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THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SECURITY SECTOR GOVERNANCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Introduction

Over the last ten years, there has been an increasing amount of interest in the issue of security sector reform, and, as a subset of this, a specific focus on the question of democratic governance over the security sector. It has been widely recognised that if security institutions are not fully under democratic civilian control, they can impede the development of the state in a number of ways. This may involve the squandering of scarce national resources because there is little civilian oversight over how they spend their money. It may be a matter of poorly trained and badly paid staff turning to corruption in order to supplement their income, with no mechanisms in place to stop them doing so. In extreme cases, the security sector may become so independent of external control that it starts to become a 'state within a state' or threatens to take over the state in order to better pursue its own objectives. Emphasis has thus been placed on ensuring that all the state institutions that are involved in the provision of security have clearly defined roles and remits within society, are professional and accountable, and that they are overseen by capable civilian administration and democratically-elected bodies.

A well-functioning security sector thus consists of three main categories of institution: organisations authorised to use force, civil management and oversight bodies, and justice and law-enforcement institutions.[48] Recently, however, it has become clear that it is not enough to focus only on the official state bodies that make up the security sector. In order to have a full understanding of the security situation in the country, it is also necessary to take into account two further groups that are part of the

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[48] Ball, Nicole (2002). 'Democratic Governance in the Security Sector'. UNDP Workshop on 'Learning from Experience for Afghanistan', February.

wider 'security community'. The first is non-state security actors that may use force, such as guerrilla fighters, political militias, civil defence groups and private security companies. This spans a range of different organisations, some of which are legal, some of which are illegal. At times, they can play an important role in 'filling in the gaps' where the state is unable or unwilling to tread. In many parts of the world, however, these groups function in parallel or even against the official state bodies, and they can frequently impede state-led efforts to reform. This is a genuine threat in the South Caucasus, and the influence of such non-state actors must be considered when designing projects to improve security sector governance.

In this paper, however, the focus will be on the second category of non-state bodies that have, or should have, a role to play in the provision of security: a wide range of civilian-run, non-violent groups that together form what has become known as 'civil society.'

What Is Civil Society, and what Relevance does it have to Security Matters?

Before considering the importance of civil society involvement in security matters, it is necessary to define what is actually meant by 'civil society,' as different people and organisations tend to have a different scope in mind when using this term. At its most reductionist, the words 'civil society' are often used interchangeably with 'non-governmental organisations' (NGOs). This in itself can be problematic, as the whole concept of what constitutes an NGO is also somewhat amorphous; however, the term generally refers to organised, non-profit groups that are thought to be representative of society more broadly and claim to strive for some social goal. This tendency to equate 'civil society' with NGOs is seen particularly frequently in development circles, where the number and efficiency of NGOs is seen as a good marker of the overall democratic health of the state.

Properly understood, however, the concept of civil society is much wider in scope, 'encompassing all the organizations and associations that exist

outside of the state (including political parties) and the market.'[49] This broader definition would embrace everything from research, policy and advocacy organisations, through trade unions, religious and faith-based organisations to traditional structures (such as village elders) and small community groups, and even those with no social or political agenda (such as film clubs or sports associations). It can include concerned members of the public who have not founded formal organisations but are nonetheless active in the public sphere. Importantly, it also includes the media, which in most societies plays a key role in sharing information and helping to form public attitudes. It is this broader definition that will be used in this paper, as will be shown, to equate civil society merely with NGOs in the South Caucasus would be a grave mistake.

It is now widely accepted that a strong, active civil society greatly enhances the vitality and durability of a democracy, functioning as a transmission belt easing the interaction between the state and the individual. The role of civil society organisations in issues relating to security, however, is often much more controversial. Members of the military, the police, and other governmental institutions authorised to use force often feel that their job is by its nature a matter of state, to be dealt with by state professionals alone. They may believe that civilians are ignorant of what they do and are therefore incapable of contributing usefully to their work. But a state can best provide security only if it takes into account the opinions of the people it is ultimately protecting, even if these views do not always correspond to those of state officials. Furthermore, in countries with a well-developed civil society, non-state civilian bodies can perform a number of functions that help to improve the governance of the security sector, ultimately strengthening the security of the state itself.

Perhaps the most obvious role that civil society can play in security matters is as a public watchdog, checking that security sector actors are performing their tasks both within the remits assigned to them and within the general direction in which society is developing. For example,

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[49]   Carothers, Thomas. 'Think again: civil society'. *Foreign Policy*. Winter 1999-2000.

academics and research organisations might evaluate the state's overall defence policy, or consider whether specific actions are in line with the government's stated aims. They may wish to focus on one particular element of security affairs, such as defence expenditure or the arms trade[50], or on specific events, such as a decision to send troops to a particular conflict or peacekeeping operation. Organisations might also monitor the level of respect for human rights and the rule of law within the security sector, highlighting infringements with the aim of ensuring that such abuses will not happen again. This will obviously involve the government being subjected to a certain amount of criticism, but providing the criticism is responsible and constructive, it will benefit the state as a whole by raising awareness of security issues and hopefully increasing the range and quality of ideas to solve them. Furthermore, this monitoring acts as an extra check and balance within the democratic system – but one that the state does not itself have to pay for.

As noted earlier, in most countries the media is influential in forming and informing public opinion. Security actors are often suspicious of the media, particularly as some of their work naturally requires secrecy. It is indeed important that there is clear legislation in place governing what the media can and cannot report, and that the media is responsible enough to respect the state's need for secrecy, when it is genuine. Yet too often, official secrecy can be used as a veil to hide incidences of inefficiency, incompetence or corruption. Security officials often complain that civilians are ill-informed while at the same time withholding much information that could be made public without endangering state security. At times, this restriction of data is so severe that even civilian oversight bodies that form part of the official security sector, such as finance ministries and parliamentary oversight committees, do not have the necessary facts to make informed decisions. There is no reason, however, why many items should not be made publicly available. These include major documents such as the state's national security policy, the defence budget (except secret funds), the

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[50]   For example, every year, London-based NGO Saferworld publishes an audit of the UK Government's annual report on arms exports in order to analyse whether authorised UK arms sales adhere to the government's own human rights and arms export criteria.

minutes of parliamentary meetings on security issues (except when these are behind closed doors), and government statements on all major security-related issues.[51] Security officials should realise that there can be benefits to having a more open relationship with the public and the media. Though the media may at times be openly critical of the government, it can also help to publicise the government's successes, enhance the public's understanding of the security challenges facing the state, and build greater will for reform.

A final, but often overlooked benefit of a strong civil society working on security issues is that it provides a pool of knowledge and experience into which governments can tap. Most obviously, it is an alternative source of skilled professionals from which government agencies can recruit. Furthermore, academics and research organisations offer an extra resource to government officials who may wish to seek advice at any stage of policy planning and implementation.

The Development of the Civil Society in the South Caucasus

How do these general theories on the benefits of civil society involvement in security sector governance relate to the specific case of the South Caucasus? To answer this question, it is necessary first to consider the particular circumstances relating to the development of both the security sector and civil society since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as this period has seen dramatic changes to both. In fact, the histories of the two are inter-related, particularly in the immediate pre- and post-independence era.

Going back only twenty years it is almost impossible to identify anything that resembled an active 'civil society.' Though it is debatable to what extent the Soviet Union was a truly totalitarian society, particularly post-Stalin, few would deny that it shared the totalitarian characteristic of being 'a modern autocratic government in which the

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[51]   For a more comprehensive list of information that should be publicly available, see. Born, Hans, et al. (2003). *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Principles, mechanisms and practices*. Handbook for Parliamentarians no. 5. Geneva: IPU/DCAF.

state involves itself in all facets of society…erasing the distinction between state and society.'[52] The state involved itself in everything from children's youth groups to veterans' associations, from sports clubs to theatre groups. There was no independent media. There were no independent research or advocacy groups. Organised religion was always frowned upon, and usually severely repressed.

This is not to say that there were absolutely no units bigger than the individual, but smaller than the state. In fact, the near omnipresence of the state actually heightened the importance of close personal links, and people relied heavily on small networks of family and friends. This was as true in urban areas of the Caucasus as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, whilst in the more rural and remote regions, where modern Soviet life had penetrated less deeply, traditional family, clan and ethnic allegiances continued to play an important role in the organisation of society. Yet such structures were by nature unofficial, small and isolated, and therefore could not combine to make a concerted impact on Soviet public life.

It was during Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to revitalise the Soviet society through *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost'* (openness), that the civil society, in its broadest sense, began to awake. The state allowed citizens to form independent organisations, and almost overnight groups sprouted up across the Soviet Union, from those campaigning on human rights or environmental issues to those concerned with minor local issues. The press was allowed greater freedom to discuss issues that had previously been totally taboo. Political life became relatively more open and inclusive'; in a situation where for many years there had been no independent political or social life, the development of one was so closely linked to that of the other that it makes little sense to discuss the regeneration of civil society separately from the overall political revival. Gorbachev himself did not seem to divide the two, extolling the ideal of

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[52]   *Totalitarianism*. The Columbia Encyclopedia, sixth edition, 2001.

'whole-hearted, active participation by the whole community in all of society's affairs' in 1987. [53]

One apparently unintended consequence of Gorbachev's political and social reforms was a sharp increase in overt nationalism. The easing of state control over certain spheres of life created a vacuum that was soon filled by nationalist rhetoric. This meant that other social goals soon took a back seat to political campaigning. Many civil society organisations that had begun as apolitical interest groups became increasingly politicised. Some issues were exploited by nationalist campaigners looking for reasons to criticise the central authorities. This was particularly true of the environment movement. In Armenia, for example, already powerful nationalist sentiments were further strengthened by the Soviet government's insufficient response to the terrible earthquake in Leninakan (Gyumri) in December 1988.

Thus, in the last years of the USSR, the sudden renaissance in civil society was part of a wider political reawakening that led eventually to independence for the South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. With independence, of course, came the need to create new institutions of state, including the establishment of security sectors. Out of the mixed bag of institutions, personnel and weaponry inherited from the Soviet Union, these states were forced to construct ministries of defence, armed forces, police services etc almost overnight. This process was greatly complicated by the fact that all three states were engaged in some form of conflict: until a ceasefire in May 1994, Armenia and Azerbaijan were at war over the largely ethnic-Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, whilst by the end of 1993 the central Georgian authorities had already lost two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and had also seen large-scale fighting, often referred to as a civil war, by political factions competing for control of the state. Understandably, with much of the South Caucasus on a war footing, the security sectors in these states (including in the breakaway regions) were very much moulded to the needs of war, and

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[53]   *Pravda*, 26 February 1987, quoted in Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski (2001). *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy.* Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

indeed the development of all state structures in the region was strongly influenced by the atmosphere of conflict. One almost inevitable consequence of this was that normal civilian life – and with it much of civil society – took a back seat or disappeared entirely.

Since 1994, the three major conflicts in the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia) have all remained stuck in a situation of 'no peace, no war' (though much more progress appears to have been made in regard to South Ossetia than in the other two conflicts). There has been a much higher degree of stability since then, though the backdrop of 'frozen' conflicts and the potential for internal political instability (as indicated by the varying levels of protest in 2003 against election results in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) continues to cause concern and threatens the evolution of a mature, democratic state with a vibrant civil society.

In general, civil society in the South Caucasus remains weak and underdeveloped, though recent events in Georgia suggest that observers had underestimated the strength of civil society and public opinion there. There is general agreement that NGOs and the independent media played a crucial role in spreading democratic ideas among the population, leading to the peaceful 'Rose Revolution' of November 2003, when President Shevardnadze was forced to resign after three weeks of protests about fraud in parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, it is too early to confirm that this represents a genuine entrenchment of civil society in the Georgian political system.

Despite these differences between the three recognised states, not to mention the breakaway regions, some broad observations can be made about civil society in the South Caucasus. To focus first on NGOs, there is still limited understanding both within government and amongst the public itself as to what NGOs can offer. In part, this is probably because they are still a somewhat new phenomenon; however, it is also the case that they have a poor (or sometimes no) public image. USAID's 2002 NGO Sustainability Index notes that in Georgia 'people are aware of

NGOs' existence, but have little specific knowledge of their activities',[54] whilst in Azerbaijan 'NGOs do not take sufficient efforts to create a positive public image…and they remain closed from the general population…68% of those surveyed were not aware of what an NGO is.'[55] NGOs are sometimes seen in a negative light due to apparent political bias, or because they are largely dependent on international funding. This can lead to a perception (sometimes well-founded) that NGOs are more interested in earning money than in their supposed social goals. For example, in large-scale sociological surveys in 2002 across the South Caucasus on human rights issues, nearly half of respondents in Armenia (47.8%) and Georgia (49.8%), and over a quarter in Azerbaijan (26%) expressed an opinion that human rights organisations 'engage mostly in self-advertising and receiving foreign grants, and their real assistance to people is insignificant.'[56] Even when NGOs are representative of a particular constituency or interest group, the huge majority of them works only in their respective capital cities and has little influence in more remote regions. Finally, most NGOs still have little organisational capacity and lack experience in co-operating with other actors (e.g. governments, the media, other NGOs). Despite all these negative comments, however, it should be recognised that in all three states there are examples of well-organised, well-respected NGOs that have succeeded in helping their community, either by providing a service that the government itself was unable or unwilling to provide, or by campaigning for certain rights to be respected or legislation to be implemented.

It should also be noted at this point that since the mid-1990s, the work of local NGOs has been supplemented by the involvement of a number of international NGOs. Initially focused largely on issues such as caring for refugees and supporting democracy-building activities, the scope of foreign involvement has broadened in line with the overall increase in international interest in the South Caucasus. Such organisations

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[54]   NGO Sustainability Index (2002). USAID, p.79.
[55]   Ibid. p.38.
[56]   Regional Project "South Caucasus Network for Civil Accord", 'Situation with Human Rights in Countries of South Caucasus: Results of sociological surveys 2002'. Yerevan: Armenian Sociological Association, 2003.

potentially bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and resources to the region. However, in order to be effective they must strive to understand and adapt to local realities, and thus many of them seek out local partners with which they can co-operate.

The situation regarding the media in the South Caucasus is as ambiguous as that of NGOs. For a start, state-controlled media has not been politically neutral, particularly in the run-up to elections. The OSCE stated that during campaigning for the March 2003 presidential elections in Armenia, 'public TV and the major State-funded newspaper were heavily biased in favour of the incumbent' and that in corresponding elections in Azerbaijan in November 2003, 'media coverage of the campaign was characterized by an overwhelming tendency of state-owned and government-oriented media to exhibit an overt bias in favour of Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev.' In Georgia, the state media was less overtly biased, and the reporting on independent television channel Rustavi-2 was considered to play a key role in informing the public about the election violations and subsequent protests. Though this is a very positive step, there is a danger that this example might convince other regimes to clamp down even more firmly on freedom of speech, as it can clearly present a threat to their continued hold on power.

The level of press freedom in the three countries is also less than ideal. The 2003 press freedom rankings by Reporters Without Borders placed Georgia 73rd, Armenia 90th, and Azerbaijan 113th out of 164 countries.[57] There have been a number of cases where journalists have been intimidated or attacked, though of course it is hard to say who is ultimately responsible. Nonetheless, incidents such as the death of independent television presenters Georgy Sanaya in Georgia in July 2001 and Tigran Naghdalian in Armenia in December 2002 suggest that journalists cannot feel entirely safe when reporting on certain issues. Private broadcasters and newspapers have sometimes been fined or lost their licenses for apparently political reasons. In Azerbaijan, for example, journalists from several independent newspapers, including *Azadliq*, *Femida* and *Yeni Musavat* have faced libel proceedings for

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[57]   Reporters without borders, annual report, 2003.

publishing articles focusing on corruption, incompetence and social problems. In Armenia, Mesrop Movsesian, the outgoing chief of television channel *A1+*, alleged that he had lost his license to another bidder because his station criticised the government. Nevertheless, in all three countries there are independent media outlets. Furthermore, despite the flaws in both the independent and state-controlled media, it clearly does play a key role in formulating public opinion and thus provides an important function in society.

One further element of civil society that is often overlooked, but may be particularly significant in the Caucasus, is at the level of local community institutions, both formal and informal. Given the difficult mountainous terrain, the large number of ethnic groups in the region, and the fact that outside the major cities, the influence of modern urban life has been quite small, family, clan and ethnic loyalties often play a particularly important role in daily life. Religious figures may also be well respected and often have more authority in the public's eyes than government officials.

Civil Society and the Security Sector

Thus civil society as a whole is flawed, but in some ways quite vibrant. As far as the security sector is concerned, however, it is undoubtedly the case that civil society involvement is very low. There are no more than a handful of organisations across the region that work directly on security issues.[58] There are a number of reasons for this. The first may simply be that there are few individuals with much expertise on the civilian side of security matters; it may not be surprising that there is a knowledge vacuum within civil society, when governments themselves struggle to find suitably trained staff. Secondly, in some areas it may be felt that security issues are not one of the most pressing priorities – this appears to be the case in Armenia, where, given that there are no conflicts directly on Armenian territory and there is a perception that Armenia has

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[58]   The one notable exception are groups uniting veterans of the recent wars in the South Caucasus. These have the potential to play a significant role in pressing for the rights of ex-combatants, but some feel they are deliberately marginalised or ignored by their governments.

'won' the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, other issues, such as basic poverty, are thought to be much more important. Thirdly, some people may feel that work that involves analysing and criticising the work of the security sector is too dangerous, as being too vigorous in one's criticism could potentially lead to trouble, either officially or unofficially, with people who, for their own reasons, wish to keep certain information out of the public domain. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is widespread pessimism about what, if anything, civilian actors can achieve in such matters – and thus a feeling that it is better not to waste one's time trying.

It is this general public cynicism that gives the clearest indication of the lack of civil society engagement in the security sector. To some extent, this cynicism towards the security sector is merely part of a wider public distrust of the state – though much of this distrust is caused particularly by the actions of the 'power ministries' (i.e. the ministries of defence, interior and state security), who are generally seen as being the most corrupt and threatening branch of power. For many civilians, their primary (and perhaps only) mode of interaction with the police force may be in the payment of 'fines' for questionable traffic offences. The public holds little hope that it can rely on the law-enforcement agencies for protection from crime. In the aforementioned sociological surveys, only 5.5% of Georgian respondents, 10.5% of Armenian respondents and 26.4% of Azerbaijani respondents answered positively to the question 'How would you characterise the work of the police in your country?'; the most common answers in all three countries were 'they mostly pursue their own interests' and 'regular citizens would do better to avoid the police.'[59] Similar attitudes are generally found towards the legal system – there is a widespread belief that the decision of the courts depends on the bribe paid, rather than on justice or the truth.[60] This leads

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[59]   Regional Project "South Caucasus Network for Civil Accord", 'Situation with Human Rights in Countries of South Caucasus: Results of sociological surveys 2002', Yerevan: Armenian Sociological Association, 2003, p.32.

[60]   Civil society groups such as the Helsinki Association of Armenia, the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association have been campaigning for the strengthening of the rule of law and highlighting human rights abuses, meaning that there is at least some monitoring of the legal system by civil society.

to a general perception that security is not a public right – it is a commodity available only to those who can afford it. Even where official complaint mechanisms exist, the public tends to doubt they will have any effect. In response to a question on who they turn to when their civil rights are violated, over 80% of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and 70% of Georgians, answered either 'nobody' or 'friends and relatives.'

The overall view is that most security forces are more concerned with pursuing their own interests than in defending the citizens and the state. This may take two forms. Firstly, there are often suspicions that certain security services are not politically neutral, and function as much to preserve the incumbent regime as to maintain stability in the state as a whole. In the October 2003 presidential election in Azerbaijan, for instance, international observers noted that 'an atmosphere of intimidation gravely undercut public participation and free campaigning. This situation was compounded by serious violence and an excessive use of force by police at some stages.' Examples of state agencies functioning in an apparently biased way were also quoted in elections in Armenia and Georgia.[61] Secondly, these forces are often corrupt, and simply more interested in making money than their official tasks. It is well known in Armenia that Ministry of Defence officials have business interests in a number of profitable industries, such as the oil and tobacco trade. Some of the profits go into unofficial 'slush funds' that boost the Ministry's budget; the rest presumably goes straight to those involved.[62] This is not an isolated case – similarly corrupt practices have been

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[61]   OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 'Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Election 15 October 2003', p.3,
www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1151_en.pdf
see also 'Republic of Armenia Presidential Election 19 February 2003: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions',
www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/am/am_19feb2003_efr.php3;
'International Election Observation Mission: Parliamentary Elections, Georgia – 2 November 2003',
www.osce.org/press_rel/2003/pdf_documents/11-3659-odihr1.pdf

[62]   Avagyan, Gagik (2003). 'Armenia: Forcing the Peace' in Anna Matveeva and Duncan Hiscock (eds), *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided – Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*. London: Saferworld, p.37.

identified in a number of ministries in all three countries. Given that Azerbaijan and Georgia both ranked joint 124th out of 133 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index,[63] it is safe to say that high levels of corruption are pervasive across the South Caucasus.

Improving Security Sector Governance in the South Caucasus, and Integrating Civil Society into the Equation – why does it all Matter?

Does this lack of civil society involvement, and the largely negative public attitudes towards the security sector, actually matter? The answer is yes, both because they limit the efficacy of the state security actors to perform their tasks, and because they are also an obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus.

At the national level, it is clear that the poor level of interaction between civil society and the security sector makes it harder for the state agencies to function efficiently. For a start, it is clear that they are missing out on the potential benefits listed above of greater civil society involvement, in terms of more individuals with expert knowledge of security issues, more and better ideas being generated, independent monitoring of their progress, and so on. At a much more basic level, however, public co-operation is often essential to the successful work of certain agencies. For example, the police cannot hope to be very effective if people do not even report crimes, or do not trust the police enough to aid them in their enquiries. The work of customs officials and border guards can similarly be enhanced by public willingness to co-operate and provide information on criminal activity. Recruitment for the armed forces, whether for military service or career professionals, is hindered by negativity towards army life, and those that can find a way to avoid enlisting generally do so. The result is that the army may have trouble attracting the most talented or suitable members of the population.

Where the official security agencies are perceived to be unable to defend their citizens, protecting oneself becomes a personal matter. One clear result of this is high levels of illegal small arms possession in many

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[63]   'Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2003', www.transparency.org/cpi/2003/cpi2003.en

areas. People may acquire weapons to defend themselves against mafia groups and other criminals, believing the police will not do this for them. With no final peace deal found to the conflicts in the region, the fear of further fighting provides another strong reason to hold on to one's weapon. The danger is, however, that this arms proliferation makes the region as a whole more insecure. Weapons that are not registered or controlled can easily fall into criminal hands or through the illegal arms trade flow to and from conflict hotspots, fuelling further violence. Furthermore, high levels of arms possession impede conflict resolution, as the presence of large quantities of weapons, particularly if they are not under state control, stokes suspicion that the other side either intends, or is unable to prevent, further violence.

In fact, it is clear that the whole issue of security sector governance and reform is closely linked to the success or failure of conflict resolution efforts. Improving security sector governance is but one part of a process of strengthening the state and making it more acceptable to the people, and only if the public has a sufficient degree of trust in the state can the state be confident that it will be supported when it makes the compromises that are necessary to the non-violent resolution of any conflict. It is essential that civil society is part of this process, even though it is unlikely to be directly involved in peace negotiations. The difficulties surrounding the attempts to come to an agreement on the future of Nagorno-Karabakh are a clear demonstration of what can happen if the public is not considered. Though the frozen conflict in Karabakh is obviously the most important security issues facing both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the search for peace was seen as a matter for senior government officials only. Those that were directly affected by the conflict, in particular refugee groups, felt that they were rarely consulted. Crucially, little effort was made to generate a realistic public debate in either country about the future of the territory. The result is that even when it has appeared that behind closed doors, progress has been made, both the Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership have had trouble promoting any aspect of a peace deal to a cynical public, who exhibit little understanding that compromise is either necessary or, in the long term, to their benefit. Accusations that Levon Ter-Petrossian was preparing to 'sell out' Karabakh were a major factor in his fall from

power in 1998, whilst it is generally believed that agreement was close at Key West in Florida in 2001, but later abandoned when presidents Kocharyan and (in particular) Aliyev returned to their respective countries to find that the deal on offer was politically beyond the pale. Until more is done to foster public support for a peace settlement, including an awareness that compromises will need to be made, this situation is likely to continue. This will require greater involvement of civil society organisations in the peace dialogue, and in particular, the transmission of these ideas through the media.[64]

It is not only the citizens of a state itself that need to be convinced that the security sector is democratically controlled and essentially aims to protect their lives and rights. Though the peace-loving nature of democracies is often exaggerated, it is not unreasonable to suggest that most states would prefer their neighbours to have responsible and efficient security institutions, with which it is possible to co-operate on cross-border security issues. Moreover, trust in the security sector is a key issue in resolving conflict between central government and separatist regions. If the final goal of the central authorities is some form of re-integration of the separatist region into a unified state, one of the largest obstacles will be the lack of trust between those security officials in the capital and those in the breakaway (unrecognised) republic. This lack of trust, or even animosity, is likely to be particularly intense as it is probable that these people fought against each other in the original conflict. Persuading the separatist state that some form of re-integration is acceptable will therefore require firm evidence that the central security institutions do not present a threat to the people of the separatist state – which is unlikely to be possible unless these institutions are seen to have changed and are now democratically accountable and non-biased. Even where such re-integration currently seems totally unrealistic, well-designed security sector reform may still succeed in improving trust between the conflicting sides, making some form of resolution possible.

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[64] One step in this process is being supported by the UK Department for International Development, which has sponsored a consortium of NGOs to work on building dialogue and a constituency for peace through work with civil society, the media and the parliaments of the conflict states.

Challenges to the Reform Process

The potential benefits of improving the level of democratic governance over the security sector should thus be clear. The question now is whether such reform is actually achievable, and whether possible obstacles to the success of the reform process can be overcome. By far the biggest challenge will to ensure that there is enough political backing for reform. Without a genuine commitment to reform on the part of the states of the South Caucasus themselves, the process will fall at the first hurdle. Similarly, if the international community cannot coordinate its policies on political, technical and financial support, reform is likely to piecemeal and ineffective. To avoid these potential traps, it will be necessary to consult widely to clarify the aims and objectives of reform, and how it will be implemented – and civil society must be part of this dialogue.

Two observations about the nature of 'security sector reform' should help to highlight the potential risks associated with initiating such a reform process in the South Caucasus. Firstly, a brief glance at the history of 'security sector reform' as a concept makes it clear that it has generally been an externally-led process. What is now referred to as security sector reform stems largely from the traditional study of civil-military relations being adapted to the needs of development agencies, as they became increasingly aware in the post-Cold War environment that insecurity could be a major obstacle to development.[65] Hence security sector reform has been largely donor-driven, and this is reflected by the fact that there appear to be as many documents detailing how donors should input into the process as there are giving practical advice to states that are themselves trying to implement reform. The implication is that the nascent interest in security sector governance and reform in the South Caucasus may stem as much from a shifting of international priorities as to an internal realisation that reform is necessary. In the last few years, Western interest in the Caucasus has been growing, both because of its natural resources and because of its key strategic position. Alongside greater bilateral involvement, organisations such as the OSCE

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[65]   Edmunds, Timothy (2002). *Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation,* Working Paper no. 3. Geneva: DCAF.

and NATO have expressed their intention to focus more on the South Caucasus (and Central Asia). This is clearly to be welcomed – but the success or failure of co-operation on specific issues will depend on whether common objectives can be found by enough of the actors involved.

Is security sector reform an area where enough common ground can be found? A second observation about the discipline highlights a potential problem. Security sector reform has been most concerned with two types of situation – post-conflict and post-authoritarian scenarios. The states of the South Caucasus contain elements of both, but fit neatly into neither. Though there has been virtually no active fighting since 1994, no part of the region can truly claim to be 'post-conflict', as between them, the three frozen wars continue to affect everyone. Nor do these states really fit into the 'post-authoritarian' category. At first, this may seem strange: surely the Soviet Union was authoritarian, and thus the states that were formed out of them may be classed as 'post-authoritarian'? Perhaps, but replacing the word 'post-authoritarian' with another (admittedly problematic) word, 'transition', illustrates the problem better. Unlike post-authoritarian, transition states in Central and Eastern Europe, or even Latin America, there is no clarity about what form of state the governments of the South Caucasus are attempting to transform into, and this is the crucial difference. Most international experience in security sector reform has been in situations where there is a clear break from the old regime, and general agreement about the eventual goals; attempts to run reform programmes in parallel with conflict resolution, and with less certainty about the overall direction the state is headed, are much less charted waters. While Poland and Hungary, for example, saw security sector reform as an essential part of their integration into Western structures such as the EU and NATO, this remains a distant prospect for the states of the South Caucasus. If the international community wishes these states to reform, it will need to think carefully about what incentives it can offer beyond the usual abstract promises of greater peace and prosperity. Part of this entails demonstrating that its engagement in the region will be substantial and long-term; if involvement does not exceed occasional workshops and seminars that

focus more on what states should do than on giving them the resources to do so, interest in reform will soon wane.

This is not to say that successful reform is impossible. If enough common ground and political will can be found, there is no reason why any obstacle cannot be overcome. Does this agreement exist, however? It would be foolish to rush into reform projects simply because various people feel that they must be seen to be doing something. Unfortunately, there are reasons to be pessimistic about the commitment of the states of the South Caucasus themselves, and about the usefulness of international involvement in the process.

Perhaps the greatest reason to doubt the commitment of states in the South Caucasus to security sector reform is that their attitude towards democracy as a whole remains questionable. The elections held in all three recognised states in 2003, criticised to varying degrees for infringements such as ballot-stuffing, incorrect voter lists, and voter intimidation, provided strong evidence that these regimes' approach to democracy is less than satisfactory. International observer missions felt that these failures could not be attributed to a lack of technical expertise or equipment. The OSCE concluded that the deficiencies in the 2003 presidential election in Armenia were due to 'a lack of sufficient political determination by the authorities to ensure a fair and honest process,'[66] and that the failure to meet international standards in the Azerbaijani presidential election 'reflected a lack of sufficient political commitment to implement a genuine election process.'[67] This apparent lack of enthusiasm for proper democratic procedures in their most obvious manifestation does not bode well for attempts to improve democratic mechanisms in a field as sensitive and central to the functioning of the state as the security sector. Georgia presents a different case. The 2 November parliamentary elections, which raised

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[66] 'Republic of Armenia Presidential Election 19 February 2003: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions', accessed on 6 January 2004 under www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/am/am_19feb2003_efr.php3.

[67] 'Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Election 15 October 2003', OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 2003, p.3, accessed on 6 January 2004 under www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1151_en.pdf.

'questions about the willingness and capacity of the Georgian governmental and parliamentary authorities to conduct a credible election process,'[68] led to the mass protests that culminated in the resignation of President Shevardnadze. It remains to be seen, however, whether the new government, once elected, will maintain its commitment to anti-corruption measures, openness and transparency – particularly in the security sector – once it has been in power for a while.

The commitment of the international community to act is less in doubt; it has been noted earlier that both national governments and international organisations have expressed their desire to deepen their engagement in the region. The risk here is more that the multitude of international actors that are interested in the South Caucasus may all pull in different directions, effectively cancelling each other out. The South Caucasus forms a natural crossroads between a number of great civilisations and powers, and this, combined with the Caspian basin's natural oil and gas resources, has meant that Western planners have begun to attach greater significance to the region. Yet Western governments have often ignored the fact that despite their greater involvement in the area, they are still far from the only voice that is heard there, and that the interests of a number of other states must be taken into account. This means, above all, Russia. After all, Moscow was in control of the region that has come to be known as the South Caucasus until 1991, and it is understandable that Russia will continue to have an interest in what happens along its borders. Western governments must accept that Russia will continue to play an important role in the South Caucasus, even if its actions are not always positive or benign. Even where other states are not directly included into the dialogue, their likely reactions to events must be factored in. This is particularly true of Iran, which certain Western governments have sought to isolate; whether they like it or not, however, Iran shares a border with Azerbaijan and Armenia, and its views will need to be considered. Lastly, though Turkey is seen as a Western ally in the region, it should be realised that Turkey's priorities in the region, in

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[68] 'International Election Observation Mission: Parliamentary Elections, Georgia – 2 November 2003', accessed on 6 January 2004, www.osce.org/press_rel/2003/pdf_documents/11-3659-odihr1.pdf.

particular its strong support for Azerbaijan, may not always correspond to the strategic interests of the West more broadly.

The danger is that the South Caucasus continues to be a geopolitical or ideological battleground. This could mean that different major actors engage in activities that although designed for the benefit of the region, end up negating each other's effects; the states in the region might see an interest in playing major actors off against each other – even if this is to the detriment of regional, and eventually their own, development. Even if reforms are carried out with some success, it could come to nothing if the success of these reforms in one area causes fear and suspicion in neighbouring areas. For example, the US Georgia Train and Equip (GTEP) programme designed to enhance that country's counter-terrorism and command and control capacities, has aroused concern in South Ossetia and Abkhazia that Georgian troops might one day be deployed in operations against these breakaway states, though the Georgian leadership have stated that this will not happen. In a similar fashion, it is not hard to imagine that many possible security-related reforms in Armenia or Azerbaijan could be interpreted by the other side as increasing the threat towards them, leading them to take counter-measures that succeed only in making everyone less secure.

Hence unless more is done from the early planning stages to coordinate policy objectives and programmes, the best intentions may run aground. This will involve a wide consultation process that aims to take in the voices of all concerned, with the purpose of identifying how much genuine political support there currently is for security sector reform (and from whom), and what can be done to build on this. The UK Department for International Development suggests 'the convening of a series of small workshops that bring together the military and other security and intelligence actors, civil servants, politicians, media and civil society groups.'[69] Indeed, civil society, including the media, academics and NGOs, has a crucial role to play in this process. Firstly, it is important to understand that although on the surface the states of the South Caucasus may be similar in structure to those of Western

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[69]   *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform*. London: Department for International Development, 2002, p.14.

developed countries, the underlying assumptions and attitudes towards security issues, and the practice that results from this, may be quite different. Civil society actors may be able to speak more openly and candidly about such issues than government officials who feel they must follow a particular line, and their input is thus vital. Secondly, as noted above, civil society plays a vital role in bridging the gap between the individual and the state; this is particularly true of the media and, in much of the Caucasus, veterans groups. Civil society involvement is a two-way process: not only can civil society actors contribute their opinions to the dialogue; they can also transmit information back to the public at large, thus building interest and support for reform. Thirdly, civil society, especially research institutions and NGOs, can actually help to organise the consultation process, as often they are seen as more neutral than other actors, and thus able to bring together a wider spectrum of participants. Given the complicated political situation in the South Caucasus, international NGOs may be best placed to facilitate dialogue at the regional and international levels.

A Programme for Reform

The first step, then, will be reaching some sort of consensus on a broad agenda for security sector reform in the South Caucasus. Once this has been agreed, it will be necessary to develop programmes aimed at improving specific aspects of security sector governance. In its recently published Institutional Assessment Framework, the Clingendael Institute suggests five entry points it considers key for interventions strengthening the quality of democratic governance in the security sector: the rule of law; policy development, planning and implementation, professionalism of the security forces; oversight; and managing security sector expenditures.[70] This list is not extensive, but gives an indication of the type of areas in which reform may be necessary.

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[70] Ball, Nicole, et. al. (2003). *Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security Sector: An Institutional Assessment Framework.* The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs/The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', p.26.

It is at this stage in the reform process that civilians with a high level of expertise are most valuable. The Assessment Framework suggests that a multidisciplinary team of experts should provide an evaluation ('mapping and analysis') of the key factors influencing the level of democratic governance in the five areas outlined above, the core needs and challenges for the security sector, obstacles to change and how these obstacles might be overcome. It is important that this team should include independent experts, 'so that the various stakeholders in the process will have a high level of confidence that no specific interests are either being served or remain unacknowledged or unaddressed'.[71] Academics, and possibly also certain NGO staff, are most likely to have the necessary combination of experience and independence.

Once this mapping and analysis phase is complete, it will be largely up to the government, supported by its partners, to decide on how best to implement these recommendations – and then, crucially, to actually implement reform. The states of the South Caucasus are likely to remain cautious about the benefits of engaging with the international community on an issue as sensitive as security sector governance until they can see some tangible results. Well-chosen pilot projects may help to test the ground for future co-operation. The choice of project will of course depend on the specific needs and capacities of the state in question. One possible entry point for countries wishing to work together, however, may be police reform.

Over the past few years, there has been increasing interest in the concept of 'community-based policing', which aims to build trust and partnership between the community and the police. It is based on a belief that 'the solutions to community problems demand allowing the police and the public to examine innovative ways to address community concerns beyond a narrow focus on individual crimes or incidents.'[72]

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[71]   Ibid, p 94.
[72]   Saferworld (2003). Philosophy and Principles of Community Based Policing. Policy Options Framework Document on Community-Based Policing, produced for the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the UNDP Country Office in Albania and the UNDP

Such initiatives are already showing positive results in countries such as South Africa, Malawi and Northern Ireland, and are being introduced in a number of other countries across the globe. The OSCE has been active in promoting police reform within its region, and has initiated projects, *inter alia*, in Serbia and Montenegro, Kyrgyzstan, and most recently Armenia (still at the consultation and design phase).

Police reform projects may be a suitable entry point for a number of reasons. Firstly, of all the security institutions, the police is probably the one that interacts (or at least *should* interact) most regularly with the public, and has the biggest influence over daily security. Fear of crime and personal security are one of the most important issues for civilians across the region. Efforts to reform the police therefore send a strong signal about the government's commitment to improving democratic governance and public security. Secondly, community-based policing may be of particular relevance to the South Caucasus environment; there are a lot of small communities that are currently poorly policed and isolated, and such initiatives could have a state-building element by improving their level of interaction with the authorities. Furthermore, the influence of traditional forms of self-policing is still much stronger in such small isolated communities, and they can thus provide vital experience about the local security context. Finally, though the police must also respond to cross-border threats from organised crime and terrorism, they are concerned primarily with their own territory. This means that reform of the police is generally less sensitive than of more obviously military institutions.

A further obstacle, as noted above, is that civil society in the South Caucasus remains weak, and knowledge of security matters is low. Much of what needs to be done applies equally across the third sector. Government attitudes towards NGOs and the media are often very negative and obstructive. The legislative environment, particularly in Azerbaijan, complicates the registration of NGOs and discourages philanthropy. For their part, NGOs themselves must work to improve their image, become less politicised, and demonstrate that they are truly

Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR). www.seesac.org/reports/seesacapd6.pdf.

able to provide some form of public service rather than simply making money. In the short to medium term, the health of civil society will continue to depend in part on foreign support. Donors should target this aid to improve the professionalism, organisational and planning abilities of NGOs. They could sponsor regional networks of academics and NGOs, and help to strengthen links between local civil society actors with the wider world. International actors are well placed to develop the capacity of civil society to work on security-related issues, if possible working with more developed local organisations that already have some experience themselves. Some possible examples might be training to improve conflict sensitivity and awareness of small arms and other security issues; media projects to improve the quality of reporting and investigative journalism; or work with community leaders to raise understanding of security issues at the local level. This should eventually lead to civil society becoming more able to play the watchdog role it already plays in some developed democracies.

Conclusion – First Steps and Entry Points

The ideal of a strong, vibrant, knowledgeable and responsible civil society contributing to the democratic governance of the security sector of states in the South Caucasus is still a long way off. This paper has attempted to indicate some of the steps that will be needed to get there, and how and why civil society should be involved, and has also highlighted some of the potential threats to the reform process. The biggest challenge will be to ensure that right from the start there is a coherent vision for reform shared by governmental and non-governmental actors both from the South Caucasus itself and from the wider international community. Achieving this will require wide-ranging consultation, a venture that civil society can help to organise.

Nonetheless, it is naïve to imagine that complete unity can be obtained on the objectives of reform. Well-chosen pilot projects will be needed to demonstrate the benefits of national governments, the international community and civil society working together on an issue as sensitive as security sector governance. Community-based policing projects may be the best means of showing that civil society, from community leaders, to

NGOs, to the media, is essential to the process of security sector reform. The OSCE police reform project in the Arabkir region of Yerevan will be an early test of whether the governments of the South Caucasus and the international community can work together. It is hoped that this project will be a success, and that it will lead to more substantial efforts to improve the quality of democratic governance over the security sector, and, ultimately, the security and quality of life of the citizens of the South Caucasus.

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