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# Insurgency, militias and DDR as part of security sector reconstruction in Iraq: how not to do it

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**Abstract**

One of the most demanding challenges since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 has been the establishment of security and stability. The continuation of violence by myriad armed groups is yet to be tackled as part of a comprehensive security sector reform initiative in which effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants will constitute a litmus test of success or failure. In Iraq, much insurgent and militia activity is shadowy and difficult to trace. However, those involved can be divided into two main categories: insurgent groups; and Shi'a militias. In a highly complex and insecure environment such as this, resulting from the presence of many armed groups with varying agendas and objectives, the conduct of a DDR process will be an extremely sensitive and testing task both for Iraq and the international community. Appropriate preparation for such a process is clearly an imperative for the establishment of peace in the country.

## Introduction

More than 91,000 civilians died in violence in Iraq between March 2003 (the start of the United States-led invasion) and March 2008. Although the average is down slightly on previous years, 53 civilians per day are still losing their lives due to vehicle bombs, gunfire, and executions (Iraq Body Count, 2008). In 2007, according to the US Department of State, there were 6,212 'terror' attacks, resulting in the killing, injuring, and kidnapping of more than 44,000 people (National Counterterrorism Center, 2007). A major national survey conducted in March 2008 revealed that only 44 per cent of the members of the population thought that they enjoyed freedom of movement, falling to 14 and 18 per cent in Basra and Mosul, respectively (Cordesman, 2008a). The *Iraq Commission Report* identifies three broad categories of sources of violence in the country:

criminal gangs; the Iraqi insurgency; and militias.[1] This paper focuses primarily on the latter two groups.

There are between 50 and 74 insurgent units in the country with around 50,000 combatants. Based primarily on kinship ties and locality, these groups are located mainly in the Sunni-dominated provinces and have links with former Iraqi political and security structures, such as Ba'ath Party, the Republican Guard, and the paramilitary Fedayeen group. In addition, there are some Islamist insurgency groups, including the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Partisans of the Sunna Army, the Mujahadeen's Army, Muhammad's Army, and the Islamic Resistance Movement in Iraq. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), formed by a small number of mostly foreign fighters, can also be included in this group. AQI has played a significant role in the instigation of sectarian violence, particularly the targeting of sacred Shi'a shrines and mosques.

Militias, meanwhile, involve approximately 100,000 combatants in total, and include three broad groups: the Kurdish peshmerga; the Shi'a militia that was established in exile; and the Shi'a militia that emerged after the toppling of the regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in April 2003. Within the Kurdish peshmerga, there are two main groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which have already been integrated into the new Iraqi security apparatus to some extent. The Badr Brigade,[2] with around 15,000 combatants, was set up in exile in the 1970s and received training from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, while the Mahdi Army, founded by Moqtada al-Sadr after the invasion of the country, has around 50,000 combatants in its ranks (The Foreign Policy Centre, 2007).

In addition to these insurgency and militia groups, there are around 90,000 combatants operating under the umbrella of the 'Sons of Iraq'. These are primarily Sunni security forces that the US arms and supports at a cost of USD 300 per person per month.

Iraq is a complex and challenging security environment, with different sources of violence conducted by ethnic, sectarian, and tribal armed non-state actors (NSAs) with

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[1] Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, Baroness Jay of Paddington and Lord King of Bridgwater took the lead in preparing this report. See the Foreign Policy Centre (2007).

[2] The Badr Brigade is the military army of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (SICI).

large numbers of combatants. Consequently, Schofield and Zenko (2004, p. 678) argue that 'Iraq cannot be made politically stable by an exclusive reliance on institution building, social engineering and re-education because a major driving force of its behaviour is its insecurity'. Security sector reform (SSR), which has already occurred on an ad hoc basis with the restructuring of the national army and police force, will thus play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the country. How Iraq deals with its insurgency and militia groups will be of particular significance to SSR. Hence, the focus of this paper is on possible ways of dealing with their disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

In order to recommend possible strategies for such a sensitive and controversial process, this study seeks to identify how *not* to carry out such programmes. The next section, therefore, presents a brief conceptual exploration of SSR and DDR in the context of a war-to-peace transition. This is followed by an investigation of security sector reconstruction challenges in Iraq in light of lessons learned in Afghanistan.[3] Although there are major differences between these two countries, such as the scope and duration of violence experienced, their levels of development, the quantity of natural resources available to support reconstruction, and the historical experiences of governance structures, there are also a number of good reasons why Afghanistan can serve as a comparator:

- like Iraq, it is a complex setting with many armed NSAs that formed different alliances and fought in different phases of a long civil war;
- the external military interventions in both countries were launched by the US and its allies following the events of 11 September 2001;
- experience of civilian–military relationships in Afghanistan has already been utilised in Iraq in military-led reconstruction efforts; and
- Afghanistan has completed its DDR programme, involving more than 60,000 combatants, and it is in the process of dealing with 'illegal' NSAs.

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[3] Fieldwork was undertaken in Afghanistan in June 2005 and July 2006.

The paper concludes with a set of strategic planning recommendations for Iraq, specifying essential parameters for a future DDR process in the country in order to avoid mistakes made in DDR planning and implementation in Afghanistan.

**DDR in the context of security sector reconstruction**
The principal objective of DDR is to contribute to the establishment of security and stability in a post-conflict environment. One can describe it as a process of social, political, and economic transformation so that former combatants have a realistic chance of integrating into civilian society (Gleichmann et al., 2004; United Nations, 2006).[4] Rather than a sequential process, it needs to be considered as a combination of overlapping activities from the collection of weapons and the disbanding and return of former combatants to their 'homes' to the provision of opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and socio-political reconciliation (Berdal, 1996; Colletta, Markus and Wiederhofer, 1996).

The continuation of war politics in the peacebuilding process is of particular significance to DDR (Özerdem, 2008). Kingma (2001, p. 411) emphatically underlines the fact that during reintegration, 'politics comes first', which in an ironic way makes the political will of both internal and external actors imperative for successful implementation. Without political commitment, reintegration programmes, no matter how well planned and implemented, cannot be carried out successfully.

This is the chief reason why a symbiotic relationship exists between peacebuilding and DDR: without a successful DDR process, sustainable post-war recovery is hard to

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[4] The *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)* (United Nations, 2006) defines *disarmament* as the collection, control, and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the development of responsible arms management programmes in a post-conflict context. Meanwhile, *demobilisation* is defined as a planned process by which the armed force of the government and/or opposition or factional forces either downsize or completely disband. Having been demobilised and transported to their community of choice, the former combatants and their families must establish themselves in a civilian environment. (Reinsertion assistance, which is intended to ameliorate the process, often includes post-discharge orientation, food assistance, health and educational support and a cash allowance.) Finally, *reintegration* is the process whereby former combatants and their families are integrated into the social, economic, and political life of (civilian) communities. It is important to note that these three phases are interrelated, rather than sequential, although they can be thought of as part of a sequence of activities that have to happen for a society to recover from armed conflict.

achieve. Conversely, the viability of a DDR process is likely to be in doubt without a successful peacebuilding process (Knight and Özerdem, 2004). Unsuccessful DDR programmes not only have negative ramifications for the security of that particular country, but also for neighbouring states, as in a number of settings in West Africa and the Great Lakes region. Liberia, for example, failed to put in place 'an effective package of incentives that would … pressure fighters to disarm' and disengage from their respective factions between 1997 and 2002 (Pugh, 2000, p. 205). This meant that fighting between dissident and government forces continued in an unending cycle of instability and violence, with regional spillovers (Olonisakin and Alao, 2005). The possibility of demobilised combatants without proper reintegration becoming 'spoilers' of peace in such post-conflict environments is also underlined by Humphreys and Weinstein (2008). In support of this view, Muggah (2004, p. 25) asserts that 'DDR cannot be carried out in isolation of the instability plaguing other countries in the Great Lakes'.

However, unless other peacebuilding challenges, such as insecurity, governance problems concerning lawlessness, dysfunctional justice and corruption, economic constraints, and damaged societal relationships, are addressed, the implementation of DDR, particularly its reintegration phase, is likely to face insurmountable difficulties (Kingma, 2001). Assefa (1992, p. 40) contends that if combatants 'face severe unemployment or grave difficulties in resuming a normal life after a peace agreement', their enthusiasm 'for pursuing peace could be greatly reduced'. Moreover, Heller (2005, p. 122) states that even a well-funded and designed DDR process, such as the one in Côte d'Ivoire, becomes a 'non-starter' or a factor in the further exacerbation of political tensions if 'there is no security, no trust, and no nascent cooperation between the parties'.

In parallel to its interwoven relationships with peacebuilding, it is also necessary to consider DDR as part of a wider security equation—hence, SSR has become a key peacebuilding tool since the end of the Cold War. As part of the liberal peace agenda, the international community has implemented SSR in almost all contexts where it has undertaken state-building initiatives in recent years, from Bosnia-Herzegovina, East Timor and Kosovo to Afghanistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone. SSR also occurred in a number of former Soviet and East European countries during their transformation from socialist regimes to liberal market economies (Paris, 2004).

The principal aim of SSR is to establish security structures that will be efficient and effective in their use of resources, that are able to function under civilian control, and ultimately of course, that are able to provide security to the population. SSR, therefore, has political, economic, institutional and societal dimensions, and thus it has significant implications for the sustainability of peace in post-conflict environments (Brzoska and Law, 2006). It is one of the most controversial and difficult post-conflict challenges, as post-conflict security actors are often affected by a high level of polarisation due to their ethnicity, religion, and political affiliations. In addition, they are undermined by a lack of professional standards, resulting in corruption, uncontrolled spending, and nepotism (Bryden and Hänggi, 2004).

As one of the most contested concepts in international relations, understanding of 'security' has changed from 'physical security' with a realist dimension to 'human security' involving, for instance, economics, the environment, food, and health. The new 'securitisation' perspective, according to Hänggi (2004, p. 2), is about human development issues being 'explicitly characterised and treated as security concerns'. For 'security sector', he recommends a conceptualisation that incorporates both statutory (such as armed forces, border guards, intelligence services, gendarmerie, penal institutions, and police) and non-statutory (such as guerrilla groups, militias, and private military and security companies) security forces.

The important role played by civil society (such as the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and research institutes) and regional and trans-regional organisations (such as the European Union (EU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) in moving from a security to a governance perspective is also recognised within this inclusive understanding of the security sector.

With regard to the post-conflict context, Bryden and Hänggi (2004) opt for the term 'security sector reconstruction' to differentiate it from SSR activities undertaken in developmental and post-authoritarian contexts. The main reason for this is that some key security sector reconstruction initiatives tend to involve the DDR of former combatants, humanitarian mine action, control of small arms and light weapons (SALW), and transitional justice, which may not necessarily be typical aspects of the other two

contexts. This paper adopts the term 'security sector reconstruction' to make such a distinction.

Finally, in their review of security sector reconstruction experiences, Bryden and Hänggi (2004) concentrate on four principal themes:

- framing conditions;
- the involvement of external actors;
- local ownership of the process; and
- sequencing of activities.

These will also constitute the main analytical framework of this paper.

With respect to *framing conditions,* analysts recommend focusing on security, political and socio-economic histories, which are, according to Bryden and Hänggi (2004, p. 35), 'interrelated, deeply ingrained and can only be influenced to a certain extent by external actors'. The way factionalism persists in a post-conflict environment is closely related to the duration, type, and impact of a conflict, while political development prior to the conflict is critical for the way in which security sector reconstruction is planned and implemented. The socio-economic context is also likely to be a decisive variable: factors ranging from the availability of financial resources and infrastructure to the human capital of a war-torn society are all crucial for security sector reconstruction.

In relation to the *involvement of external actors,* some of the aspects identified by Bryden and Hänggi (2004) are: the legitimacy of the intervention; the level and duration of political commitment; coordination of and cooperation within activities; and the nature of contributions vis-à-vis the specific needs of the reform context. As will be shown in the analysis section, these issues have played a significant part in hampering security sector reconstruction processes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As far as *local ownership of the process* is concerned, the principal themes that have emerged from different environments are: national will; the involvement of local actors, including civil society; building local capacities; restoring faith in new security structures; and long-term sustainability.

Finally, with respect to *sequencing of activities,* it is imperative to recognise that security sector reconstruction 'must go hand in hand with a broader democratic transformation of the country's political and legal system' (Bryden and Hänggi, 2004, p. 38). In other words, rather than perceiving security sector reconstruction in isolation, planning and implementation of the process need to be linked to overall governance and justice issues.

**Challenges to a future DDR process for armed NSAs in Iraq**

*Framing conditions*

When US forces reached Baghdad in April 2003, the prospects for implementation of a security sector reconstruction programme in Iraq seemed to be much better than those that existed in Afghanistan. Having experienced violence for more than 20 years, Afghanistan after the 2002 Bonn Agreement was a devastated country with around five million displaced people, more than 10 million landmines, less than one-quarter of the population enjoying access to safe water, and an overall literacy rate of less than 30 per cent (UNDP, 2004). By contrast, despite having been badly affected by United Nations (UN) economic sanctions imposed from 1995 onwards, Iraq was still a medium-income country with a rich pool of natural resources and with a relatively well-established infrastructure, a bureaucracy, services, and an educated human capital base. One should note that there has always been a large gap between the capital, Kabul, and the rest of the country regarding security, services, and infrastructure. According to Rubin, Hamidzada and Stoddard (2003), those who live in rural areas, comprising around 85 per cent of the population, have always viewed the state as alien and interaction has occurred only when the state has wanted to interfere in the lives of the peasantry. Iraq, therefore, with its experience of a 'strongly centralised dictatorial regime', was to some extent a more conducive environment for security sector reconstruction than Afghanistan where governance was based on 'a feudal system with much power held by regional actors' (Bryden and Hänggi, 2004, p. 34).

As early as 2004, however, Iraq had emerged as an arena for intensifying conflict among its different ethnic (80 per cent Arabs and 15 per cent Kurds) and religious groups (60–65 per cent Shi'a, 32–37 per cent Sunni, and approximately 3 per cent Christian). Killings, kidnappings, and suicide-bomb attacks by myriad armed NSAs started to become a norm of daily life, further polarising society along those ethno-religious lines. It is estimated

that up to 60 per cent of the politically motivated violence was related to those insurgency groups formed by the former Ba'ath regime's security apparatus—the 'de-Ba'athification' process undertaken in May 2003, making some 750,000 people unemployed, was a major contributor (Dodge, 2005).

The Sunni insurgency has always drawn on a strong nationalist undercurrent in establishing its political ideology and its stronghold has centred on the area known as the 'Sunni Triangle' (between the cities of Baghdad, Fallujah, and Ramadi). Tribal links have also been very important for the Sunni insurgency, such as the 50,000-strong Albueissa tribe in the Fallujah area.

Similarly, the Shi'a insurgency has also drawn on strong religious and nationalist undercurrents and the combination of these two sentiments was one of the main strengths of militia groups such as the Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army in mobilising people and resources. In addition, the Shi'a insurgency highlighted a wide range of injustices experienced by the Shi'a population under Sunni-dominated governance structures both during the Saddam era and before, adding a social movement dimension to its actions (Hashim, 2007).

Around 80 per cent of the violence in 2005, though, was due to organised crime—it is important to note that a wide assortment of gangs was already flourishing under Saddam's regime. The emergence of a security vacuum with the occupation of the country allowed them to take advantage of availability of SALW and disillusioned security personnel to strengthen their capabilities further (Dodge, 2005). A similar polarisation occurred in Afghanistan due to a culture of 'warlordism', which, according to Sedra (2002), led to different permutations of alliances and groups throughout the conflict. Military commanders or tribal chieftains acting as warlords controlled large groups of combatants and weapons, and they used their military power to acquire substantial economic benefits from a series of illegal activities, such as 'taxation' of goods at borders, drug and arms trafficking, and extortion of money from the civilian population. It is interesting that such a culture of warlordism successfully emerged in Iraq in a very short period after the US-led occupation.

*The involvement of external actors*

The Pentagon believed that the Iraqi population would welcome US forces with open arms, seeing them as liberators. They were not, and, consequently, Iraq has been one of the most dangerous countries in the world since 2003. According to Diamond (2004), this mistaken assumption was the main reason for the country's security conundrum, as it meant that the US forces deployed were in fewer numbers than could realistically be expected to provide effective security during the occupation period. In addition to their inadequate strength, combat units were expected to fulfil policing responsibilities in mostly urban environments. Without appropriate training and experience, their presence did little to prevent looting, destruction, and general criminality. According to Dodge (2005, p. 9), the lack of an effective response by US forces 'helped turn criminal violence and looting into an organised and politically motivated insurgency'. With a huge security vacuum, it was hard to make meaningful progress in reconstructing the country—even the provision of basic services, such as electricity and water, became untenable. The security situation facing the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad became so tenuous that the only way to ensure the security of staff was to hide in the three-square-mile Green Zone.

In an environment of chaos and panic, one of the main contributors to insecurity was the 'self-disbanding' of national security forces. On the arrival of US forces in Baghdad, most Iraqi soldiers left their barracks and went home. Initially this was good for the CPA, as it was important to show that the Saddam regime was finished and that, in the era of liberation, the country would reconstruct its security apparatus.[5] Although Jay Garner, the Head of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), rightly pointed out that the disbanding of the Iraqi army might generate security risks and advised its employment in the reconstruction of the country, Paul Bremer III, the Head of the CPA, went ahead with the move in May 2003 (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008). The CPA was reluctant therefore to take any action to attract Iraqi soldiers back to barracks. According to Hashim (2003), there was actually a good opportunity for an organised demobilisation and reintegration process when the members of the regular army and special security units re-emerged after the cessation of hostilities in May 2003 and demonstrated for their paychecks in Baghdad. Without any DDR provision, though, 'the

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[5] Paul Bremer III, the Head of the CPA from 2003–04, argued that the disbanding of the Iraqi army was 'carefully considered by top civilian and military members of the American government. And it was the right decision' (Bremer, 2007).

United States turned as many as one million Iraqi men loose on the streets with no money, no way of supporting their families, and no skills other than how to use a shovel and a gun' (Pollack, 2006, p. 8). Pouligny (2004, p. 15) considers Bremer's decision to be one of the key reasons for 'the rapid proliferation of new militias and armed groups based on religious, ethnic and tribal lines'.

Because the CPA was largely isolated from the people of Iraq and inadequately equipped to take decisive military action to respond to the security challenges posed by armed NSAs, the security situation has worsened over time, as it has become much easier for these groups to recruit unemployed and disillusioned young men. More importantly, in the first three years after the invasion of the country, the response strategy of the US army was one of 'shock and awe', creating huge resentment among the civilian population, rather than focusing on winning 'hearts and minds', as was the policy in Afghanistan (Sepp, 2007). Nevertheless, there were problems in Afghanistan, too. To implement this policy, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces have been involved in various relief and recovery programmes through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) with the objective of breaking down relations between local populations and armed NSAs. However, the deployment of most PRTs in low security areas did not take place until 2004, and their work confused civilian–military identities in the eyes of many Afghans. With adequate security support, the window of opportunity immediately following the Bonn Agreement could have been used more effectively to implement DDR successfully, but instead, as pointed out by Lopez (2007, p. 246), 'the coalition forces were dedicated to the hunt for Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. There was little attempt to force warlords to comply with central government requests to disarm'.

To deal with the DDR challenge, Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) was launched in 2003. With a projected life span of three years, the ANBP was to act as the principal planning and implementation agent for the DDR strategy. Its mandate was to provide assistance to the government of Afghanistan for the DDR of Afghan Military Forces (AMF),[6] costing nearly USD 141 million, of which more than USD 91 million

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[6] The Afghan DDR programme began with the verification of combatants, a procedure carried out by a Regional Verification Committee (RVC) consisting of five respected civilian individuals from that particular area. It was only after verification that a Mobile Disarmament Unit (MDU) was deployed to

was provided by Japan, the lead nation in the DDR process. The Afghan DDR programme closed in June 2005.

The Afghan SSR process in general includes another four pillars:

- restructuring of the Afghan national army by the US;
- restructuring of the police force by Germany;
- reform of the justice system by Italy; and
- the fight against narcotics by the UK.

This five-pillar SSR system has proved highly problematic owing to the lack of coordination between the lead countries. For example, Germany has viewed police reform more in terms of Western-style community policing, while the US has tried to influence the process to establish a counter-insurgency force (Özerdem, 2008). Another problem related to Japan's role as the lead country on DDR, given that such an

work with a particular military unit, providing the functions of disarmament operations, security, and administration. Within each MDU, there were representatives from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the ANBP—the latter provided an international member of staff as the team leader. The disarmament phase comprised three main steps: check the identity of the candidate against the verification list prepared by the RVC and confirm the eligibility of his weapon; issue a day pass so that the candidate could have access to a regional ANBP office; and transfer collected weapons to the central storage facility and register all necessary information on weapons, such as their model and serial number, and send this to all ANBP offices via a satellite link. All ineligible weapons, explosives and ammunition collected during the disarmament phase were handed to the HALO Trust for destruction.

The entire demobilisation process lasted for only one day, during which former AMF combatants had to go through a five-step process. First, they were briefed and shown a documentary on the DDR process. Second, a caseworker interviewed them to obtain information on their education, skills, work experience, and aspirations. Third, they were asked to choose an appropriate reintegration package with the help of their caseworker who also acted as an employment officer. Fourth, they had to take an oath of conduct, promising not to bear arms for illegitimate purposes. Fifth, they were given a food package of 126 kilograms. Fingerprints and photographs were taken and at the end of the day, they were issued with an identification card based on the registration of all information collected during the interview process. Finally, they were asked to return to their regional ANBP office on a given date for a job assignment.

The reintegration phase aimed to provide a wide selection of packages, ranging from agriculture, business opportunities, de-mining, and vocational training to wage labour, teacher training, opportunities in the construction sector, and joining the national army and police force. The ANBP worked with 31 partners to implement these reintegration packages.

undertaking largely contradicted its own constitution, which forbids support for or involvement in any overseas military process. Consequently, the DDR process in Afghanistan was a careful balancing act for Japan; it had to consider the reaction of its parliament in all DDR decisions. Given that rule of law is the weakest aspect of the governance system in Afghanistan, this tended to undermine the DDR process—there were always issues of legitimacy relating to the participation of warlords as candidates in local and national elections (Bhatia, 2007).

It is also important to note that to provide adequate security for the DDR of armed NSAs, the international community needs to maintain a presence in the country. However, given that one of the main demands of Iraqi insurgents is the removal of US forces from the country, this issue needs to be handled carefully (Dodge, 2006). It is clear that the departure of US-led international armed forces would create a security vacuum, and as seen in Afghanistan and during the early days of the occupation in Iraq, such a void will likely derail any attempts at reintegration. Without a 'secure' environment, as various DDR experiences demonstrate (such as those in Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), it will be impossible to convince any armed NSAs to lay down their weapons.

As serious problems of 'legitimacy' and 'trust' are associated with the occupation forces in Iraq, it will be necessary to opt for an international peacekeeping force, preferably under the umbrella of the UN. But as Dodge (2007) rightly points out, '[o]nce 160,000 American troops have gone home I can't see the United Nations, or indeed the international community at large, intervening once again . . . I think the best we can hope for is a slow move towards multilateralising the occupation, both politically and militarily'.

*Local ownership of the process*
The Afghan DDR process was also criticised for its lack of local ownership: the ANBP almost exclusively planned and implemented it. The Afghanistan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (ADRC), representing the government of Afghanistan, had minimal involvement (symbolic rather than active) in the process.[7] The hosting by the Afghan government of more than 20 different warlords within its ministerial structures was argued to be the main reason for an externally driven process. According to the

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[7] Interviews with ADRC staff who wish to remain anonymous, 10 May 2005.

ANBP, though, the lead role played by the government in the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), including approximately 1,800 separate militias with some 80,000 combatants in total, demonstrated the international community's commitment to sharing responsibility for security sector reconstruction with the Afghan authorities.[8] However, field research conducted in Afghanistan revealed that the international community failed to pass institutional memory from the ANBP to the DIAG process. It is as if there has not been a major DDR process in the country—Afghanistan was asked to invent the wheel twice in confronting its DDR challenge.

The process to identify which armed NSAs to include in the Afghan DDR initiative was also arbitrary. A loose network of military units that had fought against the Soviets and the Taliban formed the targeted caseload of the AMF. By the time the DDR process was initiated in February 2003, these units had registered themselves with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). However, the commanders of hundreds of armed groups used military power to acquire political and economic benefits throughout the country's security sector reconstruction process. Bhatia (2007, p. 100) questioned the legitimacy of making such a distinction between the AMF and other armed NSAs, asserting that it was a 'by-product of the ability of strongmen or states to provide protection'. It seems that the identity of 'Mujahideen' was used to make a distinction between different armed NSAs, giving legitimacy to some to participate in the DDR process, while denying the same opportunity to others. 'Jihad'—fighting for the protection of Islam—is what Mujahideen groups insist constitutes the source of their legitimacy, but in the protracted Afghan war, most of these groups were involved in various human rights abuses against their own people and as far as many Afghans are concerned, 'warlordism' is what they actually do best.

In some cases, even combatants who were members of the same armed group were separated according to those for and those against DDR and the DIAG simply because of funding restrictions. This was an especially risky practice, as it left many combatants feeling dissatisfied and angry (Dennys, 2005). Furthermore, some militias were allowed to continue their activities as private security companies (PSCs) while others were excluded from the DIAG process because of their tribal links, raising even more questions about the way armed NSAs were grouped into those with the 'right to rule' and those who

8 Interview with Peter Babbington, Chief of the ANBP, Kabul, 12 May 2005.

posed a 'danger' to peace (Bhatia, 2007). Furthermore, the DIAG process collected only an estimated 10 per cent of the SALW possessed by these groups and caused delays in the introduction of laws on gun control in 2005 and on PSCs in 2007 (Özerdem, 2008). In sum, the Afghan experience shows that an arbitrary distinction between armed NSAs by the international community was a political move with potentially high risks for peace in the medium-to-long term.

As indicated by the Afghanistan case study, it is critical that the government of Iraq take the lead in disbanding armed NSAs in that country. Although the legitimacy of the government may be questionable in the eyes of most armed NSAs, this should not be seen as a reason for external actors to plan and implement the DDR process. Models based on the strong involvement of national DDR authorities tend to produce much more effective, relevant, and sustainable strategies. If necessary, the international community could play the role of facilitator (Babiker and Özerdem, 2003; Knight and Özerdem, 2004). It is essential that decisions regarding which armed NSAs to incorporate into a DDR process and which ones to exclude because they are 'terrorist' or 'illegal' entities should not be based on the geopolitical interests of external powers in the country. As observed in Afghanistan, such an arbitrary decision will likely worsen the security situation. This is particularly worrying given that Sunni and Shi'a groups are seen as the 'enemy' of the occupation forces, although the US does enjoy close relations with Kurdish groups.

This is likely to become a controversial issue particularly with the DDR of the 'Sons of Iraq'. As of April 2008, average monthly expenditure on this group was around USD 16 million (Cordesman, 2008b). In the event of a future DDR process in Iraq, the 'Sons of Iraq' will probably be a preferential target given that the US established and armed it. Since this group has provided employment for nearly 90,000 men in Iraq, the reintegration phase will need to address specifically the economic needs of combatants. However, it is important to bear in mind that because of how they were recruited at the local level, there are major differences among combatants as to whether they are tribally or politically based. Tribally based 'Sons of Iraq' are those who live in rural areas and whose main objective is to protect their villages, while politically based ones come from groups such as the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade and Hamas Iraq. Loosely confederated, the 'Sons of Iraq' will likely represent different types of reintegration needs—one of the

main response strategies is expected to be their recruitment for the new army and police force.

At the other end of the spectrum is the reintegration of Sunni insurgents. As only 20 per cent of the population is Sunni, a democratic Iraq is unlikely to allow Sunnis to recover their position of primacy during the distribution of peace dividends. They are likely, therefore, to be more reluctant to respond to a DDR process than Shi'a militia groups (Robinson, 2007).

If all these different armed NSAs and their reintegration needs are addressed in isolation from each other without an overall security sector reintegration framework, the likely outcome will be a rise in the number of threats to future security and stability.

*Sequencing of activities*
If the DDR of armed NSAs in Iraq is to have a realistic chance of success, the establishment of a certain level of political stability and security is the most crucial prerequisite. However, from the beginning of the US-led occupation, the reconstruction of new security structures was tackled ineffectively; the strategies, institutional capacities, and resources invested in the process were highly inadequate and inappropriate. As early as December 2003, an SSR plan called 'The Security Sector Synchronisation and Development Matrix' specified a time frame of January 2004–December 2006 for various activities, including the DDR of militias. The main goal was to transfer responsibility for security to the Iraqi government through an 'Iraqification' process, but efforts were 'belated, half-hearted, ineffective and even counter-productive' (Herring and Rangwala, 2006, p. 196). For example, when the security situation was rapidly worsening in 2004, the Iraqi police force 'lacked cars, radios, and body armour and were often outgunned by the criminals, terrorists, and saboteurs they faced' (Diamond, 2004, p. 36). In addition, there was no initiative to improve the police's image and to resolve structural problems such as 'the pervasive authoritarian culture and mentality of the former regime and the existence of widespread corruption and cronyism' (Hashim, 2003, p. 9).

Similarly, the new Iraqi army, initially envisaged as a light infantry force of 40,000 personnel, suffered because of a lack of a clear mandate regarding its responsibilities and functions. Compounded by problems of low pay and improper training, it was not able

to assume an effective role in security operations. During a number of operations, such as those in Fallujah and against the Mahdi Party in April 2004, the 'security forces fell apart'. According to Herring and Rangwala (2006, p. 197), they 'failed to turn up for duty, declared neutrality and refused to engage the insurgents or joined them to fight on the same side'. The issues of payment, training, and equipment all contributed to such desertions, causing serious concerns for the future of the new army. Nevertheless, there has been some progress, such as the training of almost 160,000 personnel, and in 2007, expenditure on Iraqi security forces was almost USD 12 billion, 50 per cent of which came from the US. Expenditure by the Iraqi government is expected to increase to more than USD 10 billion in 2009, but as the US is planning to cut its spending to around USD 2 billion, there are likely to be funding gaps, affecting the establishment of highly trained and well equipped security forces in the near future (Cordesman, 2008a).

It is also essential to consider a number of other socio-cultural and institutional factors in the restructuring of the new army. First, it is necessary to recognise the importance of this institution within Iraqi society—it was the largest army in the Middle East before the occupation. Second, although Saddam's regime used it to suppress violently Shi'a and Kurdish dissent on many occasions, in general it always had the reputation of being a relatively neutral actor and guardian of the country (Hashim, 2006). Finally, having been one of the country's oldest and respected institutions, 'humiliation, disempowerment and despair from a lack of livelihood' led many former Iraqi military personnel to opt to join the insurgency (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, p. 210). In other words, the overall approach to restructuring the new Iraqi army and its ethno-sectarian balance and effectiveness in managing resources and establishing coordinative links with other security structures will be highly important to its future.

Considering the devastating impact of the conflict on societal relationships in the country, it is not surprising that ethno-sectarian issues are still very challenging for the new army. For example, as it mainly comprises Shi'a and Kurdish personnel, it does not seem to have the trust of Sunnis, while Kurdish units in the north are reluctant to be integrated. The latter run their own military academies, do not accept Arabs in their ranks, and refuse to serve outside of the Kurdish-controlled part of the country (Hashim, 2006). According to Herring and Rangwala (2006, pp. 198–199), the recruitment process for the security forces is one of the key reasons for such political and ethno-sectarian

divisions, as it 'tends to be based on lists of people and militias provided by political parties, tribal chiefs, provincial governors and notables'. Such factionalism and politicisation of the recruitment process for the Afghan national army negated its cohesion and effectiveness. One of the principal problems today is how to turn the Afghan national army into an institution that actually enjoys the trust of the population in general (Özerdem, 2008).

These are only some of the critical factors that one should bear in mind with regard to restructuring the new Iraqi army. In addition, the SSR challenge has been exacerbated by the emergence of a wide array of new security structures, such as:

- the Facilities Protection Service (FPS), charged with protecting oil pipelines and ministries;
- the Department of Border Enforcement (DBE), tasked with controlling porous borders with neighbouring Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria;
- the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC); and
- US-backed paramilitary groups and PSCs.[9]

The work of the ICDC and the PSCs has been particularly controversial. Having been infiltrated by insurgency groups and having patronage links with Kurdish peshmerga and Shi'a militia groups, the ICDC was first converted into the National Guard and then in January 2005, it became part of the new Iraq army (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008). PSCs, meanwhile, which have provided services to a wide range of entities, such as international NGOs, diplomats, CPA administrators, and construction contractors, have generated a great deal of resentment among Iraqis. As their involvement in reconstruction efforts from the Iraqi perspective 'is deemed to be aggressive, exploitative and as such creates more grievances' (Bjork and Jones, 2005, p. 782), it is critical that, from a comprehensive governance standpoint, the security sector reconstruction programme develops effective exit strategies for them. Experience shows that their use in relief and reconstruction activities has not always translated into better protection, and in order to establish an environment of mutual trust between Iraqis and the international community, it is essential that PSCs phase out their actions in parallel with security sector reconstruction.

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[9] Some of these US-supported paramilitary groups are the 'Wolf Brigade', the 'Muthana Brigade', the 'Second Defenders of Baghdad Brigade', the 'Iraq Freedom Guard', and the 'Freedom Fighters'.

As far as the initiation of a DDR process is concerned, although the Transitional Administrative Law of March 2004 banned militias not controlled by the federal government, an actual DDR initiative was postponed as a result of the addition of a proviso that their members would be integrated into the new security structures. It was announced in June 2004 that 60 per cent of militia members would be integrated into the new security forces and that the remainder would be retrained for civilian jobs (Dodge, 2005). However, due to the country's turbulent political and security environment over the past few years, this plan has yet to be realised.

Another critical decision will likely concern the programme components of DDR. It is in this context that the essentiality of a disarmament phase will need to be determined. From a conventional DDR perspective, disarmament is vital for the improvement of security and for sending positive messages to society about the establishment of peace. Yet, as has been seen in many other war-torn environments, the SALW collected during a disarmament phase usually comprise only a very small proportion of what is available in that particular environment (Özerdem, 2008). Considering the socio-economic and cultural aspects of arms in some societies—Iraq like Afghanistan is a good example of this—it would be naive to assume that any future disarmament procedure will succeed in significantly reducing the availability of SALW. Making disarmament a precondition for reintegration benefits may result in the collection of some old, unwanted, broken weapons, but in reality, most weapons will remain hidden until there is a real transformation towards a culture of peace. After all, if intentions to kill, terrorise, and inflict damage remain, it will always be possible to find the means to conduct such action. Consequently, the DDR process in Iraq should not sink into a political quagmire by making disarmament a precondition for reintegration and political progress, as was the case in Afghanistan. DDR without disarmament in Iraq is likely to be highly controversial both nationally and internationally, but it can occur at a later stage as part of a wider disarmament initiative that includes all segments of society. In support of this view, Hashim (2006, p. 303) recommends a phased disarmament approach in which the militia 'would be asked to surrender their heavy weaponry, reduce their numbers and then relinquish their light arms'.

Another controversial issue concerning a future DDR process in Iraq pertains to reintegration benefits and how to tailor them to different armed NSAs. Since most combatants, whether they are part of Sunni insurgency groups or Shi'a militias, largely live within their communities, the demobilisation phase is likely to be more about registration and counselling than protracted cantonment. Therefore, the type and scope of inducements for reintegration into civilian society and their appropriation to different groups will need to be determined based on professional competency rather than political expediency.

Regarding the issues of fairness and equality, it is likely that there would be a single reintegration 'package' with an average spend value per combatant; but to make this package more effective in terms of response, it should incorporate a wide range of vocational training, on-the-job training, micro-enterprise development, education, and psychosocial assistance options. For example, the field research carried out in Afghanistan underlined the fact that the DDR process missed many opportunities to link its aims and outputs to overall post-conflict reconstruction of the country. As Thruelsen (2006, p. 18) points out, the process 'did not set up the conditions for an integrated approach where the overall strategy concerning the rebuilding of the country was taken into consideration, meaning that the broader objectives in recovering Afghanistan from its protracted conflict were not incorporated into the structure and planning of the DDR programme'. For instance, economic reintegration was a very difficult task due to dire economic realities in Afghanistan, but when it came to deciding what vocational training skills to focus on or what type of micro enterprises would be most suitable given the economic state of the country, there was no clear coordination between reintegration and employment opportunities and community development.

More importantly, rather than adopting a one-man/one-weapon approach, a future DDR process in Iraq should take a community-based reintegration perspective. The experience of Afghanistan shows that preferential treatment of former combatants in isolation from their communities creates resentment and dissatisfaction among community members in general, as reintegration assistance is seen as a reward for warlords and their war crimes. As social networks are playing a significant role in the structuring of armed NSAs in Iraq, the role of the community can be effectively increased in the reintegration phase by making community members beneficiaries of the process as far as possible. It may even

be possible to consider community-based reconstruction programmes solely as reintegration assistance. Such a strategy is likely to be the most effective counter-insurgency approach, as it would isolate uncooperative armed NSAs and solidify confidence in government by establishing opportunities for connection and trust.

To respond to such a difficult challenge, the first priority should be to develop a more insightful understanding of armed NSAs, which are often portrayed as abusive power sources—in most cases a true representation. Through the terror they generate among civilian populations via such gruesome tactics as killing, rape, kidnapping, enslavement, forced migration, and looting, they inflict physical violence, fragment societal relationships, and bequeath deep psychological scars. However, Holmqvist (2005) argues that armed groups could also play 'positive' functions, which may vary from economic benefits and welfare provisions to security and solidarity. For example, although a number of countries consider Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine to be 'terrorist' groups, they enjoy strong support among their constituencies because of the positive roles they play in those societies. Such support has meant that many of their recruits are often volunteers and that the population at large would be happy to supply logistical and financial assistance, if necessary. According to a 2006 poll carried out in Iraq, 47 per cent of all Iraqis supported violent attacks on US-led forces, rising to as much as 88 per cent among the Sunni population (Robinson, 2007). It is also important to note that unless there is an effective, trustworthy, and reliable environment of law and order and security, those different religious and ethnic groups would turn to their militia groups for justice and security. As Hashim (2007, p. 159) notes, though, 'militias widen the political gaps between the communities, promote clashes, and accelerate the slide towards civil war'. Consequently, dealing with armed NSAs either by 'elimination' or through 'accommodation' (incorporation into reconstructed security forces after their involvement in a negotiated settlement) would be to oversimplify highly complex relationships and power balances between armed NSAs and society in general.

With regard to engagement with armed NSAs, Holmqvist (2005) recommends a number of systematic and effective methods, such as:

- conducting community sensitisation as part of DDR via women and youth;

- utilising the potential influence of neighbouring countries over armed NSAs resulting from possible financial and logistical linkages;

- involving regional cooperation organisations in creating opportunities for dialogue;

- engaging local leadership, including councils of elders and religious authorities; and

- developing engagement strategies tailored to particular groups.

It is important that a future DDR process in Iraq incorporate such elements so that it can serve as a considered and effective approach to the reintegration of combatants and to satisfying the security needs of communities at large.

**Conclusion**

It is vital to bear in mind the following parameters to ensure that a future security sector reconstruction programme is implemented in Iraq in a comprehensive and effective manner:

- first, it will be necessary to provide security support by strengthening the capacities of the national security apparatus; training and equipping the national police force will be of particular significance. More importantly, the new security apparatus will need to retain its newly trained personnel, requiring adequate pay, equipment, and facilities. The expansion of these forces will need to be matched by high quality training; the police force has yet to overcome its present training challenges.[10] Restructuring will also need to recognise the societal impact of the war, and address problems that may emerge along ethnic, sectarian, and tribal lines. It is likely that the presence of international military forces in the country will continue to be a source of tension and mistrust between the population and the government. The operational tactics of the US army, therefore, need to take account of measures that will be sensitive to the protection of the civilian population. The tactic of winning 'hearts and minds' via PRTs is already in employment but it has failed to build bridges with the population because the military tactics are based primarily on 'shock and awe'. In relation to this, the future role of PSCs should also be reviewed, as without plans for their exit from

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[10] Only 155,000 of 275,000 Iraqi police personnel had received training as of January 2008.

the country, the state's role in providing security will continue to be undermined. They may seem to be serving an important function in countering insurgency and militia attacks, but if security sector reconstruction is to be effective, they need to leave the country. Furthermore, the role of neighbouring countries and their support for such a process should also be incorporated into strategic-level planning. Every effort towards meeting this objective is likely to reduce the power and resources of insurgency and militia groups, making them more willing to participate in a DDR process.

- Second, the government, not the international community, should take the lead in planning and implementing a future DDR process in Iraq. A number of arguments are likely to be raised as to why the government of Iraq is not fit for the task, but as many other DDR contexts strongly indicate, including Afghanistan, without the meaningful involvement of national authorities, the programme is likely to be viewed as the imposition of external interests. This will be the case in Iraq in particular given the legacy of occupation and its aftermath. A DDR process removed from the local context will have no chance of being efficient and effective; even the Iraqi government will need to set out its plans at the provincial and district levels and include a governance perspective for security sector reconstruction. The engagement of local religious, tribal, and civil society leaderships will likely increase ownership of the process by a large segment of the society.

As far as the phases of the process are concerned, the need for disarmament should be carefully scrutinised. This will likely prove to be a controversial issue that could derail or prolong DDR unnecessarily. It can be postponed to a future date, and when conducted incorporate civilian populations, too. As the majority of insurgency and militia members already live in their communities, the demobilisation phase is not likely to comprise more than counselling and registration for reintegration options. Another controversial aspect of the DDR process is likely to be the type and scope of reintegration benefits. Ideally, this process will provide such benefits, in terms of education, employment, health, humanitarian, and reconstruction projects, to communities at large rather than to individual combatants. However, groups such as the 'Sons of Iraq' will likely require combatant-centred employment projects.

- Third, in relation to reintegration benefits, the engagement of different armed NSAs in the DDR process also warrants careful consideration. Apart from the objective of ending the US occupation, most armed groups lack any clear political ideology and they have different types of relationship with the occupation powers and the government. Consequently, any attempt to respond to their reintegration needs in a tailor-made way is likely to be viewed as unequal and partial. Such a tailor-made strategy is inevitable and the most appropriate response, but it is essential to bear in mind some critical issues, such as the legitimacy surrounding the selection of armed NSAs for the DDR process. It is clear that AQI will not be a part of such a DDR response, but a wide range of Sunni insurgency groups and Shi'a militia will have to be incorporated. One should note that, although the occupational powers may perceive the activities of these groups as 'terrorism', they enjoy strong public support. In the selection process, therefore, rather than opting for arbitrary decisions based on relations between these groups and the US, they all need to be viewed as potential target groups that could be integrated into the country's future security sector reconstruction programme.

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