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## Is the future of SSR non-linear?

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## Abstract

This article explores issues around security sector reform (SSR) and the involvement of the international community in peacebuilding. It argues that the international architecture that surrounds SSR privileges a particular form of knowledge that reflects a technocratic approach to security, and illustrates this by systematically examining the literature. Research in to the literature itself shows that there are three core themes that dominate: state-centric approaches; technocratic approaches and approaches to local ownership. These comprise a current, linear approach to SSR that ignores much of the critical literature on peacebuilding. The article then goes on to draw on some of this critical literature to develop an alternative approach to SSR building on a non-linear approach incorporating a better understanding of institutional politics, an emphasis on process rather than structures and analysis of hidden politics.

## Introduction

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has become an integral element of international intervention in war-torn countries for some years, evolving in to a common, and yet contested, form of post-conflict state-building (Hängi, 2004; Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014,132). Initially concentrating on a narrow set of security actors, usually military and police, SSR attempts to address issues of citizen and state security through establishing effective civil and/or civilian control over professional security services, whilst at the same time incorporating state and non-state actors in to the security assemblage. SSR literature reflects a long-term change from a focus on narrow, technical approaches and concepts through to far wider concerns encapsulating traditional justice, gender and the nature of justice (Bakrania, 2015). SSR practice recognises that security is necessary for the development of sustainable peace and it therefore constructs effective, affordable and efficient security forces that are subject to the rule of law and democratic control (Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014; Andersen, 2011; Schnabel and Born, 2011). Many of these developments have come about as a result of feedback from experience on the ground rather than through conceptual development, resulting in a situation in which SSR has suffered from 'benign analytical neglect' (Peake, Scheye and Hills, 2013, vii).

Despite the absence of detailed conceptual development, SSR has been subject to considerable changes in focus, not least in starting from a basic assumption that security takes place within a traditional Weberian state framework and this must, therefore, be the appropriate way in which to measure the success or otherwise of any given mission (Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014, 143). Critical approaches have questioned this, pointing out that there are many competing sources of security that may exist beyond the state, particularly at the local level and that these remain poorly understood (Jackson, 2011). Secondly, this acknowledgement of complex webs of security providers and local sources of security and insecurity recognises the importance of non-linear approaches to security provision, including hybrid forms of security organisation (Chandler, 2013). Lastly, since SSR has emerged as an important security approach there has been an increasing debate around concepts of local ownership, specifically who designs, controls and benefits from SSR interventions. Answers to these questions range from an approach that amounts to international trusteeship and leadership through to complete local control of security (Mobekk, 2010).

All contemporary approaches are encompassed by assumptions about the nature of the state, specifically that particular forms of the state are preferable as outcomes of statebuilding efforts, and that SSR and statebuilding agendas do not just aim at reconstructing security institutions but at social engineering through remoulding socio-political institutional structures. This drives medical-themed approaches that assume interventions to 'correct' failed states can make them functioning members of an international network of liberal states leading to security. This challenge has driven discussion amongst those directly involved in SSR programming itself, usually concentrating on the incorporation of 'non-state actors' (Denney and Domingo, 2015). This article contends that the non-linearity of 'hybrid', 'post-liberal' and 'everyday' forms of peacebuilding that set out to criticise liberal statebuilding more broadly, provide a vibrant critique of hegemonic practices of international statebuilding and also a way forward in to a 'second generation' approach encompassing political realities and empirical reality.

This article is based on the most comprehensive mapping of SSR literature to date, aimed at identifying what we know and don't know about SSR. It then develops an approach partly deriving from what is missing or undeveloped within the literature. The research was carried out between July and September 2015 by the Governance and Social Development Resource centre for the UK's Department for International Development (Bakrania, 2015)<sup>iii</sup>. This 'evidence mapping' exercise was designed to survey the existing knowledge about security and justice, and to identify topics where evidence is abundant or scarce. Systematic searches generated 126,276 studies on security and justice which were added to an earlier evidence mapping on SSR, which generated 85,269 studies. The two databases were then combined, and an inclusion criterion following a study protocol, was applied. This resulted in a total of 386 documents in the database (Bakrania, 2015). This exercise provides the first detailed and systematic insight into the current literature available on SSR and security and justice interventions more widely and provides an excellent picture of the pattern of existing knowledge. It shows that the international community continues to advocate (and research) linear models of statebuilding based on formal security structures, but without building knowledge around accountability of those institutions, or, despite discussing it, continuing in failing to understand the relationships between security actors. This leads to representation of complex networks of relationships as simple state/non-state or international/local dichotomies without acknowledging the inter-relationships of the systems or of boundary-crossing individuals.

This article starts with what we know about security and justice planning and SSR. It discusses the linear nature of this approach and how a non-linear approach may be incorporated, finishing with a discussion of the potential value of the non-linear approach for the future of SSR. Linear approaches tend to focus on Western liberal statebuilding models as reflected in the literature on SSR, which concentrates on the easier (and the easier-to-measure) aspects. Non-linear approaches advocate hybridity, local processes and the everyday, partly as an expression of 'hidden' resistance to international hegemony, but at the same time they also tend to reify those outcomes and to perpetuate a false dichotomy of choice facing citizens who are seeking security. If linear approaches make a set of assumptions that are unclear and haven't worked, how might non-linear approaches be incorporated in to a new, second generation approach to SSR that can overcome this?

### What do we know about SSR?

SSR is a relatively recent phenomenon but is rooted in earlier debates about civil-military relations (Jackson, 2011). It is perhaps different to a number of contemporary academic debates within peacebuilding because it combines an explicitly normative agenda of linking liberal statebuilding with human security. The concept has been driven, at least early in its development, by policy-makers on the ground rather than through analytical depth or an explicit theoretical framework and research has tended to follow policy within SSR. Early development of SSR was driven by the democratisation of Eastern Europe, then South Africa, both of which involved transformation from autocratic or non-democratic regimes to western democracy. The 1994 Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, adopted by the OSCE, required member states to accept democratic control over military and other security forces, a set of principles that were then taken on as 'security sector reform' by the United Kingdom and then by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD-DAC), chaired at the time by the UK. Since

then, SSR has developed rapidly within all major multilateral organisations and is now a common element of policy towards post-conflict interventions and approaches towards failed states.

Despite this rapid rise to prominence, SSR has never overcome the issue identified by Brzoska that a comprehensive approach to SSR has been 'sound in theory but problematic in practice' (2006, 2). The history of SSR has been one where theory has also been rather unsound, with very few comprehensive studies on the theory behind SSR or its underlying assumptions (Jackson, 2011). In practice the picture is no more encouraging with very few examples of successful SSR, and a singular inability to overcome an issue identified by Chanaa as a 'conceptual-contextual divide' (2002, 16)). A decade later, Sedra noted that 'this divide had become a chasm' (Sedra, 2013, 212). As Schroeder and Chappuis (2014, 136) note, most writing on SSR focusses on individual cases, and within that, the implementation of existing policies rather than on alternatives or on questioning underlying assumptions. Furthermore, SSR remains under-politicised, lacks understanding of local dynamics and have been decoupled from debates on statebuilding or liberal peacebuilding more generally (Jackson, 2011; Peake, Scheye and Hills, 2013; Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014).

The evidence base on which to make claims about SSR literature remains weak. The starting point for the research underpinning this article was therefore what do we actually know about SSR? The database combines studies generated through two distinct, but related, evidence mapping processes, one related to SSR, and the other expanded upon this to broaden the scope to S&J. Both of these began with systematic searches within academic and grey literature databases, which used keyword combinations to identify studies containing evidence on interventions. The final 386 documents all provide evidence on interventions. Purely theoretical and conceptual studies were not included. The database illustrates elements of SSR and security and justice interventions more broadly. 95 per cent of the studies used observational research designs and only eight studies used experimental methods (see Barendrecht et al, 2013). However, within the qualitative work, there was a wide mixture of methods incorporating ethnography, case study analysis, historiography and political economy analysis. There were also fifteen non-systematic literature reviews and annotated bibliographies (Cox, 2008; Maru, 2010). 49 per cent of the documents are peer reviewed articles, 35 per cent are 'other' reports, including think tank and NGO reports (DCAF, USIP, Saferworld, International Alert), and only 6 per cent are formal evaluation reports. There are also many more single case studies than multi-country comparative studies.

The geographical spread of the SSR documentation shows clearly that Africa dominates, with South Asia well behind. There are few studies that look at Central Asia, East Asia, Eastern Europe and Northern Africa. The most studied country is Sierra Leone, but Afghanistan is the second most studied, followed by Liberia, Timor Leste and Bosnia Herzegovina. Note that the time criterion used will also have influenced which countries were being studied. Policing is by far the most studied area, followed by access to justice, justice sector reform, legal reform and defence. Few studies look at intelligence and even less at border security, even those addressing more than one theme. Emerging policy themes<sup>iv</sup> of urbanisation, counter-terrorism and organised crime are almost absent from the document base.

The evidence mapping exercise was designed around a framework of interventions and outputs and outcomes, which themselves were based on DFID's SSR 'theory of change'<sup>v</sup>. There is considerable evidence around capacity building within organisations, particularly government institutions;

strategic or statutory frameworks; community based approaches; and restructuring of the security and justice sector. In other words, the literature tends to reflect the elements that have happened on the ground in international approaches to SSR and statebuilding (Jackson, 2011). This is unsurprising, however it does reflect a tendency for researchers to mirror approaches taken by those who are running programmes in ‘measuring what can be measured’, rather than researching more complex areas. Studies in the database reflect state-centric approaches because they all focus on interventions, and most interventions to date follow traditional approaches to SSR. It is perhaps unsurprising that researchers or evaluators for producing studies that reflect traditional approaches because examples of new and more politically sensitive approaches are scarce. This is reflected in a dearth of evidence on the nature of preventive interventions like combating urbanised violence and organised crime; non-state justice and capacity building; and integrated political engagement and activities that deal directly with the politics of SSR reform. The issue of politics and SSR has long been identified within the security literature, but despite its constant feature as an ‘issue’ it has rarely been directly confronted other than as an explanation of why interventions failed.

Evidence is strong across a series of outputs that reflect the nature of interventions in state-dominated institutions. There is considerable evidence regarding accountability of institutions in terms of politicisation, political interference and independence of professions like the military, police and judiciary. ‘Accountability’ also features strongly in analyses of community approaches of institutions for the general population, but also in relation to capacity building and training. In general the literature on service delivery and capacity was strong particularly in terms of formal performance review, leadership and management systems. This is also reflected in work on the formal aspects of planning, including security plans and strategic frameworks; confidence, trust and satisfaction in service provision; and, roles, coordination and dialogue. However, these latter categories were primarily constructed around anecdotal evidence.

The emphasis on formal structures and institutions is further highlighted when one analyses those areas where there is a lack of evidence. There is a lack of evidence about the nature of the roles that appear in formal documentation but may not be functional on the ground. Evidence is lacking regarding the application, compliance and interpretation of laws. Whilst a plan, structure or law may exist on paper, there is very little systematic evidence showing whether it reflects the empirical situation, and evidence that does exist is largely anecdotal and subjective. Knowledge about state and non-state linkages is inadequate: both the extent to which codification is possible between state and non-state systems; but also about how far state and non-state providers of security may be linked. Lastly, there is some evidence around political outcomes and political will, but this really reflects opinion rather than systematic evidence. This bias favouring opinion over empirical evidence is reflected in the related areas of resource allocation to reform processes, but also in the growing policy literature on local ownership, where several documents equate local ownership to those who agree with the reform rather than those who act as ‘spoilers’. Again, there is also significant evidence surrounding human rights, but this mirrors earlier SSR approaches that emphasised formal rules and regulations, since much of the extant literature examines measurable indicators like legislation, rather than actual implementation.

Areas of SSR identified as having specific weaknesses included: incentives to improve service delivery; crime rates which are frequently difficult to verify; data on legal awareness and choice;

gender-based violence; judicial redress in support for rights; economic development; poverty reduction; property rights, particularly access to land, which has been identified as a conflict trigger but appears absent in many analyses of SSR interventions despite its prevalence as a type of court case within both formal and informal justice systems; and, women's empowerment and gender equality.

The existing evidence for SSR is mixed and in many ways reflects issues identified within policy approaches to SSR (Denney and Domingo, 2015). In particular, the research on interventions unsurprisingly reflects an overarching picture of concentration on the measurable over the intangible, the formal institutional reform and documentation over the more intangible, the politically difficult and the more complex interlinkages that are far more difficult to fit in to measureable boxes<sup>vi</sup>. It is not accidental that the highest concentration of studies are in West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone, since this has been well documented and also involved considerable institution building (Jackson and Albrecht, 2010, 2016). The same may be true of Afghanistan and Bosnia. However, even in these well-trodden areas there remain considerable gaps in dealing with areas beyond the safer boundaries of the formal institutional reform process, incorporating issues with traditional authorities, non-state security actors and their political linkages. The literature acknowledges some of the more complex issues whilst rarely providing explanations of how these may be overcome or why they exist. In fact, the literature is curiously non-theoretical, generally confirming Schroeder and Chappuis (2014) finding that the growth in case studies has taken place within existing policy approaches rather than developing new theoretical frameworks within which SSR can develop. Whilst the database did not include many specifically theoretical contributions, the lack of a backward linkage from the intervention to a theoretical framework is noticeable. Additionally, evidence on a complex understanding of local societies and political environments within which SSR is being implemented is missing, most cases concentrating on causes of previous conflicts and neglecting critical political factors that may have a direct bearing on reform processes. Chanaa's (2002) 'conceptual-contextual divide' has been deepened by an approach that exhibits lack of consistency between normative concepts and real field situations.

### **Current dilemmas within SSR approaches**

This section moves on from knowledge about SSR and outlines four key challenges or dilemmas for SSR. Following from the analysis, it is clear that there are inconsistencies between statebuilding, security and development. There is an (unwritten) assumption that human security can be best served by creating a functioning state that will provide security as a public good and that development will provide benefits to the general population. However, human security in terms of 'freedom from fear' and citizen security in terms of an entitlement to protection by the state, remains elusive for many people and the state's responsibility to protect citizens is yet to be realised. This lack, in turn, may lead to claims of legitimisation of international intervention in failed states (Luckham and Kirk, 2012).

The transfer of the political architecture of the liberal state to non-liberal societies in the form of state-building, and by extension SSR, leads to a tension between the pacific nature of liberalism and the question whether those structures really are the political manifestation of the local populations (Jackson, 2011). There is a fundamental tension between the idea of local ownership of security and shared values underlying SSR. International donors are very keen to see states adopt transparency



and accountability, but those constituting the governing elite of a state may feel that their power is threatened and the citizenry may prefer to be safe than to have more transparency. As statebuilding has become a core policy for international actors, security has become central to the way in which Western Governments deal with the developing world. At the core of this is the general tendency across international aid interventions that privileges a particular form of normative approach. This appears both in terms of a preference for the international community to use the legitimacy of state structures, but also through the assumption that local actors have internalised the requisite norms of behaviour privileged by the international community itself (Pospisil and Kuhn, 2016, 9-10).

The literature on SSR reflects a previous understanding of intervention which rests on the assumption that every person is a rational liberal waiting to be liberated (Duffield, 2001, 2002). What this has meant is that much programming aims at technical approaches that could undermine the positions of narrow self-interested elites and free the local agency of civil society. This is a linear approach that makes a series of assumptions about how reform works and how far that can be directly – and predictably – affected. Within this framing, local politics was frequently problematized, but in such a way as to be framed as what spoilers engage in to prevent the achievement of the wider – and accepted – goals of SSR. Obstacles could be overcome through a combination of what Chandler (2013,19) refers to as ‘top-down carrots and sticks’. Essentially, SSR was seen as a technical exercise aimed at enhancing human security, and political opposition as preventing the serene progress of something that was wanted by local populations. Beyond the elites within countries, local populations were depoliticised as programming emphasised the lack of capacity or resources as obstacles to reform progress. Linearity in the sense of predictable progress through programmes, assumed not only that ruling elites were not representative of their respective populations, but also that those populations had an interest in supporting Western interventions (Chandler, 2013). Successful reform was a question of political will, both on the part of those in the country in accepting inevitable reform but also on the part of Western donors, who provided the resources and expertise to enforce those interventions. The linear approach assumed progress took place down a set path towards liberal peace; the only things standing in the way were lack of resources, of capacity, of international will and local predatory elites.

Linear approaches are subject to key sets of tensions, reflected in gaps within the literature and available evidence base: state-centrism; techno-centrism; and the nature of ownership.

### *State-centrism*

One of the clearest characteristics of most SSR literature is the tension between state-centric SSR programmes and the social and political realities of fragmented polities on the ground within fragile states where policing, for example, may be delivered by an ‘archipelago of elements’ to use Copan’s memorable phrase, rather than a formal, centralised police service (Copans, 2001,11; Andersen, 2011). Whilst virtually all analysts accept that there are problems with the nation state in many of the contexts in which states are failing, there is still a tendency to accept the technocratic parameters of statebuilding. Casting the nation-state as the norm ignores the broadening and deepening of security at all levels, the intra-state nature of much conflict, international conflict actors and also the role of the state itself as participant. There remains an assumption that the right mixture of policies can create a healthy nation-state.

State-centrism itself changes local power structures amongst those who benefit from training, equipment and resources. In situations where the state is one actor amongst many, this could effectively enhance just another armed faction. For a state to actually exist requires the population to buy in to the idea of the state at some level to provide legitimacy. In a liberal state this is commonly taken as participation in the political processes such as periodic democratic elections. However, formal legitimacy may not be achievable or even desirable for citizens. A technocratic approach may have the effect of creating a state super-structure with no legitimacy amongst the general population, but that provides avenues to power for local elites (Timor-Leste) or replaces a colonial authoritarianism with a post-colonial authoritarian state (Lemay-Hebert, 2009; 2011) . Constructing a new state also requires a significant cultural shift in how people relate to structures of authority, including both state and 'customary' authorities. Iraq is an example where the approach of dismantling the state in its entirety led to an artificial state overlaying existing subnational political systems dependant on external aid: Afghanistan is even clearer. The emphasis on security governance that makes SSR part of statebuilding has been lost in the drive to train and equip troops to fight the Taliban (Hodes and Sedra, 2013).

Lastly, statebuilding is very uneven within states. Even where states have had a functioning core before, during or even after conflict, it may only rarely, or partially have penetrated into the countryside, notably in many African countries (Jackson, 2007). Many people simply do not receive or have ever received services directly from states. In the area of justice provision, for example, around eighty per cent of the population in Sierra Leone and Rwanda receive justice from customary authorities like chiefs or village headmen, and this is accompanied by local security in the form of chieftom police, hunter militias or 'vigilantes' (Baker, 2008). At best, this can produce a political hybrid where local people both have a say and also have a choice in terms of accessing services, including security, but also encompassing a variety of plural providers (Denney, 2014). However, there is a risk that political hybridity also reinforces the position of local elites and neo-patrimonial rule.

### *Techno-centrism*

Alongside the construction of institutions that are aligned to ideas of what a state looks like, the history of SSR programming and also literature has been greatly concerned with technical aspects of the reform process. Statebuilding and SSR literatures rarely provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for statebuilding and tend to concentrate on technocratic approaches to the construction of states rather than the politics of what is being constructed (see, for example, Denney and Domingo, 2014). There is a critical literature that points to the lack of focus on the political within statebuilding, but this has not been clearly reflected in policies on the ground in those states where SSR has been applied<sup>vii</sup>. This decontextualized approach removes politics of reform to a place where it can be categorised as a 'spoiler' rather than something that is an integral part of the reform process. Many interventions are frequently carried out by international bureaucrats, or in SSR, by military officers whose concerns are primarily technical (i.e., teaching people to shoot straight) rather than political (i.e., teaching them who to shoot at).

Technocratic approaches to SSR represent a form of anti-politics machinery both in terms of their disregard for local political sensitivities, but also in their relentless application and reapplication. As Richmond (2007, 111) points out, the contemporary peacebuilding consensus assumes that there is

an agreed underlying set of norms and that all interventions in support of this will receive the support of agents engaged in peacebuilding. A key element of this consensus is to create standards, benchmarks and frameworks for creating a pacific world that constitute a specific type of knowledge that can then be transferred to conflict zones as international norms. This knowledge is accompanied by a set of practices designated by technical terminology as 'tools', 'indicators', 'templates or 'instruments' that can be considered apolitical and objective ways to represent reality (Körppen, 2011, 81)

Technical approaches and particularly approaches that seek the best technical solution to a problem according to best practice bring additional issues with them. Notably they tend to be resource-hungry, making them expensive to implement, but also to sustain over the long-term. However, many technical programmes within SSR, are also measurable, making them attractive propositions for international programmes. Again, the available literature on SSR is biased towards the measurable outputs. Within SSR programmes what this tends to mean in practice is that core training programmes for the military and police, for example, are carried out, but the surrounding civil frameworks of control are relatively neglected (see Jackson and Albrecht, 2016). Externally funded and driven, interventions can be extremely expensive and reflect the concerns of the funders, even if local ownership is possible. It raises questions about long term sustainability of reform and security and also the relative balance between different activities. Changing definitions of insecurity show that this balance needs to adjust to these changes, but entrenched interests and the inflexibility of many donor planning systems mean that states may be locked in to set trajectories.

### *Local Ownership*

SSR programming is inextricably entwined with statebuilding (Jackson, 2011). This matters for who owns this process and what choices those people may exercise in the unfolding of programming priorities. Whilst clearly SSR could privilege compliance with international state norms and rules, and this may be in line with the desires of some potential local owners, it raises the question of how local ownership can be exercised if these local owners do not want to comply with international norms? Local ownership may be contested and SSR tends to see local ownership as exercised by those who accept broad liberal state policies and structures. The use of customary power structures also facilitates the exercise of hidden transcripts of power that trap the dominant as well as the weak within the same web of socialised roles and behaviour (Scott, 1990).

The literature is divided on the issue of local ownership. The core question relates to agency within the process but despite the standard use of the term, there is no consensus on either what it means, or how it can be enacted (Donais, 2008; Mobekk, 2010). As Schroeder and Chappuis (2014) point out, local ownership is either over-romanticised or seen as a problem to be overcome. This reflects a wariness about local ownership and local owners themselves. They may not be representative, they may not be willing to be inclusive and they may be an elite, but they may be the real owners and unwilling to relinquish control. International involvement in strengthening security institutions may cement the positions of ruling groups, and it may be naive to assume that such local owners would accept programmes designed to change or dilute their own power. Within the discussions surrounding local ownership there is also an emphasis on the role of local security and justice institutions (Nathan, 2007; Baker, 2010).

This raises the issue of the nature of the international community. This article takes the view that ‘...‘the international community’ is a distinguishable conglomerate of political actors and a rhetorical instrument open for use in political discourse for a wide variety of actors and means.’ (Bliesemann De Guevara and Kuhn, 2011, 136). At the same time, humanitarian space is hybrid—a site of contention between international agencies pursuing neoliberal orthodoxies of a putative global governance and local groups resisting these impositions. (Heathershaw, 2016, 28). The international community involvement also represents a discourse circulating in a knowledge economy where signs of success become more important than success itself, and where knowledge is socially constructed (Heathershaw, 2016; Bliesemann de Guevara & Kostić, 2017). In SSR, the international community is an extraordinarily broad church. At its core are state institutions, both local and international, including state donors, the military and the police. However, there are also significant contributions by international NGOs and organisations, the UN and other multilateral donors, and also those engaged in activities as diverse as human rights promotion and demining. Discussion of one, singular ‘international community’ within SSR is problematic and this article uses this term as a loose reference to those with international agency who are broadly following established norms laid out by the UN and OECD/DAC. This incorporates the large number of very powerful aid agencies engaged in what is a very expensive set of activities, but perhaps not all. The relevance of this is that the overwhelming direction of SSR programming is determined by this unwieldy coalition which is difficult to stop. If SSR is to shift away from purely internationally-led approaches to more inclusive programmes, then the literature implies that we lack sufficient knowledge. The socially constructed knowledge of success identified by Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić (2017), amongst others, means that we lack a socially constructed knowledge of failure within the literature. Specifically, there is an absence of empirically informed localised interventions that start with realistic political analysis (Mannitz, 2014).

The overwhelming reaction to failures and shortcomings in SSR has been to develop new versions of existing technocratic solutions, increase funding or to improve communication, despite evidence of limited impact. A second generation SSR needs to move away from these linear approaches and reflect wider changes within the literature on statebuilding and peacebuilding, particularly ideas around hybridity and non-state actors (MacGinty and Richmond, 2013; Lemay-Hebert and Freedman, 2017). The practical approaches and categories deployed by the international community within SSR need to be coupled with a measure of humility in terms of the ambitious aims of some programming. This is coupled with a lack of knowledge of exactly how international interventions will affect already existing systems and how their implementation is likely to co-exist with those systems.

If SSR is embarking on a second generation then the focus needs to change away from just building institutions, however important, and be redirected towards how the end users interact with the potential choices they face and what institutions are viable within those environments. Whilst much literature discusses ‘the local’, there is a clearly a limited understanding of what this looks and in what ways the politics of the local interact with the politics of the international. As Daniela Körppen states:

‘This leads to a tautology, because liberal peace approaches only support local ownership if it adheres to the basic components of liberal peace and if it does not undermine liberal

values. According to this, they can hardly opt for participatory or meaningful local ownerships, as this could signify cultural conflict transformation practices which are not compatible with a liberal perspective.’ (2011, 83)

### What does non-linear SSR look like?

It is clear from the extant literature on SSR that practitioners and researchers have recognised a central challenge in how to deal with the perceived failures of linear approaches (Denney and Domingo, 2014). Usually the debate is couched in terms of assimilating ‘non-state actors’ (Baker, 2008; Mannitz, 2014). These debates are also linked to the development of ‘hybrid’ approaches within the peacebuilding literature (MacGinty and Richmond, 2013). This has led to more discussion and advocacy of a move beyond linear approaches to the state and towards recognition of the links between external and domestic actors (Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014; Lemay-Hebert and Freedman, 2017) and works that try to uncover the hidden discourses behind or in parallel with the dominant public transcripts of international peacebuilding interventions (Bliesemann de Guevara & Kostić, 2017). With concepts such as ‘everyday’, ‘hybrid’ and ‘post-liberal’ forms of peace (and statebuilding), critical peacebuilding scholars presented alternatives in light of the fundamental criticisms mounted against the adherents of liberal interventionism in both policy and academia. This has led to far greater emphasis on real accountability through the inclusion of people within SSR programming rather than just institutions, recognising the importance of politics.

The linear understanding of SSR outlined above represents a view of liberal statebuilding that envisaged states being constructed where institutions supported the establishment of societal frameworks in which liberal individuals could flourish. Liberal peace was therefore an outcome of creating the liberal state, including security and justice institutions at its heart, and incorporating democratic control, rule of law and professionalization of bureaucracies (Lemay-Hebert, 2009). However, a non-linear approach requires a very different concept of the political from this top down set of assumptions. A non-linear approach recognises that externally imposed liberal structures sit on top of the real underlying politics of states and, rather than being neutral arbiters. Körppen and Ropers (2011), emphasise that concentrating on institutional reform within peacebuilding is really only dealing with part of the picture, and they go on to advocate systematic approaches that recognise outcomes as emergent properties of systems as a whole. Bernshausen and Bonacker provide an excellent summary of the theoretical underpinnings of this approach:

‘As opposed to actor-centric approaches, systemic approaches – and especially approaches founded on systems theory – direct considerable attention to the self-selectivity and self-referentiality of conflict. [...] Thus, systemic approaches prefer to not look at conflict from the perspective of the actor but also incorporate the process perspective, which puts more emphasis on the momentum and dynamics of conflicts’ (2011, 24-25)

This relates to ideas of hybrid systems, where recognising local-local and local-international politics raises the possibility of a hybrid system as an emergent property of political interaction between international programming and societal processes (MacGinty, 2010). Non-linear approaches therefore seek to work at the societal level, understanding the local politics of resistance and adaptation that has been neglected by top down linear approaches to SSR.

As Chandler (2013) rightly notes, this shift from linear to non-linear approaches partly has its roots within the peacebuilding work of Lederach and the development of a 'process-orientated' understanding whereby the role of external actors is not to impose institutions, but to assist in establishing a framework within which local societies can pursue their own peacebuilding processes (Lederach, 1997). This approach proposed that lessons be taken from quantum and chaos theory, particularly the idea that the system was more important than the individual elements. In peacebuilding, Lederach concluded that understanding politics did not incorporate institutions, leaders and parties, but societal spaces, practices and processes and: 'The goal is not stasis, but rather the generation of continuous, dynamic, self-regenerating processes that maintain form over time and are able to adapt to environmental changes' (Lederach, 1997, 84).

This approach lends itself to further development with the work of Scott and the idea of 'hidden' politics of resistance beneath formal political processes (Scott, 1990). For Scott, the movements below the surface was what determined the support for visible political action. Again, the emphasis here is on the whole system, not just the visible elements, and the socially embedded relationships, networks and practices that formed what he terms 'infrapolitics' (Scott, 1990). Ideas of resistance and hidden politics have come to the fore in contemporary analyses of the lack of understanding of the Arab Spring, post-conflict Timor and others, but also in the politics of Eastern Europe where political scientists failed to predict the 'velvet revolutions' because they focussed on elite politics (Kaldor and Selchow, 2012; Richmond, 2009). Infrapolitics itself has, as Chandler (2013) identifies, shifted from an expression of avoidance and weakness, to an ontological starting point in explaining why linear peacebuilding models have failed.

So what might infrapolitics look like within SSR? Our research shows that the literature reflects a strong bias in programming towards measurable elements. Inputs to programmes feature strongly, and are frequently tentatively linked to outputs, although the causal mechanisms are not always well articulated. There is a great deal of material that references non-state actors, hybrid approaches and the role of customary authorities in providing security beyond the reach of institutions like police or military. Much of this literature takes the form of criticising linear approaches, without offering realistic alternatives, or tends to dichotomise the situation at the local level in to 'formal/informal', 'international/local' or 'modern/customary or traditional' and eventually, in its criticism of the international approaches ends up reifying the local (Chandler, 2013). This approach tends to ignore the importance of linkages between these elements. The conceptual-contextual divide within theoretical approaches is projected on to a situation where the internationally supported state infrastructure is not linked to local political infrastructure, even if hidden political networks exist beneath the surface.

So what does non-linear SSR look like? An emphasis on facilitating transformation through relinquishing control and following non-linear evolution – what Lederach refers to as the 'crab like' quality of transformation (Lederach 2005, 113) – has not been what the international donor community in particular, is willing to embrace. In many ways it is the opposite of the 'measuring impact' debate within most contemporary donors, which demands a theory of change, a set of desired outputs and a correlation between inputs and their eventual impact. The challenge here will be to develop an approach that balances systemic and process approaches with engaging with donors. The risk is that this form of systemic thinking will be incorporated in to the technocratic

donor approaches and consists of a small box that can be ticked to show that 'we have done this', much like 'theory of change'.

What then can be the core concerns that a second generation of SSR will have to address? This article proposes three groups of concerns: institutions and institutional power; developing processes rather than structures; and engagement with hidden politics.

Firstly, institutions remain important. In the contemporary world, systems of domination and power remain and they are overwhelmingly states, even if their reach may be limited in some places. States require institutional structures to exist, although these may not all be exactly the same. Security institutions, for example, are critical to the maintenance of secure populations and all states have variations on militaries and/or police. Professionalism within these services remains critical, otherwise they can become the chief threat to populations rather than the chief protector and, perhaps unsurprisingly, professional training is disproportionately covered in the literature. What is lacking here is the consideration of how those institutions relate to political frameworks. In other words, how far are militaries and police controlled within civil legislation and political frameworks, but also how far are they related to the infrapolitics of ethnicity, corruption, kinship, personal rule or regional bias? It is clear from previous studies of SSR, that one of the core issues with programmes so far has been an emphasis on those targets that are relatively easily achieved over those that are more complex. A detailed study of Sierra Leone from 1997 to 2014 showed that whilst the technical capabilities of the security services had been successfully reconstructed, there remained issues that directly affected the lack of civil and political oversight and also the creeping politicisation of recruitment to the police, for example (Jackson and Albrecht, 2010; 2016: Denney, 2014). Institutions themselves are important, but division of powers and control of institutions remain the underlying crucial factor in the success or otherwise of international peacebuilding.

The point about institutions as a problem is that previous versions of SSR have concentrated only on them and have created false boundaries around them, treating them as technical organisations that can be separated from the societies in which they exist. No institution can realistically exist outside the social norms of the people who are employed by that agency, but an agency can begin to influence the norms of those who work there and, by implication, wider norms. That is the theory behind finding an entry point to institutional development. Reform approaches like anti-corruption have been less successful where they have had their own separate institution, but more successful where they have been integrated in to collective action approaches (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015). Institutions do not have to sit atop underlying politics, but can become integrated into them as long as they are understood - who benefits or loses, who controls them, mechanisms for civil control over security services? In an intriguing reversal of the medical analogies that are frequently used, what SSR could think of doing is, instead of healing the patient and returning to some prior assumed state, to introduce a virus – of anti-corruption, say – in one part of the system and then encourage it to spread to the rest of the system, which is much closer to the public administration approaches of incrementalism, problem-driven foci and collaboration amongst stakeholders advocated by analysts like Andrews (2013).

Secondly, taking up Lederach's (1997) core idea of developing processes rather than building institutions, further provides an avenue for this viral development to enhance the further development of SSR and also to tackle one of its core issues of sustainability. This implies that

instead of starting out with a predetermined view of what a military or police force looks like and then working towards that, the various qualities of a desired, and agreed security service would emerge as a result of discussion. At the same time, there are also several relationships to be discussed with regard to the provision of justice and policing, not least how far local security providers are able to exercise authority, what offences should be subject to formal police inquiry and whether there is access to recourse for those seeking justice. In practice the system across much of the African countryside, for example, reflects this already with many more people using customary authorities than formal policing structures and most people facing institutional multiplicity at the local level. Community policing, for example, is a concept that has been adopted across Africa in varying forms, including in Ethiopia (Baker, 2013; Di Nunzio, 2014), Mozambique (Kyed, 2010), Nigeria (Hills, 2014) and Sierra Leone (Albrecht et al, 2014). However, this cannot be interpreted as either a wholly bottom-up or consistent initiative since much of this development has been undertaken by donor-led programmes reinterpreting approaches from the global North. In addition, the structures and processes of policing itself across Africa vary greatly, with the classic, Weberian bureaucratic police structures being somewhat patchy and empirical policing being characterised by heterogeneity of providers, opacity of the police force itself and a multiplicity of providers drawing on a wide range of authorities (Bierschenk, 2017). What a second generation of SSR requires here is precisely Lederach's idea that external intervention should enable local people and societies to make their own choices within locally existing frameworks. This would, of course, allow a degree of choice for someone who might lose out in the traditional or customary system – usually a woman or youth – who would then be able to pursue justice using a different avenue. This implies changing a historical approach that has relied on constructing formal legal systems that are some distance from people both geographically and epistemologically.

Thirdly, an engagement with hidden politics, the emphasis on process over constructing institutions alongside the continuing importance of institutions themselves over time, raise some very difficult questions for those wishing to intervene. In particular, an emphasis on process requires a total reconfiguration of a programming architecture that rests on finite time periods and measureable outputs. Non-linearity is difficult to measure, unpredictable and not necessarily time-bound, so it does not lend itself to programming. In addition, working within existing frameworks to develop processes that enhance security and justice and therefore SSR takes considerable understanding, effort and time. Sierra Leone, one of the most covered countries within the SSR literature, is a small country where clear donor leadership from the UK existed as a long-term commitment through a Memorandum of Understanding and a consistent provision of skills and resources. Yet after twenty years, there are still issues within the security sector in Sierra Leone and SSR remains an ongoing process (Jackson and Albrecht, 2016). This begs the question if SSR is so difficult in a small country like Sierra Leone, then what chance for Afghanistan, South Sudan or Syria?

Non-linear approaches and the incorporation of hidden politics requires far more effort in terms of understanding the local context, most of which takes time and is frequently not done well, if at all. Multi-layered approaches already advocated within some of the SSR literature, recognise that this may vary at different levels, but the analysis of multi-layered or hybrid approaches tends to avoid discussions of power within those systems, hence Chandler's (2013) assertion that some of these approaches establish a way of criticising linear, liberal approaches but end up reifying local solutions instead of recognising them as power structures in their own right. This emphasises the problem of lack of understanding and a lack of willingness to understand, but also a reluctance to engage with



actors who are not able to ‘talk the talk’. Whereas many local actors within SSR programmes to date have been located in the capital city, speak English or French, wear suits and can write project documents, many of the communities most affected everyday insecurity are located outside the capital cities, do not speak English and may not share international actors’ views on gender relations or human rights. However, these are the very people involved with the infrapolitics of what actually happens within states.

Perhaps one thing that parts of the international community needs to do in further developing a second generation SSR, is to be humble about their own views and learn to work with those who might have different approaches or beliefs about the world. That does not mean merely agreeing and accommodating, but it means having respect for others and working in partnership to develop mutually beneficial developments. This can, if done sensitively, produce positive outcomes through consensual community policing that is actually part of the community, such as reductions in child brides and gender violence in rural Ethiopia (Baker, 2013). There is a key paradox when it comes to practical issues, which reflects a broader issue of control. As Bernshausen and Bonacker (2011) point out in their advocacy of constructivist approaches to security reform :

‘We believe that if we are to adopt a systemic approach to conflict transformation, a basic premise is the impossibility of exercising direct control. When designing an intervention, we must therefore focus our efforts on creating a framework, an environment conducive to peace processes. We must let go of the idea of designing a detailed blueprint for conflict parties to follow. Nor can we ever be sure that we have considered and adequately anticipated the plethora of systemic factors and responses that may occur during a desired peace process. A more constructive and sustainable approach means embracing uncertainty and contradiction and concentrating on enhancing a system’s capacity for self-organization and resilience.’ (Bernshausen and Bonacker, 2011, 30)

This reflection that a key issue is that even if one wished to exercise control, this is virtually impossible in an uncertain process, has led to discussions around new non-linear approaches developed within the wider public administration literature, based around ‘Thinking and Working Politically’ (Leftwich, 2011) and ‘Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation’ (PDIA) (Andrews et al, 2012) and its by-product ‘Doing Development Differently’ (DDD) which is a practical approach to PDIA. This set of approaches questions the overall orthodoxy of project approaches to international development and emphasises power dynamics, process, context, systems thinking and adaptive and iterative approaches to international intervention, similar to Lederach’s (1997) approach within peace studies. Much like this peace studies tradition, the thinking and working politically approach advocates a ‘learning by doing’ approach rather than setting out with a blueprint, recognising that there are political asymmetries at the beginning of the process and learning how to work with them, and recognising that there will be winners and losers in any outcome from a reform process. This requires different approaches from international donors engaged in activities like SSR in terms of taking a flexible and pragmatic approach to programming to enable responses to the changing political environment, but also recognising that involvement in some security services will create new sources of power that need to be accounted for. In many ways, one of the lessons from Sierra Leone that does not seem to have been learnt in subsequent programming was the presence of precisely such a flexible, pragmatic fund that was allowed to act as the political situation dictated (Jackson and Albrecht, 2016).<sup>viii</sup>

## Conclusions: new generation, same underlying dilemmas

The failures of previous SSR programmes are all too evident and have prompted a focus on the interaction between the international community and states affected by SSR programming. The detailed literature mapping that was the starting point for this research shows clearly that there are clear areas where the SSR has concentrated, particularly in institution-building, technocratic approaches to problems and measurable outcomes. The liberal approach to peacebuilding represented by this literature is characterised by a reliance on the liberal state and liberal approaches to development and security, not least in emphasising the development of formal state institutions over informal, traditional ones. At the same time, the lack of clear success in SSR has led to a reconsideration of approaches, not least in terms of the limitations of the liberal state and the incorporation of non-linear approaches to security. However, in many ways this analysis remains only partial, since there is little actual knowledge of hidden politics by the international community in practice, and in many ways much of this theoretical approach reifies the local without really examining the implications of incorporating traditional systems that bring their own politics and power structures with them. In identifying hidden politics with 'resistance', for example, this places local political structures in a heroic opposition to the international order, whereas in reality those local structures and the actual hidden politics of states are far more complex, inter-related and non-dualistic between the international and the local. It also fails to recognise that local politics has its own hierarchies and power structures that may be less than heroic in terms of resistance to liberal values.

The development of non-linear approaches to SSR can be seen as a way of incorporating traditional structures in to a broader global security system. In other words, non-linear approaches to SSR represent more than an attempt to resolve issues of difference specific to a context in which the liberal peace experiences real difficulty. At the same time it is a means through which the other can be assimilated in to liberal strategies and by implication the liberal world system, thereby overcoming something that is perceived as an obstacle or spoiler in a wider process of modernisation. This may be a way of using non-linear SSR as a problem solving tool to expand the biopolitical reach of liberal statebuilding, but in many ways it also represents a 'back to the future' approach of reflecting earlier, colonial approaches of indirect rule and incorporation of local polities (and invented ones) in to a global security order dominated by international empires. A second generation SSR approach needs to go beyond this impasse and take on three groups of issues: recognition of institutions are important, but not necessarily the institutions that have been supported in the past or supported in isolation from infrapolitics; developing processes that are inclusive and may be sustainable in the medium to long-term; and engagement with the hidden politics of states, recognising that they are not blank slates and institutions of the state do not exist in a political vacuum.

The reality is that a multiplicity of institutions, overlapping political networks and hidden politics that are not actually 'hidden' at all, just not recognised or known by international analysts, comprise an evolving political process of contestation over power and resources. These social forces can exist and transcend different levels of formal politics ranging from the international to the community and also incorporate agents that are able to navigate these different levels, or between formal and informal politics, or be instrumental in forming and reforming alliances. The outcomes of these

alliances and agencies lead to uneven results from international activities at least partly because those interventions fail to understand how to locate themselves within these networks. Any development of second generation SSR must pay more than lip service to political networks and recognise that processes that may lead to improvements in security rely on processes as much as institutions.

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## Notes

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<sup>iii</sup> The author was an adviser to the research process and worked with the lead researcher for the study.

<sup>iv</sup> Identified as part of the initial brief for the study by DFID.

<sup>v</sup> DFID uses the title ‘theory of change’ to denote activities that may lead to a change in circumstances for the target population. This is widely used within DFID but is also extremely imprecise. A very good review of the use of this terminology concluded that ‘...we find that there is no consensus on how to define ToC, although it is commonly understood as an articulation of how and why a given intervention will lead to specific change.’ (Stein and Valters, 2012, 2). In addition this review actually changed their focus to ‘ToC approaches’ to reflect the confusion over terminology, the wide range of activities and the lack of a core definition. It should also be noted that this is not a specific DFID activity and these types of activity are widely deployed amongst development agencies.

<sup>vi</sup> This might be attributed to an academic, and practitioner, bias towards quantitative methods to provide ‘hard evidence’, but is not necessarily specific to SSR.

<sup>vii</sup> There is an extensive critical literature in this area, but see Duffield, 2001; MacGinty and Richmond, 2013; Pospisil & Kühn, 2016 amongst others.

<sup>viii</sup> This fund, the Sierra Leone Security Sector Project (SILSEP) was established in 1999 and operated over multiple years and acted as an umbrella project over the SSR process (see Jackson and Albrecht, 2016)