Security Sector Reform in Theory and Practice

Persistent Challenges and Linkages to Conflict Transformation

Leslie MacColman[*]

Abstract

In less than two decades, security sector reform (SSR) has crystallized as an organizing framework guiding international engagement in countries affected by violent conflict. SSR is a normative proposition, grounded in democratic governance and human security, and a concrete set of practices. As such, it represents an exemplary case of the dialectic between scholarship and practice and an outstanding vantage point from which to interrogate this nexus. In this article, I explore the dynamic interplay between theory and practice in SSR. In particular, I show how the basic tenets of conflict transformation – present in the first generation of scholarship on SSR – were sidelined in SSR practices. Practical experiences led to strong critiques of the 'conceptual-contextual' divide and, eventually, to a second generation of critical scholarship on SSR that has begun to coalesce. I conclude by noting the parallels between recent scholarship on SSR and the insights captured in earlier work on conflict transformation.

Keywords: security sector reform, conflict transformation, scholarship, practice.

1 Introduction

Security sector reform (SSR) is a wide-reaching conceptual framework that links various aspects of human and state security, democratic governance and development. This framework is a unique way of thinking about the deep causes of security challenges in countries recovering from episodes of mass violence and political instability. SSR also guides the practices of governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to "transform societies not only through institutional engineering but also by altering basic understandings of local actors concerning the state-society relationship" (Donais, 2009: 119). The holistic, systems-oriented, people-centred approach to security that is the hallmark of SSR is the conceptual bridge that connects it to broader theories of peacebuilding through conflict transformation.

The goals of SSR are clearly articulated in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD

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[*] Leslie MacColman is a PhD student in the joint programme in Sociology and Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests include governance, police reform and criminal dynamics in urban neighbourhoods.

DAC) publication, entitled *Security System Reform and Governance*, which states that:

> The overall objective of security system reform is to create a secure environment that is conducive to development, poverty reduction and democracy. This secure environment rests upon two essential pillars: i) the ability of the state, through its development policy and programmes, to generate conditions that mitigate the vulnerabilities to which its people are exposed; and ii) the ability of the state to use the range of policy instruments at its disposal to prevent or address security threats that affect society's well-being. (OECD DAC, 2005: 16)

The United Nations adopts a similar view, visualizing SSR as a transformation process led by national authorities that has as its goal: "the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and rule of law" (United Nations, General Assembly [UN], 2008).

In practice, SSR encompasses a wide variety of activities, including political and policy dialogues; training of military, police, intelligence services, border patrol or other state security forces; and planned demobilization of non-state security forces such as militias. It can involve support for judiciary bodies, parliaments, ministries and other public institutions of oversight and control of the security sector. Finally, SSR programmes may take the form of outreach, capacity building or support for civil society actors, like human rights organizations, universities or media outlets, which are seen as having an important role in promoting accountability and rule of law (OECD DAC, 2005). Whomever they engage and however they advance the SSR agenda, programme architects must simultaneously consider legal, financial, organizational and procedural aspects of public administration, the socio-symbolic legitimacy of security forces and other key actors, and the context-specific exigencies that may alter the trajectory of change. In post-war environments, SSR must also coordinate with development and peacebuilding initiatives (OECD DAC, 2007).

Since the crystallization of SSR in the early 2000s, international aid funds for SSR programmes have increased exponentially and, with them, the number of programmes on the ground. With support from international donors, large-scale SSR programmes have been carried out in Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Cambodia, Latvia, Nigeria, Bosnia, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Poland, Angola, Iraq, Afghanistan and several other countries. Experiences in these countries have generated a critical mass of practitioner knowledge that is now percolating back into scholarship and policy.

In this article, I argue that SSR, as a conceptual framework, constitutes the positive confluence of normative ideals and practical knowledge, which was made possible by the consolidation of an epistemic community involving both scholars and practitioners. I do this by tracing the contours of the international debate that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, resulting in the first-generation articulation of SSR. In addition, I highlight the multiple parallels between SSR

and conflict transformation, as articulated by John Paul Lederach, to illustrate the theoretical convergence undergirding these two theories of change. I describe the expansion of SSR programmes and the critical, scholarly reflection it produced as fragmented, practice-based knowledge accreted in the academic realm. In particular, I focus on four generalized critiques of SSR, all of them related to the 'conceptual–contextual' divide: weak civil society participation, state-centric approaches to security governance, superficial comprehension of relational dynamics between local actors and constrained temporal horizons. I conclude by noting the exceptional prescience of Lederach's writing on conflict transformation with regard to the second generation of scholarship on SSR.

2   Construction of the Concept: SSR as a Theory of Change

SSR, as it is understood today, took shape only in the mid-2000s. It has since had a profound impact on *ideas* about security and governance and on *practices* of post-violence peacebuilding and development. As a response to the practical demands of the changing geo-political landscape of the 1990s, SSR set a new agenda for international security cooperation. It represented a pivot towards human security, as opposed to national security, and a normative commitment to democratic governance (Sedra, 2010a). SSR discussions were initially spearheaded by international donor countries, such as the United Kingdom. Later, these discussions expanded to include a wider array of actors, including many from the Global South. Scholars, practitioners and scholar-practitioners coalesced as a recognizable epistemic community, giving form and substance to debates about SSR and eventually converging around a shared vision. In this section, I offer a historical vignette of this process, highlighting some of the key actors involved and tracing the contours of its internal dynamics.

The end of the Cold War led to a dramatic re-conceptualization of security-related cooperation. Throughout the 1990s, domestic conflicts replaced interstate wars as the greatest threat to peace. The United Nations peacekeeping mandate grew, as did the involvement of bilateral and multilateral donors in short-term demobilization initiatives and longer-term peacebuilding and development work. Faced with complex, domestic power dynamics and risks of renewed violence, donors working in countries affected by conflict recognized the need to retool their aid practices (Chanaa, 2002). Traditional security sector assistance – technical advising and technology-transfer oriented towards bolstering the capabilities of security forces and encouraging regime stability – was inappropriate for the problems at hand, including widespread violence against civilians by military and police forces (Ball and Hendrickson, 2005; Marquette and Beswick, 2011). Demands for increased accountability were accompanied by a global push for reduction in military expenditures in donor countries and recipient countries alike. Thus, by the early 2000s, "the time was ripe" (Brzoska, 2003: 3) for a comprehensive discussion about security-related cooperation.

The vision of SSR that eventually emerged was built upon two conceptual building blocks: human security and democratic governance. The concept of

human security was first introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report. It proffered a broader definition of human well-being – based on freedom from want and freedom from fear – and it placed the individual, rather than the state, at the centre of security policy (Ball, 2010; Brzoska, 2003). This concept of human security gave necessary counterweight to the still-dominant notion of national security that underpinned traditional aid strategies. SSR was expressly defined as an outgrowth of the broader human security agenda in the influential publication entitled *Security System Reform and Governance*, published by the OECD DAC in 2005.

A second key pillar of SSR was *democratic governance*, which was seen as an antidote to rogue security forces (Ball and Fayemi, 2004). The OECD DAC (2005: 3) stressed the relationship between democratic governance and peace, saying "Democratically run, accountable and efficient security systems can help reduce the risk of violent conflict". Much of the early writing on SSR talked about democratic governance as a goal of reform processes or as a condition for the achievement of more specific goals. But democratic principles were also reflected in recommendations about *how* SSR programmes should be implemented, stressing, for example, respect for human rights and rule of law and adherence to standards of transparency and accountability (OECD DAC, 2005). Democratic governance and technical capacity were identified as the two essential preconditions for sustainable security sector transformation (OECD DAC, 2007). The holistic definition of SSR that materialized in the mid-2000s drew on the concepts of human security and democratic governance forging a new agenda for global security cooperation. But how did SSR emerge as a coherent and recognizable category?

One early forum of discussion about the security–development nexus was the Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation, founded by the OECD DAC in the mid-1990s (OECD DAC, 2005). Over the next several years, the emerging concept of SSR began to take shape in publications such as the *Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation* (1998), the *Guidelines on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (2000) and *Security Issues and Development Co-operation* (2001). These publications gave written register to evolving debate and emergent stakeholder consensus about the appropriate scope and mandate of SSR and the terms that best captured this shared vision.

Terminological differences were used to highlight conceptual or theoretical divides. One group of authors, for example, argued that 'reform' was associated with incremental, superficial and ineffectual change, undertaken with limited consultation, whereas 'transformation' invoked the ideas of complexity, structural change and broad participation (Ball and Fayemi, 2004). Others argued about the difference between security 'sectors' and security 'systems' (Brzoska, 2003). Notably, the OECD DAC deliberately opted for the term 'system', rather than the term 'sector', laying claim to a complex understanding of security dynamics and a holistic approach to change, but ultimately downplaying the difference (OECD DAC, 2001). Scholarship later congealed around the more popular term 'SSR'. For donor countries, debates were not only conceptual but also tied to prior experience and the practical demands of security assistance policy, aid provision and the negotiation of complex power dynamics (Albrecht *et al.*, 2010). For

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other members of the SSR community, terminological debates raised practical questions about how aid would be disbursed, to whom and for what ends. As described by Ball (2010), the multiple terms that abounded – and still abound – in the literature on SSR represent "different perspective[s] on what is to be changed and how" (36).

The United Kingdom played a clear leadership role in forging and disseminating the concept of SSR among international donors. The expression 'security sector reform' was popularized in a 1998 speech by the UK Minister for International Development, Clare Short (Chanaa, 2002). Short's speeches and the policy statements produced by the UK Department for International Development in the late 1990s and early 2000s helped generate a single terminological umbrella under which multiple strands of discussion could converge (Ball, 2010; Brzoska, 2003). Early supporters of the UK-led SSR agenda included the Nordic countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. The United States was initially supportive of the shift from traditional security cooperation towards the governance-focused SSR framework, although this position later shifted (Sherman, 2010). In these and other countries, the broad conception of SSR expanded debates about security to include ministries of foreign affairs and development, whose interests, priorities and approaches were often different from those traditionally emanating from ministries of defence (Albrecht et al., 2010; Swiss, 2011). These changes were also reflected in multilateral forums.

Under the leadership of the UK and other early adopters, a series of international agreements helped consolidate the emergent donor consensus around SSR and generate new institutional architectures to put SSR policy into practice. The OECD DAC held a High Level Meeting on SSR in 2004. The following year, it published a guidelines document, *Security System Reform and Governance*, with the most comprehensive and widely accepted vision of SSR to date. Participation in international meetings and in the review of publications was an 'external catalyst' for donor countries and aid agencies still working to adapt their security cooperation frameworks (Swiss, 2011) and contributing to the construction of a shared agenda. Also, in 2005, the OECD granted further legitimated SSR by expanding its definition of official development assistance (ODA) to include security-related aid for civilian oversight of security systems, civilian peacebuilding, and control of small arms and light weapons (Pachon, 2012). This allowed countries engaged in these activities to count them as ODA.

Donors were influential in the dialogue around SSR, but they were by no means the only actors with voice. Academic researchers, universities and think-tanks helped shape the international agenda and the positions adopted by donor countries (Albrecht et al., 2010; Varisco, 2014). Southern researchers offered important theoretical inputs and rich, context-specific knowledge. Most of the authors of the 2004 publication *Security Sector Governance in Africa: A Handbook*, for example, were African nationals working at the intersection of scholarship and practice, jointly affiliated with prestigious universities and NGOs, such as the Centre for Democracy and Development and the African Security Sector Network. This publication was among the first to provide a comprehensive articulation of

the relationship between SSR and democratic governance, an idea that was repro-
duced and further elaborated in numerous policy papers to follow.

During the same time period, dozens of working groups, committees, net-
works and knowledge-sharing platforms were created to further the exchange of
ideas among different countries and communities of scholarship and practice (for
examples see Caparini, 2010; OECD DAC, 2007). As a follow-up to the 2005
OECD DAC Guidelines, the *Handbook on Security System Reform* was published in
2007. The Handbook built on the principles established previously and offered
more explicit guidelines on their operationalization in order to "close the gap
between policy and practice" (OECD DAC, 2007: 21). Within the forum of the
OECD, civil society groups provided valuable knowledge and written inputs to the
Handbook (Albrecht *et al.*, 2010).

By 2007, with the publication of the Handbook, a recognizable theory of
change had taken shape and the SSR agenda was firmly entrenched on the inter-
national scene. As a conceptual framework, it had been forged by a diverse array
of global actors, with voices representing the normative ideals of human security
and democratic governance, and visions from the Global North and the Global
South (Bryden and Keane, 2009). It evolved in close conjunction with related
ideas of statebuilding and peacebuilding, influenced by contemporary research on
violence prevention, state-led violence against civilians and post-war reconcilia-
tion (Ball, 2010). Thus, the first-generation articulation of SSR was a positive con-
fluence of scholarship and practice but, in terms of large-scale transformation,
aspiration still predominated over experience. This articulation had several con-
nections to theories of conflict transformation, which would prove decisive in
later critiques of SSR in practice. I turn now to these parallels.

3   Parallels between SSR and Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is at once a *theory of change* and a body of practices orien-
ted towards *making change* in the world, a dual orientation shared by SSR. Both
approaches are rooted in normative commitments to peace, justice and broad-
based participation and to a systems-based perspective. In this section, I discuss
the linkages between SSR, as it was envisioned in the mid-2000s, and John Paul
Lederach's writings on conflict transformation. Lederach is one of the founders of
and remains one of the principal advocates of the school of conflict transforma-
tion. His most influential works include *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation
in Divided Societies* (1997), *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (2003) and
The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace (2005). As a self-identi-
fied practitioner-scholar, Lederach has worked for several decades in countries
affected by protracted violent conflict, and unsurprisingly, conflict transforma-
tion is attuned to many of the same issues as SSR. I will address the basic tenets
of conflict transformation only briefly, since my aim is not to contribute to the
already expansive body of literature on this topic, but to reflect the utility of put-
ting it in conversation with SSR. As I will argue, this conversation exposes more

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similarities than differences, but these differences are significant because they foreshadow subsequent critiques of SSR.

Conflict transformation is unique in terms of its positive orientation towards conflict and its attention to the dense, multiplex networks in which isolated episodes of conflict are embedded (Lederach, 1997). It sees conflicts as normal and generative, insofar as they bring into clearer view the latent tensions which often fuel cycles of violence and acts of injustice. Inequalities and power differentials can be more readily addressed with these tensions on the surface. A similar perspective was put forth by African analysts of SSR, who recognized that regional armed conflicts had been destructive but also generative, giving rise to "new institutions, social and economic relations and forms of consciousness" (Hutchful and Fayemi 2005: 83). Conflict transformation is a fundamentally normative enterprise; the same is true for SSR (Varisco, 2014). The stated goals of SSR, security and justice (OECD DAC, 2007), are strikingly similar to those of conflict transformation processes, peace and justice. In the case of SSR, core principles may, at times, be in tension with one another (Marquette and Beswick, 2011). Lederach recognizes the same challenge in conflict transformation but argues that both are necessary to keep in view for balanced and sustainable change.

The early intellectual architects of SSR did not cite Lederach, but nevertheless converged around several of the same ideas. Notably, the aforementioned handbook on African security sector governance stressed the difference between stand-alone, limited-scope security sector *reforms* and holistic *transformation*, attentive to power relations, culture and the dynamic roles of multiple stakeholders inside and outside the state (Ball and Fayemi, 2004). This view was taken up in the OECD DAC manual, which described SSR as "the transformation of the 'security system' – which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions – working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance" (OECD DAC, 2005: 20). Thus, in its purest conceptualization, SSR saw state security forces as embedded within a broader constellation of actors and recognized that changing their behaviour would likely require transformation of the whole system.

This is a close reflection of the conflict transformation approach, which focuses on *systemic* change (Miall, 2004). Lederach argues that issues – the immediate, tangible problems that fuel contention among conflict parties – are embedded in systems. Issues should be dealt with, but not in isolation, or are likely to re-emerge in a more virulent form (Lederach, 1997). Security system 'issues' may include upticks in violent crime in a particular region, the inappropriate use of force by police, or unequal access to the legal system by different ethnic groups. In SSR, a problem-solving approach may be employed to resolve such issues, but should be understood as an entry point for system-wide engagement (OECD DAC, 2007). The relationship between issues and systems in both SSR and conflict transformation is well expressed by Botes (2003) who, in relation to the latter, says "Transforming deep-rooted conflicts is only partly about 'resolving' the issues of the conflict – the central issue is systemic change or transformation. Systems cannot be 'resolved,' but they can be transformed."

Lederach insists that conflict transformation practitioners should not view the people embroiled in conflicts as 'problems'. Conflict parties should instead be respected, validated and afforded protagonism in transformation processes (Lederach, 1995). This means that "the international community must see people in the setting as *resources* not *recipients*" (Lederach, 1997: 94). In her discussion of SSR, Chanaa (2002) expressed a similar sentiment, albeit from a more instrumental perspective, saying that local traditions and cultural practices "can be of potential value to external assistance in SSR" (Chanaa, 2002: 75). Likewise, the 2007 OECD DAC SSR Handbook emphasized the need for local leadership in transformation processes, saying "SSR assistance should be designed to support partner governments and stakeholders as they move down a path of reform, rather than determining that path and leading them down it" (OECD DAC, 2007: 28). Like conflict transformation, SSR aims to pay as much attention to the *content* of reforms as the *context* in which they occur, encouraging 'local ownership' of concepts and programmes.

Conflict transformation rejects the 'top-down' orientation of traditional schools of conflict resolution, advocating for multi-tiered dialogue (Botes, 2003). In the model presented by Lederach (1997) in *Building Peace*, elite-level dialogue is one of several (equally important but analytically distinct) spaces that, when mobilized in concert, can promote sustainable change. According to him, top-level political, military and religious leaders can make vital contributions to national negotiations and publicly visible agreements. Yet, the most strategic actors are often social organizations, churches, journalists and other actors connected to both the elite and the grassroots. These middle-range actors have "more flexibility of thought and movement than top-level leaders, and are far less vulnerable in terms of daily survival than those at the grassroots" (Lederach, 1997: 94). The *who* of SSR – as an aspirational model – is diverse and multi-tiered. Guiding documents all emphasize the importance of engaging a wide variety of elite and mid-range actors, including state security forces and relevant public institutions, such as the judiciary, parliament and the executive, as well as informal security providers and civil society (Ball, 2006; OECD DAC, 2005). There is limited explicit attention given to grassroots actors, however.

Equally important as engaging with the full spectrum of actors at multiple levels of society is recognizing their engagement with *one another*. The intellectual architects of SSR recognized that reform processes were highly political and would "inevitably create winners and losers as they challenge vested interests and existing power relationships" (OECD DAC, 2007: 28). By design, SSR processes are meant to alter the power dynamics that undergird the existing (undesirable) *status quo*. It is, therefore, crucial to consider the relationships between political stakeholders, including state and non-state security forces, government bodies and civil society organizations, and to identify any social fissures reproduced in the current institutional arrangement. Donors are also part of this relational milieu and should be recognized as such. This perspective is echoed and amplified in conflict transformation, which recognizes that *relationships* are at the root of many conflicts and often hinder change efforts in the aftermath of violence. Indeed, conflict transformation goes a step further than SSR, placing relation-

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ships between individuals, groups, and societies at the centre of its model (Lederach, 1997).

One final overlap between the theories of change advanced by SSR and conflict transformation is their temporal perspective. Systemic transformation of the security system is an exceedingly difficult process, which requires not just institution building but cultural change (Baker, 2010; Sedra, 2010b) and the reconstruction of norms, expectations and trust in the state. Accordingly, it may take a full generation (OECD DAC, 2007: 25). Early articulations of SSR foresaw short-, medium- and long-term activities, all of which could move a country incrementally towards its objectives of human security and justice, but ultimately recognized that donors often operate on a shorter timeline. The conflict transformation model outlined by Lederach (1997) foresees immediate action, medium-term planning that spans months, decades thinking that spans 5-10 years and generational vision that stretches several decades or more into the future. These temporal horizons must all coexist in the process of peacebuilding, such that term responses to 'presenting situations' (Lederach and Maiese, 2009) are coupled with long-term, strategic visions of change.

Reflecting on his practical experience, Lederach further notes that conflict is *circular*. "It is not, therefore, linear or 'rational' in nature. In other words, it is not based on an evaluation of what is the most direct, time-efficient, or effective manner of resolving this problem" (Lederach, 1991: 184). With this in mind, he proposes a more circular vision of change, wherein forward, backward, vertical and horizontal motions are supported by an increasingly solid platform of relationships (Lederach, 2009). On this point, conflict transformation presents an implicit challenge to the rational and linear approaches to change represented by the 'project-cycle' mentality of many donors and professionalized non-profit organizations.

In 2002, Chanaa asserted that "SSR cannot only involve a destination. Rather it is the process and route that are all important" (2002: 75). With these words, she – and the nascent SSR community – seemed to acknowledge that it was not just about *what* they did but about *how* they engaged with other actors and with the dynamic process. There are multiple overlaps between the theories of change outlined in conflict transformation and SSR, as it was articulated in this first generation of aspirational thinking. The two models employ different language but are similarly attentive to the generative capacity of conflict, the difference between 'cosmetic' reforms and systemic transformation, the importance of involving multiple actors at different levels of society and the need to simultaneously entertain multiple short- and longer-term horizons. There are differences, however, in terms of degree, with conflict transformation calling for an even longer time horizon, expressly carving out spaces for grassroots actors, and placing *relationships* at the heart of its analysis and interventions. As I conclude, these insights would prove surprisingly prescient with regard to the second generation of scholarship on SSR. But first, I turn to the continuing dialectic between scholarship and practice in SSR.

4 Reflections on the Practice: Specifying the 'Conceptual–Contextual' Divide

Activities carried out under the rubric of SSR multiplied exponentially following the first generation of scholarship. Beginning in the mid-2000s, and concurrent with publication of the OECD DAC Security System Reform and Governance Guidelines (2005) and Handbook (2007), there was a dramatic increase in security and governance-related aid flow and in the number of SSR programmes, particularly in Africa. Experts agree that these programmes have yielded mixed results because of persistent gaps between policy and practice (Lawrence, 2012; Mobekk, 2010; Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014; Sedra, 2010a). Yet, a great deal of knowledge grew out of these experiences. Critical reflection among practitioners took the form of country-level evaluations and assessments, and these ideas later made their way into high-level reports and evaluations, such as *Security System Reform: What Have We Learned? Lessons from the publication and dissemination of the OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform* (2009). At the same time, scholars began studying SSR processes, usually employing a case-based, qualitative approach (Schroeder and Chappuis, 2014). A great deal of the knowledge that flowed from practice into scholarship was related to what Chanaa (2002) has referred to as the 'conceptual–contextual' divide.

After several years of systematic reflection, a second generation of scholarship on SSR began to emerge, a process that is still ongoing. Here, I focus on four persistent critiques of SSR that emerged during this period: weak civil society participation, state-centric approaches to security governance, superficial comprehension of relational dynamics between local actors, and constrained temporal horizons. I offer a brief overview of these challenges and examples of how scholarship has provided greater analytical clarity about them. While these are, by no means, the only critiques of SSR and my treatment of them is necessarily brief, these vignettes help illustrate the ongoing dialectic between scholarship and practice.

It is hard to understate the rate of growth of SSR in recent years. Between 2005 and 2007, the number of countries receiving security aid more than doubled, from 40 to 87 (Pachon, 2012). Precise data on the amount of monetary, human and organizational resources invested in SSR initiatives are unavailable, but in multi-billion dollar ODA flows, more funds are now allocated to Governance and Peace (under which SSR falls) than to any other sector, including Water and Sanitation, Health or Education (OECD DAC, 2014). From 2008 to 2012, the Governance and Peace sector accounted for approximately 16% of total ODA (OECD DAC, 2014). And, with large-scale SSR programmes ongoing in more than a dozen countries, the number of UN Security Council mandates referencing this topic nearly tripled between 2008 and 2012 (UN, 2013). This expansion was congruent with the normative ideal of SSR: to tackle systemic threats to human security wherever they occur. In practice, however, SSR was proved less than seamless.

During this wave of expansion, there were large gaps between SSR as it had been *conceptualized* and SSR as it was being *implemented*. Over time, critical reflec-

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tion on specific case began to uncover more general trends and critiques. The first such critique is related to the top-heavy and exclusive character of civil society engagement. There are examples of meaningful high-level civil society participation, through research, advocacy and regional networks of information exchange. Civil society engagement with police and intelligence services in Sierra Leone led to improved relationships between security forces and the general public (Jackson, 2011). And as part of ongoing SSR programmes in Liberia, Haiti, Timor-Leste and Uganda, donors supported a series of routine forums between community-based women's groups and security actors (UN, 2013). However, much of the dialogue surrounding SSR at both national and international levels privileged the inclusion of professional, technically oriented, Western-style NGOs, which often lack legitimacy in the eyes of society or fail to represent the needs and interests of non-elite groups (Caparini, 2010; Hutton, 2010; Varisco, 2014). In the meantime, many SSR programmes have – unintentionally – ignored autochthonous forms of civil society, including religious and tribal groups, business associations and other "collective and voluntary associations of people who seek to advance common interests and values" (Caparini, 2010: 253). By sidelining these mid-range and grassroots actors, programme architects have missed opportunities to adapt SSR programmes to incorporate local resources and respond effectively to local needs.

The dearth of meaningful civil society engagement runs counter to the goal of 'local ownership', which is understood as "the extent to which local actors (however defined) exercise control or influence over the initiation, design and implementation of reform processes" (Donais, 2009: 118). This concept was prevalent in the first-generation articulation of SSR, and captures the notion that cultural 'insiders' – not donors – should be at the helm of decision making in SSR. This has not always been achieved in practice, however. Reflecting on prior interventions, one author said "For many donors, 'local ownership clearly means 'their' ownership of 'our' ideas'" (Suhrke, 2007: 1292, cited in Baker, 2010: 213). More recently, others have problematized local ownership as a concept, asking: Who has ownership? What do they own and how do they exercise this ownership? Who actually needs the security produced by SSR? (Baker, 2010). The underspecification of 'local ownership' is, on the one hand, indicative of the potential utility of Lederach's conflict transformation model, insofar as it distinguishes between actors along vertical lines (grassroots, mid-range and elite). On the other hand, it is also indicative of the tension between the abstraction of scholarship and the urgency of practice, which in this case involves making real-time decisions about communication and alliances with diverse constituencies.

A second criticism related to the *who* of SSR has emerged under the guise of 'state-centrism'. This refers to SSR programmes' disproportionate emphasis on formal government institutions in contexts where non-state actors may provide the majority of security and justice for the population, often with higher levels of legitimacy. State-centrism has been criticized as for making erroneous assumptions about the role of the state and the necessary trajectory of statebuilding (Baker, 2010; Egnell and Haldén, 2009; Lawrence, 2012; Schroeder *et al.*, 2014). Models of statecraft based on European history "are not 'merely' academic or of interest only to historians and sociologists" (Egnell and Haldén, 2009: 36). They

have "profound consequences for the enterprise of state-building as practitioners, politicians and academics coming from one particular tradition, which is often universalised and taken for granted, attempt to establish the state institutions of one tradition in very different contexts" (Egnell and Haldén, 2009: 36). The unexamined assumption that a 'stronger' state is both desirable and achievable has led many SSR donors to privilege institutional counterparts with recognizable Western forms: police, courts and prisons (Denney, 2014). State-centrism, according to several analysts, has been the cause of many shortcomings in the overall effectiveness of SSR programmes.

Scholar-practitioners embedded in the SSR community and scholars examining it from the outside have both criticized the negative conceptions of 'weak state' or 'fragile state' frequently used to describe countries facing large security deficits. These concepts allude to what is *absent*, rather than what is *present*. Instead, they have converged on the term 'hybrid' to describe security models that involve both state and non-state actors, and draw on formal, legal norms and other forms of authority. Such 'hybrid' models are the norm rather than the exception and have been documented in places as diverse as Central Asia (Egnell and Haldén, 2009), Liberia (Podder, 2013), Afghanistan (Jarstad, 2013), and Timor-Leste and the Palestinian Territories (Schroeder *et al.*, 2014). Recent theorization about hybrid governance and security models challenges SSR practitioners to examine unstated assumptions about the environments in which they operate and the goals they pursue. Thus, following several years of critical reflection on real experiences of SSR, conceptual refinement by scholars has helped hone understandings of core ideas, such as 'statebuilding' and 'hybrid security governance'. In the established dialectic between scholarship and practice in SSR, these ideas are likely to filter back into practice, influencing decisions about who – among this increasingly diverse set of actors – should be engaged. But *who* is only part of the equation; equally as important is *how*.

A third (and related) criticism present in second-generation SSR scholarship is outsiders' lack of deep, contextual knowledge and inadvertent failure to appreciate how local power dynamics affect SSR programmes. The OECD DAC Handbook and other official documents recognized SSR as a *political* process. Yet donors have often paid insufficient attention to the political conditions that shape the reception and implementation of proposed reforms (Berg, 2012; UN, 2013). Specifically, they have failed to thoroughly consider how relations among political elites and citizens influence the adoption (or rejection) of proposed reforms, ultimately affecting the attainment of SSR goals.

Lederach (1997) stresses the importance of attending to interpersonal, relational, structural and cultural aspects of change. This means considering not only the absolute position of relevant stakeholders, but also their relationship with respect to others, their place in the overall network and the possibilities of movement that this position affords them (Lederach, 2005). This relational perspective is paramount to understanding power dynamics but has, unfortunately, not always been adopted in SSR practice. Jackson (2011) explains how some practitioners see politicians as an obstacle to SSR, rather than recognizing them as critical stakeholders in the process. Yet, excluding them (or other actors with vested

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interest in the *status quo*) does not eliminate their political influence and may be counter-productive SSR in the long term. Superficial comprehension of the dynamics of competition and cooperation among all relevant actors obscures how their relationships affect long-term systemic transformation.

The fourth criticism levelled against SSR programmes in *practice* alludes to their constrained temporal horizon and linear vision of temporal progression. In theory, the ambitions of SSR have been recognized as requiring decades to fully materialize. Critical analysis of extant SSR programmes, however, has shown that the type of 'generational thinking' called for by Lederach (2005) is rare. Instead, the 'project-cycle mentality' of donors and NGOs has allowed short-term imperatives to eclipse long-term goals of SSR (Bryden and Keane, 2009). This leads to the preponderance of *ad hoc* approaches that are not necessarily guided by a long-term strategic vision and may prove unsustainable. This short-termism may be partially the product of chronic underfunding (Byrd, 2010). However, Sedra (2010b) has qualified this position saying, "Short-termism in SSR remains one of the foremost obstacles to the concept and one of the principal reasons for its poor impact. […] In many SSR cases, it is not that more resources are needed, only that they are more prudently used over a longer period of time" (2010:25).

Closely associated with criticisms of 'short-termism' are the well-known but scarcely articulated problems of linear approaches to change. As evidenced by how-to guides and programming manuals, SSR is often broken down into discrete phases. The OECD DAC handbook, for example, differentiates between post-conflict stabilization and long-term development, and discusses SSR in terms of inception, design, implementation and evaluation phases (OECD DAC, 2007). Yet, as at least one critic has noted that, "stabilization and SSR-type activities tend to overlap and rarely proceed in a linear or 'phased' manner" (Fitz-Gerald, 2010: 158). The danger with this is that linear approaches to change may inadvertently limit the menu of options available at a given moment, discourage 'iterative' re-engagement with decisions, discussions or activities dubbed 'finalized', and foment the short-term perspectives criticized earlier. Thus, at least one author has concluded that "reform is best understood as forming part of a dialectic, rather than (as SSR would have it) a causal or linear process" (Hills, 2008, cited in Hills, 2010: 179). Complex, non-linear and sensitive to internal power dynamics: these are among the characteristics that make SSR processes so difficult to visualize in advance. They are also another indication of the overlaps between SSR and Lederach's theories of conflict transformation, a point to which I return in my concluding remarks.

5   Conclusion

In the preceding text, I have traced the evolution of SSR over nearly two decades, showing how productive tensions between theory and practice have advanced knowledge. In particular, I have juxtaposed first- and second-generation scholarship on SSR, arguing that theoretical advances have benefited from the critiques that emerged out of practice and, in particular, out of critical reflection on the

'conceptual–contextual' divide. These critiques include weak civil society partici-
pation, state-centric approaches to security governance, superficial comprehen-
sion of relational dynamics between local actors, and constrained temporal hori-
zons. The intellectual architects of SSR anticipated these problems, but theorized
that they could be averted with sufficient attention to 'systems' and sufficient
cultivation of 'local ownership'. Yet, in the translation of broad, theoretical con-
cepts to specific, historically situated practices, there is bound to be slippage, and
it is at this nexus where new knowledge can emerge. In this case, the second gen-
eration of SSR scholarship offered subtle analytical correctives to earlier models
by advancing work on hybrid security governance and the politics of reform.

John Paul Lederach's writings on conflict transformation have multiple con-
ceptual overlaps with those of SSR. As discussed previously, their aspirations and
theories of change are largely aligned. Yet, there is a difference of degree, with
conflict transformation placing greater emphasis on generational thinking and on
the relational dynamics between elite, mid-range and grassroots actors. The same
relational perspective leads Lederach (2005) to view actors not in isolation but as
part of a large, interconnected web. These insights – rooted in practice rather
than theory – proved surprisingly prescient of second generation SSR scholarship,
with its interest in relational spheres not encompassed within the orbit of the
state. The challenge for SSR, moving forward, is both conceptual and practical:
how to build better theory out of practice-based knowledge and how to employ
this theory to improve the practices of transformation.

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