

The Politics of SSR

Louise R. Andersen¹

¹ Danish Institute for International Studies, Defence and Security, Copenhagen, Denmark

lan@diis.dk

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has become a standard element in UN multidimensional peace operations and progress in this area is now regarded as key in defining the 'exit strategy' for the peacekeeping operation. This has underlined the need for 'integrated approaches' that draw on the combined efforts of political, military and development actors. At the same time, it has drawn attention to the inherent tensions of liberal interventionism, including the troubled relationship between 'human security' and 'state security', and between 'statebuilding' and 'peacebuilding'. As such, SSR has emerged as a major field of contestation for an international community that is trying to 'get its act together' when intervening in violent conflicts in Africa.

A curious aspect of this debate is the emphasis placed on 'realism' (as opposed to the allegedly blue-eyed idealism of earlier interventions). This comes through in two contradictory ways. Firstly, as a return to the state-centric realism of International Relations theory, which is implicit in the strong calls for focusing international efforts on ensuring that the national security apparatus is capable of upholding law and order within the territory. Secondly, and in direct contrast to this, as a pragmatic call for moving beyond state-centrism and base programming on 'what works' locally. The latter approach envisions a large role for non-state actors and traditional authorities, whereas the former approach focuses on formal state institutions such as the army and the police.

This paper explores how the hegemonic discourse on liberal interventionism has evolved in recent years within the field of SSR. It does so by identifying and comparing competing international understandings of SSR. The analysis will be based on a reading of policy papers and statements from international agencies, regional organisations and donor governments engaged in post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. The aim of the paper is to identify the boundaries of the political space within which discussions of SSR can be conducted at the country level. The underlying assumption of the paper is thus that the ways in which the members of the international community debate an issue have profound implications for the ways in which national political debates are shaped.