

# OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE NOTE: DEFENCE TRANSFORMATION

By Defence Transformation (DT), we mean major and long lasting changes to the structure, functioning and ethos of the defence sector of a country. DT is therefore more extensive than simple incremental improvement to a country's defence sector, such as happens all over the world. It also typically occurs after a major political conflict or crisis, usually involving violence, and often on a large scale. DT is therefore also more ambitious than the reorganisation of defence sectors following peaceful transitions, for example those in Eastern Europe after 1989. DT should be viewed as a component of a whole security and justice transformation process.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENT

The purpose of this Operational Guidance Note is to:

- DESCRIBE THE SPECIAL SENSITIVITIES AND PROBLEMS OF THE DEFENCE SECTOR
- EXPLAIN WHAT DT TYPICALLY INVOLVES
- CLARIFY THE ROLE OF OUTSIDE ADVISERS
- SET OUT LIKELY PITFALLS AND WAYS OF AVOIDING THEM

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## WHY DEFENCE IS IMPORTANT

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Defence is the most sensitive of all areas of state activity. Historically, and even today in some cases, control of the military was the basic means of gaining and holding power. It was also the most effective way for a leader to stay in power, and even to stay alive. Military power was used to unify states, expand territory, to acquire and exploit resources, to build empires, and later to fight against colonial powers. The development of the military is intimately related to the development of the state: "States made wars and war made states" as Charles Tilley said. This means that securing control of the military, or denying that control to others, is always a major political objective. After a conflict or crisis, this can result in:

- A struggle to control the defence sector and to use it for political purposes.
- The exploitation of this situation by military leaders, for their own objectives.
- Organisation of parallel structures to control or check the power of a defence sector which somebody else controls.

DT is frequently a zero-sum game. Those who currently control the defence sector fear losing the power that this gives them. Those not in power, look to control the defence sector, so that they can

In the sections below, potential risks are shown in [red boxes](#). Quotes, and suggested readings are in [blue boxes](#). Extended explanations are in [grey boxes](#).

become more powerful. In many situations, moreover, well-trained and effective defence forces can in themselves represent a challenge to existing political structures, which often rule through corruption and private patronage networks. DT, properly conducted, can seem a major threat to such structures. Thus, whilst well-conducted DT programmes can produce defence forces that enhance stability, DT programmes that neglect the governance aspect can lead to destabilisation and disaster.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

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### 1. The Conflict.

Conflict is produced by political crises that cannot be solved peacefully, and the starting point for an analysis of the DT requirement is therefore an analysis of the origins, development and resolution of the crisis itself. The majority of DT activities will take place as a result of one of the following four crisis situations, sometimes in combination.

- Disintegration of the state (including the defence sector), producing rivalry among organised armed groups, often based on religion or ethnicity.
- Organised rebellion or armed dissent against the state, opposed by the defence forces on behalf of the recognised government.
- Fracturing of the defence sector itself, as a result of a crisis, with different parts of it fighting on different sides.
- Violent political change, followed by the installation of a new government.

### 2. The Role of the Defence Sector.

Any DT programme has to start from the political situation of the defence sector before, during and after the conflict. This can vary enormously, but common patterns are:

- The defence sector is mainly identified with one party to the conflict (South Africa in 1994).
- The defence sector was identified with an authoritarian regime overthrown by force (Nicaragua in 1979) or leaving power voluntarily (Argentina in 1982). The defence sector had splintered into ethnic militias, often seen as heroes by their own people (Former Yugoslavia in 1991-5, Lebanon 1975-90)
- The defence sector played a positive role in a democratic political transition (Portugal 1974, Tunisia 2011)
- The defence sector was disintegrating and was supplemented by militia groups. (Sierra Leone in 2000)

In several of the above cases, former regimes and their security forces may retain the loyalty of large parts of the population.

In addition, and irrespective of the nature of the conflict itself, militaries will themselves fall into generic types depending on their historical origins and development. In a DT exercise, it is critical to understand this background. There are many different types of militaries in the world, but it is likely that a DT exercise will encounter elements of one or more of the following:

- Post-colonial militaries, often structured by the colonial power and looking to that power for doctrine and training.
- National liberation militaries, which draw their legitimacy from their defeat of the colonial power.
- Militaries of one-party states, which function as the armed wing of the ruling party and derive their legitimacy from its service. This includes military wings of political revolutionary movements.
- Military elites as members of a kleptocratic political system based on personal rule and enrichment.

#### 4. The Envisaged Solution.

Normally, DT activities do not take part in a vacuum. They are part of a wider reform or transformation of the security sector, and often a wider reconstruction of the state. In theory, all of these elements should be coordinated: in practice, they often are not, and even pull in different directions. A DT activity will need to be aware of some or all of the following activities taking place at the same time:

- Parallel, and sometime competing, initiatives in the defence sector, some domestic, others funded by different international donors.
- In the immediate aftermath of a conflict, Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes may be under way.
- Initiatives elsewhere in the security sector, both with operational agencies (eg. police, intelligence) and to better coordinate the sector as a whole.
- Wider governance initiatives, often funded by different sets of donors, affecting the defence sector as part of government.
- Financial or policy limitations on a government's freedom of action, imposed by International Financial Institutions in return for economic aid.
- Domestic or donor pressure to organise early elections.
- Wider social programmes (eg related to gender) with defence implications.
- The presence of international peacekeeping forces, bilateral or multilateral training teams or advisers in the country, often with their own agendas.

#### 5. The Risk of Manipulation.

Any DT process creates winners and losers. Local actors will be looking to see how they can turn DT initiatives to their own advantage or alternatively frustrate them, even whilst seeming cooperative. DT initiatives always involve the transfer of funds and the reallocation of power, and so are always major political issues for local actors, who may support changes in the defence sector as a way to consolidate their own power or to take power away from others.

### PURPOSE AND END-STATE

The strategic purpose of the security forces of any country is to provide internal and external security and stability, thus permitting the country to flourish politically and economically. In practice, this means the creation of a secure environment – something especially important after a conflict or major crisis. The end-state of a DT process is a defence sector that contributes optimally to this security and stability as part of an effective and accountable security sector. Given the political factors mentioned above, the defence sector must also be acceptable, as regards its structure and behaviour, to the broad mass of the people, since failure to achieve this can itself be a factor in instability.

Thus, individual DT proposals must be evaluated to verify that they make a clear and obvious contribution to the ultimate stability of the country. Such worthwhile initiatives are not always popular, or easy to implement. By contrast it is easy to waste time on attractive and politically pleasing

initiatives which achieve little. Beyond these two obvious objectives of improved effectiveness and general acceptability some would like to add others, such as affordability. This is true in Afghanistan, for example, where properly funding the existing security forces would exceed the country's GDP. But in general such judgements are almost entirely subjective, and very difficult to evaluate. By contrast, under-funding is a major reason for the deficiencies of the defence sector in different parts of the world.

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## **A TYPICAL PROGRESSION**

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As we have seen, the point of departure in a DT process can vary enormously, depending on political and historical factors. But if the initial analysis has been done correctly, it will reveal what point has been reached, along the following three-stage progression.

### **1. The Phase of Stabilisation.**

At this point, it is necessary to create, or re-create, a defence sector that has at least the capability to establish and maintain the monopoly of the use of legitimate force in the country. In the absence of this, nothing useful can be done. In addition, the defence sector must be fully answerable to, and under the control of, the legitimate political authorities of the country, and there must be arrangements to ensure that it acts to further that government's defined security objectives. A defence sector previously identified with a regime or political party must be brought to operate, at least formally, as the defence force of the nation as a whole.

### **2. The Phase of Development.**

Once the defence forces have demonstrated loyalty to a legitimate political system, and have successfully ensured the government's monopoly of the legitimate use of force, the main work begins. It is now necessary to construct, or reconstruct, effective mechanisms for making and implementing defence policy, for the command and control of the military, and for their internal organisation and functioning. Of course, such work cannot proceed properly without a clear defence strategy, as part of a wider national security strategy. This would also be the point at which any necessary new laws and military regulations would be introduced.

### **3. The Phase of Consolidation.**

Once a functioning set of organisations and mechanisms exists for making and implementing policy, and employing the defence forces operationally, then, if the country is stable and developing normally politically and economically, the fine-tuning of structures and processes can begin. This includes the development of structured relations with parliament and other elements of the political system.

Naturally, these phases are not entirely separate, and their implementation will overlap to some extent. For example, if a country already has a functioning parliament, which is generally regarded as legitimate, it may be brought into the policy-making process earlier. But by the same token, trying to do everything at once is a recipe for disaster. Experience suggests that most countries beginning a DT process have insufficient human and organizational capabilities even to cope with day-to-day events, and so proposed DT initiatives must be ruthlessly prioritized.

## ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

It has been tacitly assumed so far that some kind of outside advice and assistance will be available in DT processes, and indeed this has usually been the case historically. In some cases (such as Ethiopia after 1991 and South Africa after 1994) almost all the work was done by the state concerned. But in both cases there was a relatively sophisticated state, a single dominant political party with clear objectives, and considerable domestic expertise. Usually, however, this is not the case, and post-conflict states have more usually suffered from some or all of the following:

- Lack of national consensus (or even overt conflict) over defence issues.
- Wholesale corruption of the political system.
- Limited capability, often the result of the talented leaving the country.
- Fixation on short-term issues.
- Lack of confidence and belief in the future.

This effectively means that foreign help, and usually funding, will be required if a DT programme is to be successful. In view of the sensitivity and complexity of the defence sector, some additional issues need to be highlighted.

### Coherence.

As will be discussed in a moment, the defence sector in any country is always relatively large and complex. Locals may be overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the DT task, and may wish to do things first which are easy to accomplish, or popular with donors, even if they are not the most important. They need to be encouraged to adopt a holistic approach with phased implementation. If not, DT can easily degenerate into a set of disconnected initiatives for which funding happens to be available.

### Coordination.

It is normal today for assistance in DT programmes to come from more than one state or organisation. This can be useful if the efforts are properly coordinated, but can often result in duplication and competition. Host governments, with limited capacity and needing money, may well accept all kinds of DT proposals from different sources even if they do not all go well together.

### Confidence.

Almost by definition, outside experts come from wealthy countries with well-functioning defence sectors. Whatever the intention, this can easily result in the intimidation of their host government, which is almost always poor and institutionally weak after a conflict. In addition, a collapsed state can easily produce an atmosphere of failure and despair, as in the early days of work to reform the defence sector in Sierra Leone. So it is common to follow, and even anticipate, the advice of outside experts, since one lacks faith in oneself.

Some of these issues can be addressed more easily than others. Where a nation or a single institution takes the lead, coherence and coordination should be easier, but, even then, experts from a nation's

ISSAT's OGN, 'The Security and Justice Reform Adviser' provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for individuals working with host governments, which are equally applicable to collective foreign involvement in DT programmes.

The OGN can be downloaded on the ISSAT website <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library2/Operational-Guidance-Notes/Implementation/ISSAT-Programme-Implementation-OGN-The-Security-and-Justice-Sector-Reform-Advisor>

development ministry may have different priorities from those of its defence ministry. One technique that has worked well, and also instilled confidence, is that of “South-South” transfers of expertise. Nations that have successfully completed their own DT process, work with nations from the same region or continent, often facilitated discreetly by western states. Thus, the South Africans provided help and support in Sierra Leone, and more recently in the Central African Republic, and the Ethiopians, facilitated by the British, advised the South Sudanese. “If we can do it, so can you”, is the message.

Three contrasted case studies from West Africa show the problems encountered when external actors involve themselves in DT programmes.

#### Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, the lead was taken by the British, with some support from other nations. They had the prestige of the former colonial power, but even more that of the nation whose intervention had brought a rapid end to the war. The British provided coherence and coordination by carrying out an across-the-board reconstruction of the whole security sector of a small state. However, seconding UK officers to the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, in the interests of accelerating the programme, proved in the end to increase local dependency, and was abandoned.

#### Liberia.

The US played a similar role in neighbouring Liberia. Here, though, the intention was to construct a “US-style” military, with US doctrine, but starting from a force size which was dictated by financial considerations. The exercise was also entrusted to private contractors, whose staff were paid much more than locals or serving US military officers. This, together with an expensive programme to vet and reject all those who might have been involved in atrocities, consumed a sizeable amount of the limited budget.

#### Guinea Bissau.

Finally, EU states attempted a collective mission in Guinea Bissau. Efforts to reform the defence sector of this poor and dysfunctional state were complicated by the military’s alleged involvement in the drugs trade, coordination problems between EU nations, funding problems, and limited cooperation from the host authorities. There were also difficulties in coordination with a UN team in country at the same time. The mission was withdrawn after two years in 2010.

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## QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

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### 1. Defining the task.

Transforming the defence sector is not the same thing as military reform. In all countries, the defence sector is more than just the operational units and a headquarters: the military itself may own munitions factories, golf clubs, hotels or even television stations. The wider defence sector may include research and development institutes, intelligence departments, think tanks, logistics depots, repair and training facilities, degree-awarding academic colleges and even schools. As a minimum, however, DT initiatives are likely to involve four broad areas:

- Operational units, including their logistic support.
- A Ministry, for policy formulation and implementation.
- A Headquarters for command and administration
- Organisations for recruiting, training, education and support.

Of these, the concept of a Ministry is the most difficult to understand and transmit. In some countries it does not exist, in others (including some in the West) it is only a military HQ with a political veneer. Its function is often not well understood. But its role is critical. In any political system, but especially in a democracy, a political figure must be responsible for all areas of government policy, in defence as in all other areas. This means a Minister to set policy and answer to parliament, and a staff to advise and implement, as well as to deal with political, administrative and financial issues. Ideally, a large proportion of this staff will be civilians, given the nature of the tasks involved. However, defence expertise is not acquired quickly, and a rush to form an ambitious defence ministry with a large civilian component can lead to politicisation, corruption and a struggle for control.

## **2. Link with other processes.**

As indicated, it is unlikely that DT will happen in isolation. Short-term measures such as DDR, parallel initiatives to reform the police and judiciary, large-scale programmes to improve governance, and longer-term initiatives such as truth commissions or even courts, all have to be taken account of. In particular, any DT programme must be coherent with wider measures to develop the whole security sector, and any initiative to write a new security policy. DT must be clearly distinguished from DDR: one is long term and strategic, the other is short-term and tactical. Nonetheless, any DT initiative will obviously have to take the consequences of DDR into account.

## **3. Strategy.**

It is obvious that the defence sector does not exist in a vacuum. Its structure and purpose derive from an underlying strategy. In the short term, its post-conflict tasks will probably define themselves, as the monopoly of force is re-established, borders are secured etc. Likewise, if the international community insists on elections being held in a polarised political environment, (as in the Côte d'Ivoire) dealing with their potential security consequences will have to come first. But some organised thinking about defence policy cannot be long delayed. This may involve a classic Defence Review, such as carried out by Uganda between 2000 and 2004 with help from the UK. But such reviews are complex, expensive and time-consuming to carry out, and so not always appropriate. They also require a high level of expertise in the country itself if the results are not to be dominated by the views of outsiders. Much depends on the range of options actually available. A reasonably sophisticated state confronted with a completely new strategic situation may well decide on a formal Defence Review. A small state with limited options, on the other hand, may find that such a process takes huge amounts of effort to produce an answer that was obvious from the start anyway

## **4. Implementation.**

However compelling a policy may be, and however sophisticated the process, a policy is of no value unless it is implemented. This means ensuring that policy decisions are translated into capabilities, programmes and force structures, and that personnel are suitably recruited, trained and organised. There must also be a coherent organisation of the four elements listed above, and a clear recognition that, whilst the military provide advice, final decisions, and therefore final responsibility, rest at the political level.

## 5. Civilians and Military.

There are no absolute rules for deciding which jobs and functions should be military, and which civilian. But there are three general principles to keep in mind

- Very few (perhaps <5%) of defence policy and management activities are purely military or purely civilian.
- Civilians and military should perform the tasks for which they are best suited, by training and experience.
- Civilians and the military are not rivals, but should work together.

In some cases, the military will have monopolised advice on defence, and security issues, and even strategic policy. The entry of civilians into defence policy and management can arouse fears of loss of influence, politicisation, and loss of professional skills. In fact, “civilianisation” is none of these things; it is the movement of civilians into jobs for which they are better suited than the military. Finance, parliamentary relations, and negotiating with foreign and finance ministries are not core military skills. In practice, whilst the involvement of civilians can mean an apparent decline in military influence, the final result of a professional defence sector with a strong civilian component will be better for everyone, including the military, and efforts need to be made to convince them of this.

In this context, we can distinguish two core military functions:

- The command and control function, which also includes training and doctrine, military personnel management and administration. This would ultimately be the responsibility of a National Military Commander.
- The military advice function, which is the military contribution to policy-making and execution, and is the responsibility of a Chief of Defence.

In general, the first function takes place largely outside the Ministry, and the second largely within it. Ideally, the two posts described would be held by different people in different locations, but in smaller states this may not be feasible. In any event, the two roles must be clearly distinguished.

## 6. Defence in a democracy.

It is possible to have a well-run and effective defence sector under any kind of political system. But there are special considerations in the case of a democracy. Here, the state is the servant of the people, and the people obey the law, and pay taxes because the state provides them with services in return. One of these services is security, and if the state cannot provide this security, people will try to do it for themselves, often with disastrous consequences. This is one reason why a well-functioning defence sector is so important. The fact that the state is the servant of the people also imposes certain democratic obligations on defence, exactly as on other parts of government, particularly to be transparent and accountable.

- By transparency we mean simply that, since defence is spending public money and acting in the name of the people, it should make as much information as possible available about what it is doing, to the public and its elected representatives. Obviously, there are more sensitivities attached to defence than, say, education, but this is a difference of degree, not of type. Although the idea of transparency is simple in theory, it is often complex in practice, since information from governments is usually sought for political reasons, to embarrass the party in power and challenge its policies. Transparency is a large and complex commitment, especially for a newly reformed defence structure, and one where considerable help will be needed.
- By accountability, we mean that in a democracy governments owe an “account” of what they have done to the public and its elected representatives. Conventionally, this is in the form of

White Papers, statements to parliament, and the ability of parliament to demand information, question ministers and produce reports. Again, this is a complex, politically sensitive issue where external help will be required.

## **7. Parliament and the Courts.**

In a democracy, various outside forces may also play a role. Some, but not all, have legal standing. Parliament usually has the constitutional role of passing laws, and scrutinising and voting on expenditure proposals, and conventionally also has the right to question ministers and debate important topics. In immediate post-conflict situations, parliaments may be corrupt and lack legitimacy, and it is anyway often hard to find parliamentarians willing to specialise in defence issues. As part of Phase III of Defence Transformation, attempts to educate parliamentarians about defence issues are important, in allowing parliament to play its role. Likewise, courts in a democracy rule on the legality of government actions, in defence as elsewhere. Indeed, it is a test of the existence of a true democracy that a government willingly accepts the supremacy of parliament and the courts in certain situations, since, after all, there is no practical way in which either can enforce its acts or decisions.

## **8. Involvement of outsiders.**

Unelected but influential groups may seek to influence defence policy, and the defence sector has to be able to deal with them. In many societies, such groups (often labelled “civil society”) will be linked to political parties to ethnic or religious tendencies. They may also be funded by foreign donors, and so there is the risk of them cultivating close, elite relationships with foreign governments, and even becoming more influential than the elected government of their country. Whilst public debate and discussion is always important, and there are many valuable civil society organisations, management of relations with them can be very complex.

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## **CONCLUSION: FIRST, DO NO HARM**

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A well-functioning defence sector is a major force for stability and an important enabler of political and economic progress. Defence transformation is therefore extremely important, especially in rebuilding post-conflict states. But defence is also a very sensitive issue, and poorly thought out initiatives can be de-stabilising. It should never be forgotten that defence is ultimately about power. People seek power, and dislike losing it. Thus DT initiatives should be carefully chosen and undertaken only when there are clear benefits to stability. The motto for DT practitioners should be the advice traditionally given to medical students: first, do no harm.

## ANNEX: PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES AND PROBLEMS

### PRINCIPLES

- A properly functioning defence sector should be effective at what it does.
- It should also be economical in its use of resources.
- It should be fully embedded in the wider security policy sector.
- It should express the ethics of the social and political system it serves.

### GOOD PRACTICES

#### General SSR Good Practices:

- One Fundamental Approach – Local Ownership
- Two Core Objectives – Improved effectiveness and accountability
- Three Essential Dimensions – Holistic nature; Political sensitivity; and technical complexity

#### Additional Good Practices for Defence Transformation

- Holistic approach, sensitive and staged implementation.
- Prior analysis of the role, political position and culture of the military
- Ruthless prioritisation.
- As much coordination between outside experts as possible
- Concentration on measures which will enhance stability.
- Avoidance, as far as possible of the growth of a dependency culture.

### PROBLEMS TO AVOID

- Trying to do everything at once.
- Doing things which are easy and popular, rather than important.
- Trying to impose an inflexible model from outside.
- Demanding more of the host nation than it can provide.
- Promoting needless complexity and difficulty.
- Manipulation of the DT process by local elites.

## FURTHER READING

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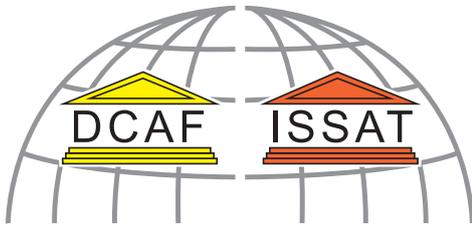
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The point of contact for the ISSAT OGNs on programme implementation is Patrick Hagan. To contact ISSAT please e-mail [contact@issat.dcaf.ch](mailto:contact@issat.dcaf.ch). Other OGNs are available at <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library/Operational-Guidance-Notes>



The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

# The International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT)

## SUPPORTING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S SSR CAPACITY



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