incaf/31785288.pdf> [Accessed 5 August 2014].

<sup>14</sup> Hänggi, H. (2004) ‘Conceptualising Security Sector Reform and Reconstruction’, in Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi (eds.), *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security Sector*, New Brunswick, NJ & London: Transaction Publishers, pp. 14-15.

water naval capacities to secure local fishery resources, it has taken the problem of contemporary piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa to really bring MSSR onto the national and regional agenda. Reflecting the nascent state of this field – and in contrast to mainstream SSR – there are relatively few academic or policy sources that discuss the concept in depth.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most developed definition of the concept is provided by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), which defines MSSR as consisting

...of comprehensive actions taken by littoral countries and a range of partners to improve the security, safety, and economic viability of maritime spaces by improving governance, infrastructure, and law enforcement capacity, creating a broader approach to SSR on the global stage.<sup>16</sup>

The USIP definition is notable for its breadth and ambition. It includes the full range of maritime security agencies under its remit, including the military, police and coastguard. It also, at least implicitly, incorporates a wider spectrum of other state competencies, including issues of infrastructure and economic development, as well as wider security and justice actors including the courts and prison system.

This holistic approach is shared by the US State Department, which has produced what is perhaps the most comprehensive

and systematic guide to MSSR in practice. This consists of a range of technical assessment criteria, strategic guidelines and planning tools, the aim of which is to structure and prioritise MSSR activities across various actors and dimensions of maritime security governance. The activities themselves are likewise wide-ranging and comprehensive, ranging from initiatives aimed at strengthening maritime law enforcement through training and capacity building with local partners, to the development of country-specific maritime law and policy, and the institution of mechanisms for accountability and transparency in the maritime security sector.<sup>17</sup>

There is much to be welcomed in these wide-ranging approaches. At a minimum, they are a recognition that maritime security is complex and multi-faceted, involving capacity building on land as well as enforcement at sea. A holistic concept of the security sector is helpful in this context because it encourages a focus on the common character of the problem, rather than on specific – and sometimes rather notional – institutional distinctions and stovepipes, between say the police, coastguard and navy.

Secondly, it recognises the central importance of wider governance issues in addressing the root causes of maritime insecurity. This wider focus departs from earlier emphases on naval patrolling or ship-based security responses to piracy and other maritime insecurities, in that it aims to provide long term, sustainable solutions to maritime security issues rather than simply dealing with their symptoms. MSSR thus makes an explicit link between security, security institutions and the wider political

<sup>15</sup> For three exceptions see: Bueger, C. (2014), 'Counter-Piracy and Maritime Capacity Building: Fallacies of a Debate', Working Paper of the CGPCS, [www.lessonsfrompiracy.net](http://www.lessonsfrompiracy.net) [Accessed 31 July 2014]; US Department of State (2010), *Maritime Security Sector Reform*, <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/othr/misc/151106.htm> [Accessed 5 August 2014]; Sandoz, J.F. (2012), 'Maritime Security Sector Reform', *United States Institute for Peace (USIP) Special Report*, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR306.pdf> [Accessed 5 August 2014].

<sup>16</sup> Sandoz, 'Maritime Security Sector Reform', p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of State, *Maritime Security Sector Reform*, p. 5.

environment in which they sit. It recognises that security responses do not exist in isolation from the wider polity in which they take place; they are nested within it, influenced by it, and they themselves exert an influence on it.<sup>18</sup>

The emergent MSSR agenda is thus both a reflection of and a response to the institutional complexities and linkages that are inherent to maritime security today. At the level of strategic planning, it is an encouragement to think about security building in a joined up way: to make connections where they exist and to avoid actions in one area that may be counterproductive in others.

However, translating such ambition into practice is easier said than done. Indeed, the very complexity that (M)SSR attempts to accommodate presents challenges of policy implementation in practice. These include how to effectively coordinate SSR activities across a range of different institutional actors and spheres of activity, in a manner that both accommodates organisational specificities but also ensures policy coherence; how to balance different interests and priorities within the SSR process, including ensuring sustainable local ownership of and engagement in any reforms that do take place; and how to work with local governance structures and practices, which can often be informal or illiberal in nature.

## GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Security sector reform in both its maritime and land-based variants is a self-

consciously normative activity. It is about a *preferred way* in which security issues should be managed, and in which the institutions responsible for this should be organised and governed. This normativity is expressed through three dimensions that are common across most internationally sponsored SSR activities:

1. SSR programmes generally preference the *formal security institutions of the state* – the armed forces, police, coast-guard and so on – as well as the legal frameworks within which they operate, and the bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms through which they are organised and administered. Where such institutions are weak or non-existent, SSR focuses on strengthening or rebuilding them through activities including training, resourcing and sometimes equipment provision.<sup>19</sup> This emphasis on formal institutions is visible in the USIP definition of MSSR cited above, where the focus is explicitly on ‘littoral countries’ and their international partners; a specificity that implicitly excludes informal and non-state actors, such as clan militias or private security companies.
2. SSR is bound up with *rationalist notions of organisational effectiveness, efficiency and planning*. Thus, organisational level SSR often focuses on issues of professionalization in security sector institutions; including the definition of clear organisational roles and responsibilities, the development of appropriate structures, training and human re-

<sup>18</sup> Hänggi, Conceptualising Security Sector Reform and Reconstruction, pp. 4-8.

<sup>19</sup> Sedra, M. (2007), ‘Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan and Iraq: Exposing a Concept in Crisis’, *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 3:2, pp. 7-23.

sources to fulfil these tasks, the establishment of formal organisational planning models, and the implementation of common standards of best practice in their day to day operation.<sup>20</sup> From a purely technical standpoint, such approaches often appear unproblematic and neutral. However, and in many environments, they can be in direct tension with established local practices and ways of doing things, which often focus on more informal, personalised and pragmatic approaches to problem solving than western notions of professionalism allow.<sup>21</sup>

3. SSR is distinguished by its focus on *issues of good governance, accountability and transparency* in the security sector. In large part this is a consequence of the concept's roots in the development community, where security institutions were traditionally viewed more as threats to human security and democratic civilian governance than as part of any potential solution to insecurity.<sup>22</sup> However, it is also a recognition of the often counter-productive nature of Cold War-era train and equip programmes, which, in the absence of any recognition of the political context in which they took place, often succeeded only in making already repressive or predatory security institutions more effective in their abuses.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Edmunds, *Security Sector Reform in Transforming Societies*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>21</sup> Bueger, *Counter-Piracy and Maritime Capacity Building*, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Brzoska, M. (2003), *Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform*, DCAF Occasional Paper No. 4, Geneva: DCAF, pp. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Buchanan, G. (1998) 'Chameleon, Tortoise or Toad: The Changing US Security Role in Contemporary Latin America', in J.I. Domínguez (ed.) *International Security*

The breadth and normativity of the SSR agenda present significant challenges for its implementation in practice, in ways that are also relevant for the maritime environment. These fall into three main categories: coherence, context, and ownership.

## COHERENCE

There is a danger that the sheer scope and ambition of SSR in its most holistic forms means that it loses all coherence as a guide to action. Thus, while it may be strategically desirable and even necessary to ensure that reforms in one part of the security sector – the coastguard or police for example – are effectively 'joined up' with those of others – such as prisons and the justice sector – if SSR as a whole is to be effective, ensuring this happens in practice is easier said than done. Part of the reason for this is the sheer diversity of different actors, roles and functions that fall within the remit of SSR; even under the narrower remit of MSSR. Most obviously, there are major institutional and professional differences between say, the navy, police, coastguard and court system. However, there are also important differentiations within these groups too, for example between anti-terrorist, criminal investigation or port security branches in the police. In fragmented state environments such as Somalia, the range of different security actors is even wider, including various militia groups and sub-state armed formations.

SSR is ill-served by trying to impose some kind of homogeneous or homogenising external framework on such complexity.

*and Democracy: Latin America and the Caribbean in the Post-Cold War Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), pp. 268-71.

Where SSR programmes have been successful – in post-communist Europe, the western Balkans and South Africa – they have been able to combine a strategic conception of the challenges faced by the security sector in any given case, with a much narrower series of often institutionally specific reforms in practice.

Thus in most central and eastern European and western Balkan cases, the strategic agenda for SSR was holistic and coherent, incorporating democratic, civilian control of the security sector and organisational reform of the military, police and intelligence services in line with NATO and EU standards.<sup>24</sup> However, the actual practice of making and supporting these reforms devolved down to specific initiatives tailored to particular institutions and problems, whether those were training programmes for parliamentarians charged with oversight of the defence budget, re-drafting legislation on the security services, or demilitarisation of the police. Each of these activities formed one part of an overall process of SSR. Yet each was also operationally specific in practice and content, and ultimately problem-driven in nature. SSR in such cases did not function as a monolithic mega-project, but as a strategic umbrella under which a series of discreet, though interconnected, reform activities could be prioritised and coordinated. Similar patterns were visible in both South Africa and Sierra Leone.<sup>25</sup>

## CONTEXT

SSR can often be presented as a politically neutral or purely technical process of organisational betterment or strategic necessity. However, its normative nature means that all processes of SSR, maritime or otherwise, are likely to create winners and losers in the societies in which they take place. This is particularly the case in environments undergoing processes of political change, or where the state itself is weak or fragmented, and in which patterns of governance, authority and civil society do not necessarily follow those of modern western societies. Under such circumstances, there is no guarantee or even likelihood that public institutions (where they exist) will function in the general interest or that the security sector will act to enforce collective order.<sup>26</sup> Instead, they can often serve as vehicles for individual or sectional interests, while security on the ground may be delivered through a variety of non-statutory mechanisms such as militias or vigilante groups.<sup>27</sup>

In these environments, SSR is likely to disrupt local power structures, threaten particular interests and disrupt informal patterns of governance. So for example, reforms aimed at strengthening and enforcing the fishing permit system in Somalia may run counter to the interests of those local elites who benefit financially from its

<sup>24</sup> Germann, W. (2003), 'Security Sector Reform in the Euro-Atlantic Area: Choice or Imperative?', in T. Edmunds and W. Germann (eds.) *Towards Security Sector Reform in Post-Cold War Europe: A Framework for Assessment* (Baden-Baden: Nomos-Verlagsgesellschaft, pp. 40-1.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, P. and Albrecht, P. (2010) 'Conclusions, Issues and Themes from the Sierra Leone Security Sector Transformation Process', in Albrecht: and Jackson:

(eds.) *Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone 1997-2007: Views from the Frontline*, Zurich: Lit Verlag/DCAF, p. 217.

<sup>26</sup> Egnell, R. and Haldén: (2009), 'Laudable, ahistorical and overambitious: security sector reform meets state formation theory', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 9:1, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Scheye, E. and Peake, G. (2005) 'To arrest insecurity: time for a revised security sector reform agenda', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 5:3, p. 67.



currently dysfunctional state.<sup>28</sup> Efforts to eliminate petty corruption in the police or coastguard may stumble in the face of a fiscal environment in which serving personnel are rarely or inadequately paid. More widely, reforms aimed at improving or strengthening state security institutions in general may end up aggravating the insecurities of many ordinary people if those same institutions go on to behave in a repressive or predatory manner.<sup>29</sup>

The risk in all these cases is that the goals and prescriptions of the SSR agenda are so at odds with extant practices of governance that they become irrelevant to local circumstance, counterproductive, or undermined to such a degree that the foundational principles of the SSR agenda are destroyed<sup>30</sup> or co-opted.<sup>31</sup> The temptation for donors in these cases is to fall back on the more modest interpretations of what SSR means in practice, whether that be simple disarmament and demobilisation efforts or narrow train and equip packages aimed at strengthening discrete elements of the police or armed forces.<sup>32</sup> As Mark Sedra observes, such policies reflect an understandable tendency for donors to ‘...revert to what they know, what is easier, and what they have the capacity to accomplish in short time frames when faced

with major challenges.’<sup>33</sup> Even so, the absence of a governance component from such activities means their scope for addressing the root causes of insecurity may be limited. In the worst cases, their impact may be counterproductive or even pathological to the long-term objectives of the SSR agenda as a whole.

## OWNERSHIP

Underpinning many of these issues is the question of what is often called ‘local ownership’; that is the extent to which the SSR agenda is accepted and internalised by the very institutions and political communities in which it takes place. Local ownership is commonly agreed to be necessary to the success of the SSR agenda, both to ensure that reform takes place in a way that is relevant and sensitive to local context, but also to maximise the chance that it will be sustained and continued once specific donor initiatives have come to an end.<sup>34</sup> At its crudest it can be understood in a limited and even tautological manner: local ownership occurs when the ‘locals’ see sense, understand what is good for them, and accept the (generally externally driven) SSR agenda on its own terms. In such cases, foot-dragging or recalcitrance towards SSR tends to be perceived in rather simplistic terms, as a consequence of ignorance or a failure of ‘political will’.

However, the problem of ownership becomes more nuanced and political when

<sup>28</sup> Leymarie et al. *UNOSAT Global Report on Maritime Piracy: A Geospatial Analysis*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ball, N. (2010) ‘The Evolution of the Security Sector Reform Agenda’, in M. Sedra, *The Future of Security Sector Reform*, Waterloo: CIGI, pp. 37-8.

<sup>30</sup> Downs, M. and Muggah, R. (2010), ‘Breathing Room: Interim Stabilization and Security Sector Reform in the Post-War Period’, in M. Sedra, *The Future of Security Sector Reform*, Waterloo: CIGI, pp. 140-4.

<sup>31</sup> Edmunds, T. (2009), ‘Illiberal Resilience in Serbia’, *Journal of Democracy*, 20:1, pp. 133-6.

<sup>32</sup> Born, H. (2009), ‘Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments: Insights from Comparative Analysis’, in H. Born and A. Schnabel (eds.), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments*, Zurich: Lit Verlag/DCAF, p. 242.

<sup>33</sup> Sedra, M. (2010a) ‘Introduction: The future of Security Sector Reform’, in M. Sedra, *The Future of Security Sector Reform*, Waterloo: CIGI, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan, L. (2007) *No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership in Security Sector Reform*, [http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1530/1/Nathan\\_-2007-\\_No\\_Ownership.pdf](http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1530/1/Nathan_-2007-_No_Ownership.pdf) [Accessed 5 August 2014], pp. 2-4, .

understood in terms of the overtly normative goals of the SSR agenda and given the importance of context as discussed above. There is also the question of *whose* ownership should be prioritised, not least in fragmented political environments with multiple different actors, interests and constituencies, and where, as noted above, SSR policies themselves are likely to create clear winners and losers.

Addressing these tensions is not straightforward, though experience from elsewhere suggests four ways that they can be navigated.

1. It is important to take the question of ownership seriously, and to approach it on its own terms rather than as a relational influence on a pre-existing (externally conceived) SSR agenda. At a minimum this involves developing SSR activities that are consistent with and properly cognisant of local circumstance, and a sense of priority that is rooted in local needs. In this context, working with and developing local interlocutors and research capacities will generally produce a more textured and relevant understanding of the challenges of security governance on the ground, rather than relying on external experts, needs assessments or consultancies to determine the context for SSR.<sup>35</sup> Supporting local capacities in this way not only provides locally-sensitive analysis of the challenges SSR seeks to address, but also empowers local actors to grapple with such problems themselves. A similar devolution of responsibility to local actors is im-

portant throughout the SSR process, albeit within the context of the overall aims of the reform programme as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

2. It is important to approach SSR as an ongoing, iterative process – one that takes place in dialogue with evolving local circumstance, priority and practice – rather than as a one-off intervention with rigidly pre-defined outcomes and goals defined in a strategic master plan.<sup>37</sup> The temptations of the latter approach are clear, particularly for international donors whose activities are often project-driven and time-limited, and take place against specific criteria for success. However, if SSR is to take place in a way that is sustainable, it needs to support and empower local actors over the long-term. There are plenty of examples of SSR initiatives that have been successful according to the narrow terms of their mandate, at least in the short term. However, they have often foundered subsequently due to either their over-dependence on specific externally-sponsored projects or their isolation from the evolving security challenges and governance patterns of the societies of which they are a part.<sup>38</sup>
3. Successful SSR is often less about imposing models of best practice from outside, and more to do with thinking

<sup>35</sup> See for example: <http://www.ocvp.org/resources/district-conflict-and-security-assessment-reports> [Accessed 5 August 2014].

<sup>36</sup> Bueger, Counter-Piracy and Maritime Capacity Building, pp. 9-11.

<sup>37</sup> Bueger, C. Stockbruegger, J. and Werthes, S. (2011), 'Pirates, Fishermen and Peacebuilding: Options for Counter-Piracy Strategy in Somalia', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 32: 2, pp. 365-9

<sup>38</sup> Hills, A. (2000), 'Defence Diplomacy and Security Sector Reform', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21: 1, pp. 54-6.

creatively about how to engage with the domestic political environment to incentivise local reformers – and indeed recidivists – to invest political capital in the reform process, and then to sustain that process once it is in place. In part, and again, this is about understanding local circumstance and engaging with local actors in relation to their own constraints and opportunity structures. As such, the specifics of any incentives for (M)SSR are likely to be context specific, but might include, in the Somalia case at least, addressing recognised capacity gaps such as investment in infrastructure around port facilities or the implementation of long term security assistance packages or cooperation agreements.<sup>39</sup>

4. It is important to think creatively about the opportunities provided by local conditions as well as the constraints they engender. One example of direct relevance to the CGPCS is that of the various neighbourhood watch schemes (*ciidamada madaniga*) that have sprung up across Somalia, and that, in much of Somaliland at least, have been successful in reducing levels of terrorism, criminality and violence, including piracy.<sup>40</sup> Considering how such measures can be strengthened, how they can be integrated with more formal SSR initia-

tives, and how locally-derived best practice can be shared more widely, are all ways in which external donors can support local security building. Such initiatives may depart from orthodox SSR in that they engage with illiberal and ultimately normatively undesirable patterns of local security provision. However, they help to address the real problems experienced by ordinary people on the ground, and work with rather than against the grain of resilient local realities of social order.<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For all its potential scope and scale, the MSSR agenda remains perhaps a more straightforward endeavour than its mainstream equivalent (of which, after all, it is but one part). Maritime security actors and institutions are less likely to play overt roles in domestic politics or internal repression than their land based comparators. At the same time, there are a number of issues of maritime insecurity where relatively uncomplicated measures – proper surveillance and patrolling of territorial waters for example – can make a real difference to security outcomes.

Even so, if MSSR is to be sustainable over the long term; if its benefits are to persist independently, and in the absence of specific international tutelage; and if it is to successfully address the root causes of the maritime security challenge, then it needs to move beyond a simple train and equip approach to capacity building. Instead,

<sup>39</sup> Bueger et.al. *Pirates, Fishermen and Peacebuilding*, pp. 370-3.

<sup>40</sup> Mohamed Ahmed Jama, 'Securing Mogadishu: Neighbourhood Watches', *Accord*, 21, pp. 66-7; Herring, Eric (in progress) 'Unarmed Neighbourhood Watch to Prevent Terrorist Attacks: Building on Success in Somalia', *Critical Studies on Terrorism (TBC)*; See also the work of the *Transforming Insecurity* project at the University of Bristol: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/global-insecurities/transforming-insecurity/nonviolent-grassroots-networks/> [Accessed 5 August 2014].

<sup>41</sup> Scheye, E. and Peake, G. (2005) 'To Arrest Insecurity: Time for a Revised Security Sector Reform Agenda', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 5:3, p. 72.

MSSR needs to follow the lead of the mainstream and consider how the reform initiatives it mandates can best work with local actors and circumstances, in ways that empower and support them in delivering relevant and enduring solutions to challenges of insecurity they face. Specific recommendations follow:

1. Maritime insecurities are often linked closely to issues of insecurity and governance failure on land. MSSR must likewise grapple with these land-based issues as well as strictly maritime ones if it is to meet its objectives.
2. (M)SSR is not well served by a top down, 'cookie cutter' approach that aims to impose externally derived models of reform on diverse and complex local environments. Notions of best practice in SSR can be important, but are best considered in terms of general principles rather than as a formulaic guide to action.
3. (M)SSR is not a good guide to policy in and of itself. Instead, it works best as a strategic framework through which specific security reforms can be planned and coordinated, drawing on appropriate professional expertise, and in ways that are not counterproductive to good governance and human security goals.
4. Local context is key. Where possible external donors should engage meaningfully with local knowledge and interlocutors in determining the nature and scope of the MSSR challenge at hand.
5. Generally speaking, positive incentives for reform work better than external imposition or the use of punitive conditionalities. Incentives should be considered in line with local context above.
6. Beware the fallacy of 'political will'. Apparent absences of 'political will' generally mask real problems of politics, which should be understood and addressed on their own terms.
7. Consider whom the winners and losers in of SSR will be. How can the losers be incentivised and motivated to engage in the process of reform, or at least not to disrupt it? How can the range of winners be broadened?
8. Civilian capacities can be as important to successful (M)SSR as those of the security sector itself. This is particularly the case in relation to the effective, transparent and accountable administration of security sector institutions themselves.

## About the Author

Timothy Edmunds is Professor in International Security and the Director of the Global Insecurities at the University of Bristol. His research focuses on defence and security institutions in processes of political and organisational change, with a particular emphasis on issues of civil-military relations, security sector reform and strategy making. He can be contacted at [tim.edmunds@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:tim.edmunds@bristol.ac.uk)

## Suggested Citation

Edmunds, Timothy. 2014. Maritime Security Sector Reform. Lessons from the Mainstream. Cardiff: Cardiff University

@ Timothy Edmunds, August 2014

**The Lessons Learned Project** of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia follows up on a plenary decision and records the history of the group, captures its experience and extrapolates core lessons from its work. The Project is supported by a grant by the U.S. Department of State.

[www.lessonsfrompiracy.net](http://www.lessonsfrompiracy.net)