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**THREAT ASSESSMENTS AND REVIEWS
(OR CONFLICT ASSESSMENTS AND DEFENCE REVIEWS):
A Note on Current Practice¹**

by

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FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Threat assessments compile and analyse current and prospective challenges to a country's security and interests, and may be conducted as part of wider reviews of national security and defence policy and institutions. They may serve as the basis for developing national security policy and strategy. They may also serve as the basis for decisions on how to structure the institutions that implement security policy and strategy.² Reviews are typically conducted on a periodic basis to evaluate force posture and to determine new budgetary and human resource requirements to support national security strategy.

This practice note focuses on processes behind the development of threat assessments and reviews, especially but not exclusively in countries emerging from conflict. It discusses ways to ensure that results of threat assessments and reviews are accepted by national authorities and that the process itself is inclusive and legitimate. The note addresses the challenges of conducting reviews and assessments during ongoing conflict, examines the defence review process, and discusses the need to create procedures for periodic reviews of the security sector. The note does not specifically address assessment of public health threats or potential for natural disasters, but *responding* to such events may be a secondary role for national security services. Finally, the note focuses broadly on international support to threat assessment and review processes, since much of the support provided and many of the challenges faced are common to both processes, but items of particular concern to either process will be noted throughout the document.

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² For more on national security policies and strategies, see the relevant practice note.

The host state's national security leadership (which usually includes the chief executive, the ministers of defence, interior, foreign affairs, and finance, and key elements of the legislature) may both mandate the assessment and—in some combination—select those who conduct it. Peace operations providers and/or development donors may assist the host state in its conduct of a threat assessment or review, in part to determine which kinds of assistance may be needed and the ways in which it could be provided to selected institutions. Such outside institutions may prefer to rely entirely on their own personnel (or private companies) to do a threat assessment or review, but doing so risks decreasing the local legitimacy, and therefore local acceptance, of the result.

When the host state faces an active threat, adding independent local experts as well as other (especially regional) experts to the assessment team may help to ensure that it looks beyond the host state security forces' current operational priorities (Hendrickson, 13). It is especially important in such cases that members of the security forces understand the rationale for the assessment and review, its objectives, and its possible repercussions.

Involving the population and conducting surveys of perceived threats and of security preferences (for example, which institutions should undertake which security tasks), may improve the legitimacy and acceptance of security forces in the eyes of the public over the long term.

CORE PROGRAM DESIGN ISSUES

The main program design challenge is to determine the scope of the threat assessment or review, that is, deciding the breadth and timeframe of the threats to be analyzed and whether the process will be focused on the short, medium, or long term. Another challenge is to decide what the output and outcome of the exercise should be. One approach might use a relatively simple definition of key threats and of the force requirements to meet them. An alternative, longer process would analyze threats in greater detail, determine their absolute and relative importance, determine which forces are to respond to which threats, and determine which threats may not be manageable by the host state alone. It would also lay the foundation for national security policy.

Threat Assessments

Some analysts, in interviews, described the need to assess threats based on a country's interests, which can be grouped into four categories: those that relate to state survival (attack and absorption by a neighbor, for example, or secession of a province or ethnic group); those that are vital (a country may choose to go to war rather than compromise them); those that are major and substantially affect the welfare of the country (but may be dealt with through diplomacy, embargoes, or other means short of military power); and minor interests that, for example, may still have long term economic impact.

Others considered that limiting the definition of "threat" to that which affects primarily the security of the state—while disregarding that which affects the security of its citizens—risks missing important causes of conflict. They argued that human security, measured in terms of violent threats to individuals, should be considered in threat assessments. Still others argue that the conception of threats should be even broader and should include disease, hunger, and natural disasters, because those kill more people than war, terrorism or genocide. (Human Security Report, viii, and Fair and Jones, 2). This note adopts the middle view that assessments should

include not just threats to the state and its survival but also threats to the security of its citizens and their ability to live in peace.

Threat assessments should begin with the threat environment—the different categories of actors within and around the host state that hold potential for (or have a recent history of) violence—how these different actors are connected, and how they influence each other. Countries in conflict or recovering from conflict may benefit from a more comprehensive conflict assessment, which may include analysis of the political, economic, and institutional conditions in the host state that precipitated current conflict or may mitigate its recurrence. There is no universally-accepted threat framework on which to build an assessment but there are several potentially useful models, from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development, and RAND Europe for the UK Security Sector Reform Advisory Team.

USAID's Conflict Assessment Framework, which serves as the basis for the US Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) described in the US Army's Field Manual on Stability Operations, provides a useful set of iterative questions. The framework is first examined as part of a desk review, and then used to guide a field team tasked with examining the country's conflict. The desk and field analysis are intended to determine whether realities on the ground threaten peace in a country (USAID, 38–41). The framework suggests examining the conflict in five steps: establish context (determine which long-standing conditions are resistant to change); understand core grievances (for example, perceptions that physical security, livelihood, interest and values are threatened by other groups or institutions and how these factors may affect each other); understand sources of social and institutional resilience (the performance of institutions and social groups in the face of conflict; regime type and legitimacy; inclusion or exclusion of certain groups; rule of law and provision of security; economic governance; and natural resource management); understand regional and international factors (including political and economic dynamics); identify drivers of conflict and mitigating factors (who the key actors are; where they are; what they affect and how they affect conflict; organizational, financial, and human resources; and general questions concerning incentives for violence); and describe windows of vulnerability/opportunity (vulnerability when an event, including a natural disaster, could threaten to lead quickly to conflict; and opportunity when an event could be used as an entry point to bring stability). In short, the framework provides questions to assess the motives (or incentives), the means, and the opportunity for conflict in a country (USAID, 12; United States, FM 3-07, D3-4).

The US Army Field Manual on Counter-Insurgency Operations recommends that prior to developing a program for security force assistance (the US military's terminology for SSR), commanders and leaders should assess the following dynamics "throughout the planning, preparation, and execution of the operations:" social structures (organization, demographics, and education level of the existing forces); methods, successes and failures of host state operations; state of training at all levels and specialties and levels of leader education; equipment and priority placed on maintenance; logistic and support structure, and its ability to meet the force's requirements; level of sovereignty of the host state government; extent of acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities; and laws and regulations governing the security forces and their relationship to national leaders. Such assessments should be used to develop troop-to-task

analyses and then to determine the required size of the forces and what other kinds of assistance the host state forces need in terms of capacity building, infrastructure management, and procurement. Periodic follow-on assessments (or reviews) should determine whether priorities need to be realigned and programs modified (United States, FM 3-24, vi7–8).

DFID also uses a conflict assessment tool to guide its work in this area. The methodology for conducting an assessment is flexible and “adapt[s] according to the needs and objectives of the end user.” Donors should be mindful that assessments may return different results depending on the phase of conflict in which the host state finds itself. As such donors should use a dynamic model of analysis where plausible possibilities are identified based on the analysis of many different actors (“joined-up analysis”). Much like USAID, DFID suggests basing the assessment on different “analytical lenses” including political economy (encompassing but not limited to “greed and grievance”), the structures and actors involved in the conflict, and the dynamics of their interactions. When examining political structures, assessments should analyze long term factors such as security and the political, economic, and social situation in the country. Factors requiring analysis include interests, relations, capacities, peace agendas, and incentives. Analysis of dynamics requires looking at long trends in the conflict, triggers for increased violence, capacities for managing conflict, and likely future scenarios (Vaux et al., DFID, 2002, 7–10).³

RAND Europe’s framework categorizes factors that affect national security as either permanent or contingent, and as domestic or external. Permanent factors include geography, climate (including propensity for natural disasters), and natural resources. Contingent factors include conditions created by conflict (combat-experienced but otherwise unemployed youth, for example, damaged infrastructure, and flight of professional talent and foreign investment). Domestic security concerns include homegrown terrorist or insurgent threats, public health threats (food security, or risks posed by contagious disease), transportation security, and ability to manage exploitation of domestic natural resources. External concerns include neighboring states (both for risks of conventional conflict and for risks of mass inflows of persons fleeing conflict in neighboring states or elsewhere in the region), access to needed external resources (oil, food), and threats from non-state actors who are based in or funded by other states (Bearne et al., RAND 2005, 21).

Defence Reviews

The first step in a defence review is to determine the current state of the security forces, their current capabilities, the threats to which they are expected to respond, and whether their current structure and doctrine is suited to their current needs. In addition, the review should examine the existing state of defence management and oversight structures, including the relevant ministries, parliamentary committees, and other oversight bodies. Before beginning the review, assessing the capacities of the institutions expected to take part in the process may also be helpful, particularly when even limited training by donors or others could help expedite the process and increase its legitimacy.

³ Organizations that use similar frameworks are the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In conducting a defence review, national ownership is important and the process should be open and transparent, even while technical and political challenges require more host state mentoring. At the same time, donors should not conflate government ownership with national ownership, particularly in countries recovering from conflict (Hendrickson, 11–12, 29). During conflict, a defence review may require “trade offs between meeting immediate security needs and satisfying longer-term institutional transformation.” Thus, even with a 10–15 year focus, a defence review will inevitably be affected by ongoing operational requirements (Hendrickson, 13, 40).

The review should examine the structures required to support effective and capable forces. In Uganda, the review included seven areas: policy and planning, logistics, procurement and infrastructure, financial management, information technology, accountability mechanisms, and civil affairs. It may also require balancing defence spending needs with donor requirements for improved efficiency of financial and personnel management (e.g., removal of “ghost soldiers” from payrolls) (Hendrickson, 38, 30–31).

The assessment or review should consider local resources, both financial and human, expected to be available in the near and long term, as force structures must be locally sustainable (United States, FM3.07, vi-12). Finally, donors should recognize that political sensitivity may prevent the defence review from covering all topics. There are risks both for donors and the host state government associated with being part of a defence review, arising from possible disagreements over national ownership, threat definition, and so forth. (Hendrickson, 33).

Defence reviews should have a clear methodology with a broad conception of host state requirements. Consultation and the involvement of multiple agencies will also increase the legitimacy of the process. Donors should also be aware, however, that some may not back the process initially and it is important to find ways to obtain their buy-in (Hendrickson, 17–18). In Uganda, the review also required balancing analysis of the country’s wider security needs with the choice of the defence sector as an entry point. In some cases, holding a workshop to familiarize the key players with the adopted methodology can be helpful (Hendrickson, 33–36).

Similarly, it may be useful to set up a special committee to discuss sensitive issues (classified information) within the military capability assessment (Hendrickson, 2007, 40). In the defence review, donors and the host state must “achieve a common understanding of the full range of security threats, military and non-military” that the host will face in future. The review then helps to clarify roles of the various defence actors in meeting these threats (Hendrickson, 35). The fact that a defence review is underway should be publicized and the resulting white paper should be widely disseminated.

PROGRAM PLANNING

The planning process has several steps: first, specify current donor activities; second, identify conflict drivers and gaps not addressed by existing efforts; third, specify challenges to addressing these gaps; fourth, describe the risks associating with failing to address the gaps; and fifth, describe opportunities to address gaps, entry points and windows of opportunity (United States, FM 3-07, D6-7).

The threat mapping process should be as inclusive as possible. An important part of threat assessment is to determine the importance of each threat, but based on the perspective of individual actors. What constitutes a threat in the eyes of host state authorities may seem less important to assistance providers. These different perspectives need to be reconciled so that all threats, not just those viewed by one party as important, can be effectively addressed (Fair and Jones, 7). Acknowledging threats in this fashion can improve coordination in addressing them.

A defence review or threat assessment requires the creation of robust project management structures.⁴ While support from donors may not always be required to create such a structure, donor programs should ensure that the host state develops a plan to adequately manage a threat assessment and review program. In countries recovering from conflict, lack of capacity (and thus inability to conduct a comprehensive assessment or review) may affect the eventual outcome of the process. In such cases, creating a formal management structure to discuss program planning challenges may be necessary. Doing so might be particularly necessary in cases where concerns about overly informal processes for such efforts may affect the ability of the host state authorities to sustain or duplicate efforts in the future. In countries recovering from conflict, donor support to formal process can serve to create good practice in project management across the host state institutions involved. In other cases, where capacity is sufficient, donors may choose to encourage participants in the host state to share program management concerns in a more informal manner (Hendrickson, 14–15). As part of the defence review, the host state and donors should develop a “defence professionalization and modernization plan set in a context of competing needs and resource constraints across the public sector” (Hendrickson, 36).

Technical assistance in managing the assessment or review should “complement, facilitate and enhance” host state efforts, but this does not mean that donors should do the work for the host state government. Before the process begins, donors should “assess national institutional resources in order to identify gaps and the specific requirements for technical assistance.” Donors should then consider providing basic training to host state administrators because, if their capacity is very low, training before the process begins can increase confidence and ownership. Donors should receive advance assurances from the host state that newly trained officials will not change jobs in the middle of the assessment/review process. As much as possible, donors also should ensure continuity in their own teams of advisors, even when they are not based inside the country. While project management software may be helpful if its users are adequately trained, it may be too complex to be used effectively in the host state (Hendrickson, 16–17, 46).

The assessment/review process should ensure stakeholder involvement by increasing their capacity to debate security issues (Hendrickson, 17–18). Donors should identify stakeholders, understand their individual interests, assess their level of support for the process and its potential outcomes, and develop strategies for managing stakeholder expectations (Hendrickson, 46–47).

A public information campaign on the need for an assessment and review could include efforts to disseminate information in various media, including newspapers and radio, at meetings in the legislature, and via civil society organizations. A challenge to organizing effective workshops as

⁴ While the following discussion is largely drawn from Hendrickson’s *Uganda Defence Review*, the lessons learned from that process also apply to threat assessments.

part of an assessment/review may be the depth of stakeholders' political, economic, or emotional involvement in the conflict and the resulting difficulty of generating objective feedback. Donor staff should take such considerations into account (SIDA, 6).

FIELD EXPERIENCES

This section looks in greater detail at assessments or reviews in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Uganda

The Uganda Defence Review reflected a comprehensive effort on the part of the United Kingdom to support a review process in a country that was still recovering from conflict. It occurred in three phases. In the first phase, Ugandan authorities and UK advisors conducted a strategic security assessment that detailed the roles of the various government agencies in responding to security challenges. It also outlined missions for the Ugandan Peoples Defence Force (UPDF) and requirements for its modernization and reform.

The assessment also included the development of three scenarios (worst, middle, and best) for Ugandan development over the next 10–15 years and how such scenarios would influence the security of the state and its people. Threats were rated, within scenarios, according to their likelihood and impact. As part of this process, the Foreign Ministry assessed the ability of defence actors to meet Uganda's foreign policy goals, including participation in peace operations (Hendrickson, 36).

In the second phase of the review, the UK and the government estimated the UPDF's operational requirements to meet anticipated challenges within each scenario, which included analysis of institutional support systems and structures that would be needed for the UPDF to operate effectively. Based on this analysis, four strategic options were presented to the government, each detailing human resources, equipment, training, and funding required to operationalize the option, including the "supporting institutional structures and processes needed to deliver this operational capability effectively and efficiently" (Hendrickson, 37). The review identified, under each option, key tasks for meeting priority threats and the capabilities required to undertake those tasks. A paper detailing the rationale for each option was also produced (Hendrickson, 38). As part of the review process, UPDF service chiefs were asked to conduct institutional gap analyses—assessments of what their service would need in order to meet the operational objectives of each strategic option. Local consultants were hired to assist each of the service chiefs (Hendrickson, 39).

In the third phase, the findings of the defence review were submitted to senior civilian and military leaders for evaluation. The evaluation led to the production of a White Paper on Defence Transformation.

Sierra Leone⁵

⁵ This section is largely drawn from Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, *Security Sector Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007*.

In 2003, the UK's International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) supported the Sierra Leonean MOD's efforts to develop a Defence White Paper and an accompanying "Plan 2010" for its implementation.⁶ Based on this document, the Sierra Leonean Office of National Security (ONS) first began an initial review of the country's security sector in late 2003. The efforts continued through 2005. This security sector review, based in part on Plan 2010, aimed to "evaluate the main threats to the political, social, and economic development of Sierra Leone" over the ensuing 5–10 years (Conteh, 3). The review, which formed part of Pillar One of Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, also aimed to clarify the roles of the security institutions (Jackson and Albrecht, 2008, 3; Albrecht and Jackson, 2009, 102–105).

Stakeholders in the security sector review process formed a Working Group which included the military, police, prisons, fire service, members of the parliament, the judiciary, the private sector, traditional rulers (Paramount Chiefs), and civil society (NGOs, the media, and women's groups). The Office of National Security prepared a Framework Document that identified corruption, revenue loss, organized subversion, cross-border issues, persistent delays in implementation, human rights violations, and lack of confidence in government institutions as the major threats. The Framework Document was used at a series of workshops held across Sierra Leone. The workshops were intended to build the legitimacy of the security review process and to increase public confidence in the government. Participants were divided into groups and asked to discuss their vision for Sierra Leone for 2025 and threats that could jeopardize that vision (Conteh, 3). Consultations also included participation in radio programs. Finally, the Security Sector Review process included eight steps: conduct a strategic environment review, determine national threats, develop a security policy framework, develop individual institutions and agencies policy frameworks, conduct a gap analysis, develop transformation strategies, address cost and affordability, and implement transformation strategies (Albrecht and Jackson, 122).

In the next phase, the Working Group (again through workshops) developed a review that examined the current institutions, the institutional and force structure requirements for meeting threats, development of specific roles for all actors expected to counter the threats, and an analysis of gaps in roles and capacities of the existing institutions (Conteh, 4). The process also led to a definition of which institutions fell under the "security sector" label, finding that institutions included governance and oversight mechanisms, the ONS and intelligence agencies, the ministries of Interior, Justice, Defence, Foreign Affairs and Finance, uniformed services, the judicial system, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, private security companies, non-state paramilitary forces, and civil society (Albrecht and Jackson, 120).

Based on this process, the ONS-led team found that internal threats were the most significant for Sierra Leone and, by late 2004, draft recommendations for each institution were issued. The final release of the review was delayed by the departure of a key IMATT adviser, the need to obtain political buy-in, and the difficulty in funding all the workshops the review required, particularly in more rural areas (Albrecht and Jackson, 122).

⁶ For more on the Defence White Paper, its contents and development, see the National Security Strategies and Policies practice note.

By 2005, the Review process determined that because the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) is charged with responding to the internal threats it had identified as most severe (disgruntled ex-combatants, corruption, etc), it required authorities to codify Military Aid to Civil Power (MACP). While such legislation existed, it needed to be modified and an MOU had to be developed to ensure civilian control and determine systematic mechanisms for allowing the RSLAF to assist the SLP in case of threats to internal security (Albrecht and Jackson, 151–152). The signing of the MOU in particular played an important role in defusing long-standing tensions between the two institutions. Today, if the SLP requires assistance, it must formally request it from the RSLAF (Nelson-Williams, 6; Le Grys, 8).

Sierra Leone's Office of National Security now conducts more frequent security assessments. The ONS includes a Joint Assessment Team, which receives reports on threats from the Central Intelligence and Security Unit. Assessments are developed weekly and discussed in meetings of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Discussions within the JIC are designed to vet assessments by examining their context and determining whether they may be politically motivated before they are provided to higher ranking officials. If decisions need to be made based on assessments and intelligence collection, the ONS-led Strategic Situation Group, which includes the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Information, and Internal Affairs (among others) examines the assessments and recommends action (Conteh, 5). Overall, one of the main remaining challenges is retaining qualified staff for assessment and review and insufficient funding for either personnel or facilities for these tasks (Conteh, 7).

Liberia

In Liberia, the International Crisis Group divided threats into two categories: political, and economic and social. Political threats include unemployed ex-combatants, particularly youth; insurgency (from the formation or reformation of an armed group); and the less likely external attack. Social and economic threats include food riots, violent crime and vigilantism, and land disputes (Crisis Group, 5–8).

A RAND study commissioned by the US Department of Defence focused on internal versus external threats. Internal threats include widespread unemployment, disaffected (and often still armed) youth, associated lawlessness, and the risk that these actors will form militia, rebel, or insurgent groups and threaten the state. Given instability in the sub-region, external threats are possible, but would more likely come from non-state actors (Gompert et al., RAND 2007, 9). To determine Liberia's security requirements, the RAND analysts examined the reasons for lack of legitimacy and effectiveness in Liberia's previous security forces. They found the security sector to be "corrupt, bloated, incompetent, and unsustainable." Any new security apparatus, they argued, should meet four basic criteria: coherence, legitimacy, effectiveness and affordability (Gompert et al. 17–18). The study laid out principles on which Liberian forces should be based, determined roles and missions for each service branch, and offered recommendations for a security architecture and three force structure options. The study analyzed each option's capacities, cost, and anticipated cost effectiveness. It recommended the creation of a medium-sized police force with a quick response unit, a small army, and a small coast guard. The study process included an exercise to test the force plans against predicted threats (Gompert et al., 30, 32, 35–37).

ITERATIVE LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons in developing threat assessments and reviews remain extremely limited, largely because of the sensitivity of such processes and the ensuing lack of publicly available documents containing relevant lessons. While numerous donor governments have been involved in supporting such efforts, their officials do not routinely publish lessons learned from their experiences—it is therefore necessary to find individuals directly involved and discuss their experiences with them.

Nonetheless, from the limited existing literature, national ownership appears to be key to conducting a successful assessment/review. Assessments/reviews should seek input beyond the governmental security community, both for an accurate reading of security perceptions and needs amongst various groups and areas of the country, and also to legitimize the post-conflict security system amongst those consulted. A noted good practice is the organization of a workshop or workshops for stakeholders in the security system, broadly defined.

Training for key security administrators before the assessment/review begins is logical, resource effective, and ultimately time-saving.

Balancing immediate security needs against needed long term capacity is another core concern, as the two needs may point toward different security solutions. Recommendations that flow from threat assessments and defence reviews must, however, pay close attention to the projected ability of the host state to sustain recommended courses of action both in human and financial terms, on the basis of nationally-generated revenues and realistic expectations of other assistance. Reviews should be explicit about the trade-offs that resource limitations may impose regarding states' abilities to meet different threats, and how the pattern of trade-offs changes with different policy options.

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