

## SECURITY, STABILISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

### Building security institutions in conflict-affected environments: Learning from Iraq

This was the first in a series of three seminars on 'Building security institutions in conflict-affected environments' co-organised by Libra Advisory Group and the Centre for Defence Studies at Kings College London. The seminar was addressed by Alex Martin of Libra Advisory Group and Professor Yezid Sayigh, from the Department of War Studies, King's College London. The session was chaired by Dr John Gearson, Director of the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London.

Alex Martin, who has been working on behalf of the UK government with the Iraqi Ministry of Interior of Iraq (MoI) to develop the MoI's management proficiency, leadership and internal governance, focused on the development of the institution and on lessons learned from the UK experience. Professor Sayigh situated the discussion within the broader political context of Middle Eastern Security Sector Reform (SSR), drawing upon his recent research on American and European Union approaches to SSR in Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen.

The MoI is without equal in the United Kingdom or America. It is a massive institution with management responsibility for internal security and a wide range of civilian functions. In western states, the equivalent responsibilities of the MoI are divided amongst many different departments or ministries. The ministry has expanded to around 600,000 personnel, a ten-fold expansion since the fall of Saddam, and an organisational growth unprecedented for a security institution outside wartime. Though it is not a military institution, its development and reform was largely managed by the US Military, and the ability of its police to ensure governmental authority is a central component of the American counter-insurgency effort in Iraq.

The US approach since 2004 has centred on 'Force Generation' – the need to replace US soldiers with Iraqi security forces in performing basic security functions as quickly as possible – but until recently has neglected both the need for the development of a wide range of management functions (planning, HR management, budgeting, procurement, logistics management) to support the deployment of large numbers of new forces. The weaknesses of this approach have been exacerbated by two further issues:

1. A lack of Iraqi ownership of foreign interventions
2. A tendency to focus on individual projects to develop specific technical competencies (forensics, explosive ordnance disposal) without looking at the full continuum of competencies required to deliver security and justice to people.

Scaling up the numbers of police as the Americans did provides extra capacity, the ability for the MoI to put more 'boots on the ground'. However, the creation of additional capacity does not directly translate into additional ability. In order to effectively utilise capacity, it must be resourced and managed. These myriad management necessities, such as human resources, logistics, budgeting and procurement chains must furthermore be gathered together under effective leadership. Without creating the management functions to effectively employ and control the available resources, the resources themselves are at best inefficiently utilised, and at worst can be dangerous.

The US military deployed a large number of advisers into Iraqi ministries including the MoI to work on developing management capacity. However, the pressure from the coalition leadership (driven by a strategic timeline set by CNN) for immediate reductions in violence led to frustration. Many advisers sought to import processes and systems from their own home departments (US army, FBI, DEA etc) without consulting Iraqi partners on what was required and increasing their competence to build their own systems – they grew frustrated when their solutions were not implemented and in many cases essentially took over the running of the directorates they were supposed to advise. This in turn inhibited the development of Iraqi capacity.

Libra advisers, funded by the UK government, took a 'locally-owned approach' when working with the MoI. They worked with the MoI to enable senior Iraqi officers to develop their own strategic vision for how their ministry should function. Both speakers noted that the strategy and vision of interior ministries differ from state to state and are inherently based upon the culture of the country in question. Therefore, Iraqi officials conceiving their ministry differently to the American idea of what is should be is not necessarily a failure.

Joint Iraq-UK project management structures were vital to ensuring that the project was not only delivering UK-conceived objectives but meeting a real demand for change. Libra helped create the Joint Project Management Board, a 10 person committee that was given project management training to allow them to identify their own objectives. Once these objectives were identified by the Iraqis', they were then assisted in working towards them. This evolutionary approach to security sector reform differed from the American method of meticulous planning towards clearly defined objectives. The process of doing so was frustrating and slow (and sometimes balancing the expectations of UK officials and Iraqi counterparts was difficult) but without Iraqi planning and ownership of the process, the end result would be alienation of Iraqis from the institutions that are meant to serve them.

Institutions cannot be considered in a vacuum, and must be considered within the wider political dialogue within a country. Professor Sayigh stressed the importance of the meaning of an 'institution' to the wider population. The transformation of security sector institutions from organisations used to protect regimes to institutions that exist to protect the populace is a long process. This process involves organic change and reform that is often reflective of the society at large. Moreover, the alteration of the core objectives of an organisation will necessarily alter the organisation itself and its position in society. Therefore the substantial alteration of interior ministries is in itself a sovereign matter. Interior ministries control possessors of power and resources, and their political control is an important issue in any society. In post-conflict societies the common political frameworks are largely broken, meaning that a re-alignment of political power is a highly sensitive issue to all concerned. When a society lacks agreement on fundamental issues such as the functions and responsibilities of the security sector, such political deadlock may forestall any number of attempts at security sector reform. This is a problem for the MoI, which was divided up into 'fiefdoms' that represented a post-Saddam Hussein political compromise. Conversely, the alignment of key political figures in a society may allow for improvement in previously deadlocked situations, such as the three way agreement of the President, Prime Minister and Interior Minister of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. However, such groupings are inevitably fleeting, and without the acceptance of a common political system, such reforms will be subject to political developments.

A further key issue which arose was the need to revise donor policy and practise in SSR operations. A key criticism of donors was the 'feeding frenzy' model of donation, in which donors intervene and provide aid in an un-coordinated manner, sometimes motivated purely by being seen to help.

Without a reform of donor attitudes and practise, aid may prove counter-productive. As noted by Alex Martin, the thorniest question is that of donor coordination, because it restricts the freedom of donors to act as they see fit. What was required was a more 'horizontal' approach to security and justice development, where provision of security and justice was seen from the point of view of the experience of the citizen. The citizen does not care if there is a well-developed forensics analysis capability if it is not linked to the judicial process, or if that process is not linked to corrections. Forensics itself does not induce a feeling of security in a citizen who has had a crime committed against them, what induces such feeling is the process of investigation for which an institution is responsible and employs forensics in order to do so. The security system needs to be addressed as a whole, and donors needs to work to a single, locally-developed and owned strategy. It was acknowledged that this was utopian, but it represents an idea to work towards. Donors may be reluctant to cede control to local stakeholders, since they will then be unable to control the choices that those stakeholders make, which may be important in light of cultural issues that donors may disagree over. Professor Sayigh pointed out that many donor governments are unwilling to get involved with security institutions at all because of past history and malpractice, choosing instead to limit their involvement to 'safe' institutions that have a less contentious past and unlikely to cause domestic unease for the donor government.

Different organisations have different outlooks and methods, some of which may be more effective than others. Moreover, it is not necessarily an organisation's current configuration that is the most important factor, but their ability to adapt and learn. A comparison cited was that of the British and American militaries. Whilst criticised on some points, the US military was cited as being an exceptional learning organisation, one which would no doubt reform its current practice based on evidence and analysis from internal and external sources. Conversely, the British military was cited as an example of good practice, but also lacks the institutions and investment that allows the American military to adapt quickly to new situations. Such learning processes apply to civilian groups as well. The importance of such learning and ability to effectively analyse mistakes and failure was underlined by Alex Martin's blunt statement that much of what has been learned in the field is learned by assessing failed policies, but that there lacked a developed system for importing these lessons into future programming.

The best people for security sector reform and development were felt to be technical experts. The systems and processes involved in making a ministry such as the MoI function are very complex, and as such unsuitable for amateur involvement. It was here that it was felt that some well intentioned donors lacked the necessary technical expertise to realistically help such institutions. The type of people who are needed for such large scale projects are not general practitioners, they are the consultants who work with similar sized organisations, both government and business. One senior US general had commented that what is required is 'an army of geeks'. In some senses developing security institutions after conflict had much in common with private sector management consultancy, which revolved around building a company's capacity to design and improve its own systems. This is a highly technical activity, and the same level of technical expertise is required in security sector development.

Both speakers acknowledged that there was likely to be some criticism of these ideas, particularly from donors. A key problem cited by Alex Martin was that of metrics, and how donors judge projects. Since donor organisations commit significant public funds they are bound to make best use of those funds – government cannot be expected to give money without a measure to judge it by. In Iraq, security sector reform was judged by two main metrics, the number of police on the payrolls, and the daily number of bomb attacks. As we have examined previously, simply multiplying the number of

police is an unhelpful way to judge security sector reform, since they may be ineffective. Measuring attacks or the number killed is an unsatisfactory and misleading measure of security in a community. Over time, the metric of bomb attacks gave way to an understanding that the best way to judge the process is by how secure Iraqis actually feel. The US military undertakes some polling, but in general reliable baseline statistics on security or justice delivery (e.g. court statistics) were absent in Iraq, making measurement of impact, or attribution of effect to specific interventions, almost impossible, particularly in a way which will satisfy the reporting requirements of a donor organisation.

#### Points Raised

Dr Gearson began the Q&A session by remarking on the possibility of an international or EU doctrine for institution building.

The first question asked by the audience was “Why are we re-inventing the wheel?” in Iraq, and asked if previous experience of institution building dating back to colonial periods could provide donors and their agents with lessons for the present. Whilst Alex Martin discounted the colonial nature of such strategies, he again praised the American military for their institutional learning ability and adaptability. He cited the recent uptake of counter-insurgency doctrine by the US military as an example of its ability to follow success. If the US military could replicate such learning strategies on the civil effects side, it could make a huge contribution to future attempts at state stabilisation.

The second question talked about donor exit strategies. Alex Martin responded by saying that any donor intervention has to be based on political settlement. Such settlement must come from within a country, but need not necessarily be completely home-grown. Professor Sayigh underlined the need to work out a functional political system based upon reconciliation of rival parties. The parties themselves need to accept basic rules of how to settle disagreements. Again drawing upon his recent research he pointed out that partisan political input by donors can be counterproductive in allowing the formation of such political settlements. He pointed out that accepting local ownership means allowing local stakeholders to make mistakes, develop their own responses to challenges and conduct negotiations with groups that donors may dislike.

Alex Martin was asked whether Libra's terms of reference were aimed at enhancing democracy or management. Alex responded by talking about the MoI's decision to reinstate an internal court martial system. Whilst such internal courts might run contrary to western ideals of open courts, the five functional courts that now exist provide a basis for institutional adherence to the rule of law. Should we help states build viable, locally-supported management institutions if they run counter to our own concepts of accountability?

Another question asked how aware Iraqis are of the transformation of the MoI. The MoI and police were in a parlous state, particularly in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion when it was simply assumed that the police would turn up to work. Ten years of sanctions had “hollowed out” the MoI and left an institution that was widely perceived to be corrupt by the Iraqi population, in some cases seen to be a joke. Alex Martin pointed out that the transformation of such an institution to becoming the main provider of human security in Iraq was in itself a massive shift. At the organisational level, there is a perception that change is beginning; however again the lack of statistical data denies donors and analysts the ability to judge how ordinary Iraqis perceive the MoI.

Lastly, an audience member asked about the movement of leadership away from a “proper” Western direction towards “strongmen”. Alex Martin responded by saying that in his experience Iraqis do want

strong leadership, as long as such leadership is above sectarian affiliation. For example the type of leadership that can make independent choices such as the “Charge of the Knights” security operation in Basra. Iraqis want and need a leader who is able to “grasp the nettle” on such issues.

Further reading:

A report cited during the seminar was: Rathmell, Andrew “*Fixing Iraq’s Internal Security Forces: Why is Reform of the Ministry of Interior so Hard?*” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007)

An audience member pointed out that the US military produces quarterly statistics on Iraqi human security issues. The reports can be found at: [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/)