

# **The Pursuit of SSR in North Africa**

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## **Introduction**

Promoting Security Sector Reform/SSR/ at a regional level has been the major concern of African Civil Society Organizations/CSOs/ dealing with security issues<sup>2</sup> since mid-2005. As a result SSR is increasingly serving as a powerful organizing force among African academics and international actors dedicated to conflict prevention and poverty reduction. Africa is one of the most unstable and conflict-prone areas in the world and SSR is critical to alleviating this insatiability. Indeed, an abiding theme in this paper is that most of the problems of peace and governance in the African continent are in many ways linked to the nature, history, culture and conduct of the Security forces/Systems.<sup>3</sup> To this effect, SSR has now become a central component of efforts to overcome fragility and conflict in a number of countries.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to reflect on the issues surrounding the governance of the security sector in Africa. It is focused on the regional dimensions of Security Sector Reform/SSR/ lacks details and requires much refinement. However, it throws into sharp perspective the following otherwise puzzling challenges of pursuing SSR in North Africa.

## **The Regionalization of SSR**

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is usually considered at the national level. In practice, however, there are important regional and sub-regional considerations to be taken into account, and increasingly in Africa – although not sufficiently so – SSR is being given a role in the regional and sub-regional structures of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). SSR is now recognized as essential to recovery from conflict, peace building, state-building, and conflict-prevention at regional and sub-regional levels as well. It is felt that; the complexity of conflicts, the multidimensionality of 'widened' security issues, the erosion of sovereignty, the transnational character of the new security threats and the new wars, the growing pressure on the UN system for peacekeeping and other actions, the pressure for democratization and security sector reform, and the complex effects of globalization all lend themselves to regional solutions.<sup>4</sup> Central to any serious, meaningful, realistic and long-term SSR is the formulation and design of National Security Strategies/NSSs/.NSSs are an important precondition for regional security as well as the reform of security institutions.<sup>5</sup> This also helps in building confidence among states and contributes to ensuring predictability of decision making by governments with regard to their neighbors. A critical issue to the North African context.

The African continent presents a diversified terrain for SSR processes. This is also extremely relevant because the nature and mission of security forces varies from region to region. Hence, a major consideration should be the cultural differences inherited from colonization not only in term of language but in terms of institutional, organizational and procedural structures. In this regard SSR is more advanced in Western and Southern Africa; it is at its infancy in Central and Eastern Africa, while North Africa is the last affected by the whole development.

## SSR in the Deserts

The Maghreb is lagging behind in terms of good governance, and the spread of democratic norms, values and principles. It would not be an exaggeration to say that even the word SSR is not widely known in the sub-region. This is true both in terms of processes, institutions and norms. In the Maghreb it is not only the norms and principles but also the process of building a regional architecture for peace and security is far behind than other African sub-regions. The idea of security sector reform (SSR) in the Arab region of Africa seems highly unrealistic, given the sensitivity of the issues involved. The security sector in many Arab countries suffers from several structural, functional and technical problems. The problem in North Africa is partly an extension of this. These include insufficient training for relevant actors; the lack of legal frameworks that would promote transparency, for instance in finance; a lack of respect for human rights; and ethnic and sectarian divisions.

This may well have been because of the traditional security concerns, and concomitant lack of transparency, in that part of the continent. In the Maghreb, a robust regional peace and security order has been elusive. In fact, North Africa has rarely known peace or democracy. It is a region in which interstate conflicts, tyranny and human rights abuses have long hampered the emergence of well-governed states that represent the interests of their citizens and which cooperate to build a stable inter-state order. The sub-region is one of the most ill governed in the world, and lacks both the subjective and objective conditions for the rapid establishment of such an order. Is this due to culture and tradition? Or is it due to the internal religious, ethnic and cultural divides? Is it the internal structure of the states and the weakness of democratic representation? Or the absence of a strong sub-regional security organization? How does the Maghreb compare to other regions of the world that have also lagged behind in democratization and suffered interstate rivalry?

What is it that is unique about the region? What kind of institutions should be established to underpin this? Should the priority be to establish good diplomatic and political relations between states? Is democratization a necessary pre-requisite for stability? To what extent can discussion and agreement on SSR among stakeholders in the sub-region establish a consensus on core values, which in turn serve as a foundation for a peace and security order? All the above are relevant questions to ask, but the problem is deeper than that. Why are most of the governments in the sub-region unpredictable? Is it related to how security policy is formulated? Or is it due to the very nature of the states themselves? All this compels us to pay special attention to SSR, DDR, as well as the development of National Security Strategies/NSS's/ and face broader issues of dealing with militarized political culture. This is a neglected but crucially important issue. Refocusing our framework of analysis to these issues will serve as an important contribution to thinking and policymaking in the sub-region.

The limited availability of entry points and information as well as the weakness of the civil society in that region may also reflect the lack of significant security system developments

there. Clearly, the role of CSOs varies from region to region (discussed above) as it is related to the level of democratization and the progress made in political transitions. In addition, it has been difficult for Arab civil society representatives to engage with those in charge of the security sector in their countries. This is paradoxical the more so because Africa has the distinction of being the only continent where the civil society began to actively engage in SSR research and policy processes long before states and regional organizations began to take the issue seriously.<sup>6</sup> Despite measures taken to facilitate this process, the sector, like the political regimens that control it, remains resistant to change. This would be consistent with its limited movement toward political liberalization. Understandably, the obstacle in most of these countries is immensely complex and multi-layered.

A large number of policies have to be transformed; the required changes are likely to be substantial and radical given the undemocratic and militarist nature of security policy under authoritarian rule; and the reforms require significant changes in organizational structure and the expertise, skills, disposition and behavior of staff.<sup>7</sup> The problem of complexity is compounded by the general lack of skills i.e. lack of managerial, planning, financial and policy expertise in a new political dispensation. Whatever genuine intentions they may have, members of the executive and parliament might be unfamiliar with contemporary debates on security and with the range of policy options that are open to them. A tendency towards conservatism and a reliance on traditional security perspectives is natural in these circumstances.

Undoubtedly, SSR is in its infancy in the North African sub-region. Recent overtures and disparate initiatives-though belatedly, however, means that the topic may be gaining prominence.<sup>8</sup> Central to all SSR processes in Africa is the role of the civil society. This reinforces the argument that the process of incorporating SSR into the African Union, and sub regional organizations, cannot be separated from the myriad processes of establishing democracy, good governance, institutional capacity and peace across the continent. The same is true with the North African region. To this effect, understanding the unique features of the Maghreb is critical. The dangers of incomplete and crude analyses are that external actors may apply inappropriate pressure on the government; they push government to move more quickly than is sound.<sup>9</sup> Any SSR process in the region should aim to relocate the debate within general political reform, rather than confining it to the security sector. By so doing it informs not only the debate on how to design a workable strategy for SSR but also indicates the general approaches and specific directions that need to be adopted to resolve the conflict in the sub region. This aside, the huge disparity among Africa's sub-regions remains to be a structural logjam for a workable SSR framework in the continent. This makes the issue of complementarity and coherence among the different regional initiatives ever more pivotal. Most importantly it reinforces the sense of urgency in initiating and strengthening security discourse in the Maghreb.

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<sup>2</sup> Among which the African Security Sector Network/ASSN/ at a continental level, and the Center for Policy Research & Dialogue/CPRD/at the Horn of African level play a crucial role.

<sup>3</sup> Medhane Tadesse. Overcoming Challenges to SSR in Africa. Kampala, Uganda July 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Medhane Tadesse, the Role of Regional Organizations and Civil Society. Journalists Training on the African peace and Security Architecture and SSR. November 20-22, 2007. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>5</sup> A major prerequisite for realistic and sustainable SSR, particularly in the African context, is the development of national security strategies. The lack of well defined and widely shared NSSs has made the African state unpredictable.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on this see Medhane Tadesse. SSR and the African Union: A review of the PCR. Prepared for FES. March 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Laure Nathan. 'Operationalizing the principle of Local ownership in Security sector reform'. 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Governance Insights: Promoting Peace and Democracy through Security Sector Reform. November 2009. These include some of the work being initiated by the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), a network of independent Arab research and policy forum within the region. ARI has recently undertaken SSR-related empirical research in some North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt.

<sup>9</sup> Medhane Tadesse, External Actors and SSR in Africa: A Policy Brief to the African Union. ASSN, August 2009.