Rapid Assessment Process (RAP) and Security Sector Reform

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INTRODUCTION

Security sector reform is one aspect of operations to support peace. It helps to create the conditions for economic and social development, which may be the heart of a strategy to alter the roots and causes of violence and protracted social conflict. We have a generally accepted idea of what we are trying to achieve. But how do we know if our efforts are working?

In May and June 2001 I conducted 170 interviews and focus groups in Sierra Leone to gather qualitative information about the impact of third party efforts to manage violence. This effort was to be part of a comparative study of UN, regional and bilateral efforts to reduce violence and restore stability after protracted social conflict in Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Haiti, Kosovo, and Bosnia. What these cases have in common is the variety of different types of efforts to restore stability, from UN Military Observers to Human Rights Monitors, Civilian Police, UN forces, regional forces, and the unilateral forays of major or medium powers. The research question is broad and complex: what works? I do not yet have an answer for that question, but I am closer to a workable method for answering it, drawing on the evolution of methods for studying development and community health problems. These methods offer much promise for understanding the problems associated

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with security sector reform, and give us a better framework for managing complex sets of qualitative data collected in the field.

How do we know what works when we are planning and adjusting our international interventions at multiple levels to stabilize failed states? A useful method is the suite of tools that have been developed mainly for health and development projects, but which have not yet been applied systematically to security sector reform or the larger task of dealing with new and emerging societal conflict. Rapid Assessment Process and associated techniques like Rapid Rural Analysis and Participatory Learning and Action can change the way that we adjust our interventions to achieve peace and stability in complex conflicts.

The central difficulty for analysis of new and emerging societal conflict is to combine many facets of the problem, when our capacity to collect and to understand data as outsiders may be minimal. The utility of the analysis ultimately hinges on describing the problem from local perspectives, because local actors will determine the sustainability of any solution, whether it is a solution to a problem as narrow as vehicle licensing or as broad as electoral reform. Those who work in the fields of community health care and rural development understand this, but those who pursue security with large multinational forces have yet to learn it. Rapid Assessment Process and related techniques offer a suite of tools that can help outside analysts to understand new and emerging societal conflict. In this paper I will describe some of these tools and their application to supporting Security Sector Reform efforts.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

What are new and emerging societal conflicts? I take these to be two different things. "New societal conflicts" are those that have recently begun or been re-ignited as a result of changing circumstances. The ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union or the Balkans, for example, are new in the sense that they began or were re-ignited after the Cold War (Aklaev, 1999). The empirical measure of their "new" status is the rising level of physical violence associated with them after 1990. The characteristics of the rising violence are not really new. Ethnic tensions, electoral violence, pogroms, and politically motivated genocide have a long heritage (Bell-Fialkoff, 1996; Vulkan, 1998; Snyder, 2000).

"Emerging societal conflicts," on the other hand, have evolving or changing characteristics that reflect new military, political, economic and social phenomena. In 1840 the first Opium War was part of an emerging social conflict as rapacious commercial interests eroded the authority of the Chinese state with British military assistance (Melancon, 2003; Wakeman, 1966). Today, conflicts from West Africa to South East Asia produce a nexus of drugs, guns, and illicit resource exploitation that characterize emerging societal conflicts we are still trying to describe, let alone manage (Duffield, 2001).

This distinction suggests the need for at least two different tracks for analysis. Traditional analytical techniques can be applied to "new" conflicts, with some confidence that their characteristics might be stable, or at least that they are similar to conflicts we already understand. Analysis of emerging conflicts, however, should take account of their protean nature. We cannot be sure what causal factors are important or how emerging conflicts are likely to evolve, *a priori*, and so it becomes particularly important to describe

and analyze them from the perspective of their protagonists, and to continue that analysis throughout any engagement to stabilize them.

The "security sector" can be defined narrowly or broadly (Ball, 1998, 2000). Narrowly, it consists of the organizations and arms of government that provide for the security of individuals and institutions within a state, including the police, gendarmes, and military forces, and the intelligence and special services that support them. At the personal-security end of the security chain, the security sector includes the courts and penal services necessary for the police to function. At the state-security end, it includes the defense department and political oversight necessary to direct military forces. In the middle, political oversight of gendarmes and special police services for internal security can be especially difficult for weak states. As we include more of the political institutions that provide oversight of and guidance to security organizations, we move from the narrowly defined functional aspects of security to the broader questions of governance of institutions. At its broadest, security reform is about democratization and governance.

Security sector reform (SSR) is the process of reforming and developing the security sector. Drawing on a decade of work in the field, Michael Brzoska summarises the most important elements: states must decide what sort of security they need and how much they will invest in it; they must differentiate between police and military functions, and prepare each force for its sanctioned roles; they must provide for effective civilian control, including executive command and legislative (budgetary) oversight of police and military forces; and they must work to professionalize police and military forces. (Professional forces are ones that perform their jobs reliably.) SSR in the wake of protracted conflict includes democratization, strengthening of governance institutions, disarmament-demobilization-reintegration (DDR) programs, post-conflict reconstruction, and both the provision of physical security and evolution towards wider community security objectives (Brzoska, 2000).

The central idea in reforming a security sector is that the organizations must evolve to serve a community and a state, rather than preying upon them and undermining security. SSR is undertaken in Eastern European states like Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary with minimal foreign assistance (Socor, 2003). It is undertaken in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq with massive foreign intervention across the spectrum of security organizations and supporting political structures (Yusufi, 2002; Slocombe, 2004). But in either situation, the sustainability of the reformed institutions depends wholly on local support. How well do they serve the community and state for which they are intended?

There are strong parallels between reforming security sectors and the problems of health care reform and rural development; lack of understanding and conflicting external interests can undermine efforts in all three. For example pandering to commercial interests selling medicines, defense technology, or agricultural produce can distort international assistance. Failure to understand local circumstances, the motivations underlying behavior, interrelationships and local dynamics can lead to interventions which are irrelevant or counter-productive in unpredictable ways. Evaluation of decades of rural development and public health initiatives has led to an emerging consensus about the importance of framing the problem in local terms. Rapid Assessment Process (RAP), Rapid Rural Analysis (RRA), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and related techniques have been gaining ground as tools to shape intervention, and should be applied to security sector reform.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RAP

RAP should not be seen as a single, all-purpose tool. Early practitioners like James Beebe, a USAID development official with extensive African experience, emphasize the importance of tailoring techniques to local circumstances. Beebe nevertheless identified in 1995 three core elements of RAP: a systems approach, triangulation, and iterative process. Revisiting his description after six more years of evolution he describes four important elements: emic approach, research teams, triangulation, and iterative process (Beebe, 2001).

The systems approach assumes that elements of a complex system like the security sector are interconnected, and their relative importance cannot be identified in advance. It suggests that standard templates of police departments (such as those used by the US Department of Justice's ICITAP may be misleading or inappropriate. Rather, models of the system should be built on emic categories, "describing the structure of a particular language or culture in terms of its internal elements and their functioning, rather than in terms of any existing external scheme" (OED, 2001). This demands consideration of indigenous knowledge, and accepts inevitable variability within the system. An example of an emic category with considerable local variability would be "tribal police" in Sierra Leone, who have evolved differently in each tribe and region since at least the 1930s (Last, 2001; Killingray, 1991).

Beebe's later (2001) work replaces "systems approach" with the label "emic approach", to emphasise the importance of starting with local knowledge, not with an externally imposed model of the system. Field research proceeds through semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), which allow those with indigenous knowledge to shape the categories that determine reform efforts. Short guidelines set the parameters of the research, for which there is purposeful selection of respondents with specific local knowledge. The selection of respondents is adjusted as new categories become evident. For example, tribal police and alternative dispute regulation mechanisms might not have been on the original research plan, but would be added as the team becomes more familiar with the local environment. The team should be structured with local participants, so the more say they have in the initial design, the less adjustment will subsequently be necessary. Focus groups and group interviews help to trigger discussion of common knowledge and inter-relationships, which might be initially obscure to outside researchers, but which become evident as knowledgeable insiders discuss them.

Beebe's (1995) concept of triangulation hinges on multiple perceptions and multiple research methods. Rural development provides obvious examples: the commodity farmer does not have the same perception of land value or transport needs as the subsistence farmer or small-town merchant. The importance of triangulation is equally obvious in security sector reform: majority and minority perceptions of safe policing will vary, and the problem of minorities that constitute a local majority leads to contradictory prescriptions. Triangulation involves not only describing the situation accurately, but predicting with some probability the impact of current and future policy alternatives. Small interdisciplinary teams permit use of descriptive and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines (such as anthropology, operations research, and social-psychology).

Local participation on the research team is essential. "All members of a rapid appraisal team should speak the local language. In practice, however, one or more members of a team may not speak the local language and an interpreter will have to be used." (Beebe, 1995, 46).

Interpreters are indispensable members of most international research teams. Anyone who has had recourse to their services will acknowledge that they provide much more than basic language services, providing context and insight about local circumstances. In fact it is probably fair to see them as part of an insider-outsider research process (Bartunek and Louis, 1996), though they will be in the company of the outside expert for most interviews. With this knowledge, interpreters are often chosen for local knowledge or characteristics beyond linguistic skills, and might reasonably be involved in the qualitative analysis, particularly when qualitative analysis software like NUD*IST or N.VIVO is used to track linguistic linkages.

Triangulation through the use of research teams suggests a combination of information collected in advance from documentary sources, interviews in the affected country, and direct observation (Beebe, 1995). If we think of each research team member as a conduit for data from a much wider field, then we can envision coordination of data collection functionally and geographically. The anthropologist in-theatre with a local partner might collect a variety of observational and documentary data for her own use, and for the sociologist who is likewise collecting documentary and interview data prior to deployment from outside the theatre. Once in theatre, one research pair is interviewing the ministry, while another is exploring the same questions at a local police station or jail. Combinations of qualitative information can be analysed using a variety of strategies (Feldman, 1995; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Wolcott, 1990).

Writers on RAP, RRA, PLA and related techniques emphasize that the research strategy changes as it progresses. Information collected early in the research process changes the subsequent objectives. Tentative hypotheses lead to preliminary findings, which result in new questions and further data collection and exploration. The research plan must therefore be structured to permit team interaction, revisiting sites and data-sources to confirm or further explore the early findings (Beebe, 1995; Beebe, 2001, 59-74). Local participants are involved at each stage to validate the direction of research and discuss its implications.

The strengths of an iterative approach are evident to anyone who has attempted to study contemporary conflicts, particularly SSR and DDR. The idea of a conflict life cycle is well established (Mitchell, 1981; Kriesberg, 1998), and has been explored in the context of protracted conflict and recurring violence. SSR and DDR are introduced as tools to extend the de-escalation of a conflict and reinforce stability and peace. We expect to see progressive changes to the security environment, involving lower levels of violence, smaller international presence, greater local control, and an end-state that meets local needs for autonomy and security. Iterative, qualitative assessment tools like RAP are ideally suited to the process of adjusting intervention in accordance with local needs.

Adjusting intervention strategies to accommodate local needs, rather than the preconceptions of the intervening organizations, is widely advocated in conflict resolution and crisis management. The emic approach is similar to "elicitive conflict resolution" techniques as a basis for peacebuilding in divided societies. Rather than import foreign patterns of conflict resolution like the Harvard negotiation process, Lederach argues, interveners should elicit from local sources the structures and processes that are used to resolve conflict (Lederach, 1997). Workshops with experienced aid workers, like the one conducted by the European Community Humanitarian Organization in Addis Ababa in 2000, typically emphasize the primacy of local control over outcomes, and participation in the planning and execution of crisis management (Scott-Villiers, 2000). Both Lederach's

observations on conflict resolution and Scott-Villiers' reports of emergency aid experience are relevant for analysis of security sector reform efforts.

Scott-Villiers reports "…Culture is critical in reducing the shock of conflict or emergency situations, but it also plays a major role in creating crisis. Identity can play both a positive and a negative role" (2000, 4). The negative role identity plays in preventing cooperation across ethnic lines and generating mistrust, conflict and violence is the obverse of its positive role in generating a cohesive response to crisis. Those who seek to reform police and paramilitary organizations need to understand, from the perspective of participants, both the positive and negative contributions of group identity. Identities are never monolithic, and crosscutting identities can be used to create the conditions for institutional success (or failure). Reporting on rural development strategies, Chambers describes "…a growing family of approaches, methods and behaviors to enable people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate." (1999, 2)

The essential characteristics of RAP have evolved to address community development, health care, and other complex social problems. They can be readily adapted for studies of security sector reform and conflict management.

RELATED TECHNIQUES

Related techniques include Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). The essence of these techniques is participation by the researcher in the activities under study, but they also imply full participation by the local stakeholders in shaping the study and its outcome. Cornwall and Welbourn, (2000) writing on participative approaches to sexual health research, identify six ways in which participative approaches contribute to the objectives of sexual health research. First, by including the most vulnerable members of society in the study, participative approaches ensure that those who are vulnerable because of fundamental inequalities in society have an opportunity to be heard through the evaluation. A related advantage is creating "space for voice". This goes beyond hearing the vulnerable or dispossessed, and extends to engaging them in dialogue that can help them understand their options while it helps outside parties to recommend assistance and action. This facilitates interaction and learning within the target community, opens up dialogue with the previously excluded, and has the potential to build bridges and make connections between groups with a vital interest in the issues being researched (Cornwall and Welbourn, 2000, 4-8).

Are these advantages of participative approaches relevant to security sector reform in new societal conflicts? I think they are. Third party interventions in conflict and stabilisation operations have tended to be heavy-handed and coercive, driven by the interests of powerful actors with the capacity to benefit from them. Looking back on the experience of providing security for returning refugees and displaced people in the Balkans, the value of engaging them early in the planning process (along with host communities) is evident to anyone who was engaged in the process. Consider the history of the colonial powers in Africa in the nineteenth century, of the United States in Central America and South East Asia in the twentieth century. Local institutions have generally been co-opted or destroyed, and if weaker groups have been spared it has often been in divide-and-conquer strategies like the Belgian use of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda (Robbins, 2002, 269), or the British use of Turkish Cypriots (Holland, 1998). It is not just the legacy of colonialism but the nature of

weak and failing states that creates vulnerable and excluded groups in society. Groups for whom the state does not provide security readily become part of the security problem of the state (Buzan, 1991). Security sector reform that is top-down, that is externally driven, and that serves powerful interests is less likely to result in long-term stability. Participative approaches to assessing security needs are more likely to result in dialogue about local needs, and to yield community-based solutions. Participative research is unlikely to occur without a third party, because powerful interests have little incentive to include the marginalized. But without including marginalized groups in needs assessment and reform plans, it is unlikely that reform initiatives will result in institutions that serve society. This has been the experience of research on rural development and on sexual reproductive health, and it is relevant to security sector reform.

APPLYING RAP TO SSR

Development and security have long been linked as mutual prerequisites (Last, 1989; Fitzgerald, 2004). This might lead us to evaluate them in tandem, but there are few studies that do. Protracted social conflicts have made security and development both harder to separate and harder to address. While health and development researchers have resorted to more innovative ways to understand community dynamics, security researchers have tended to "securitize" the problem by focusing on external sources of violence such as support for insurgency. This is unfortunate, because the foundation for understanding insurgent violence was laid with extensive historical studies of the correlates of successful counterinsurgency conducted by the US Small Wars Operations Research Division (SWORD) in the nineteen-eighties (Manwaring and Fishel, 1992; Manwaring, 2001). Surprisingly, this insight did not yield much empathetic consideration of local perspectives. Conflict and security studies still tend to be dominated by outsider interpretations – the security experts consulted on security sector reform.

One way for war-fighting soldiers to understand security sector reform is to think of it as the step beyond counter-insurgency. If counter-insurgency is about defeating an enemy in the field, reforming the security sector is about stabilization and reconstruction, building an effective security sector that responds to the needs of a state and its citizens. They can be parallel activities (as they are in Iraq now), or sequential (as in the era of imperialism and decolonization). Third party outsiders can assist the reform process, but as with democratization, they cannot impose it. Like legitimacy, the most important of the correlates of success in counter-insurgency (Manwaring and Fishel, 1992), it must be conferred by locals. RAP helps to judge progress in the eyes of the people who stay after then intervention is over – the local population.

Principals of security sector reform are a logical extension of the gradual convergence of two tracks of intellectual evolution – security thinking based on coercive domination achieved through military means, and security thinking based on cultural, social, economic and political revolutions to achieve the just society. Figure 1 illustrates this convergence. The milestones and names in Figure 1 are intended to be illustrative rather than definitive. While it is difficult to describe precisely the dimension of convergence (the vertical axis), we can say that the two key contributors to convergence, and to progress along any single axis, are understanding of the other ("know the enemy" in the broad sense) and awareness of the other dimensions of conflict (social, political, economic) implied by the other axes of

doctrinal and practical evolution. Western military doctrine is evolving towards compromise and accommodation by becoming more discriminating even as it becomes more potentially destructive and by taking greater account of political, social, and economic factors at every level. The counter-trend is the barbarity of warlords (not generally a Western phenomenon, but periodically party to Western campaigns) and brief divergences such as America's flirtation with nuclear war fighting.

The most important driver for the convergence illustrated in Figure 1 is an understanding of the "other", usually the "enemy" but often our "allies. The deeper our understanding of the other, the greater is our potential for accommodation of some of the opposing objectives, hence modification of our own. As strategists confront the limitations of the tools at their disposal, each primary track has informed other streams of thought to deal with forms of violence that won't go away. Coercive security involves defeating a threatening enemy, but is equally applicable to colonization and imperialism. Faced with a dominant or occupying power, revolutionary warfare, insurgency, and terrorism are weapons of the weak. The responses of the strong are the discourse of counter-insurgency (we can defeat the weak) and the discourse of legitimacy associated with peacekeeping (it's for their own good, we're only here to help). Neither is a sound basis for accommodating legitimate differences and securing individuals and groups in a diverse society, but this must be the objective of security sector reform if the security sector is to be durable. This is where RAP can help.
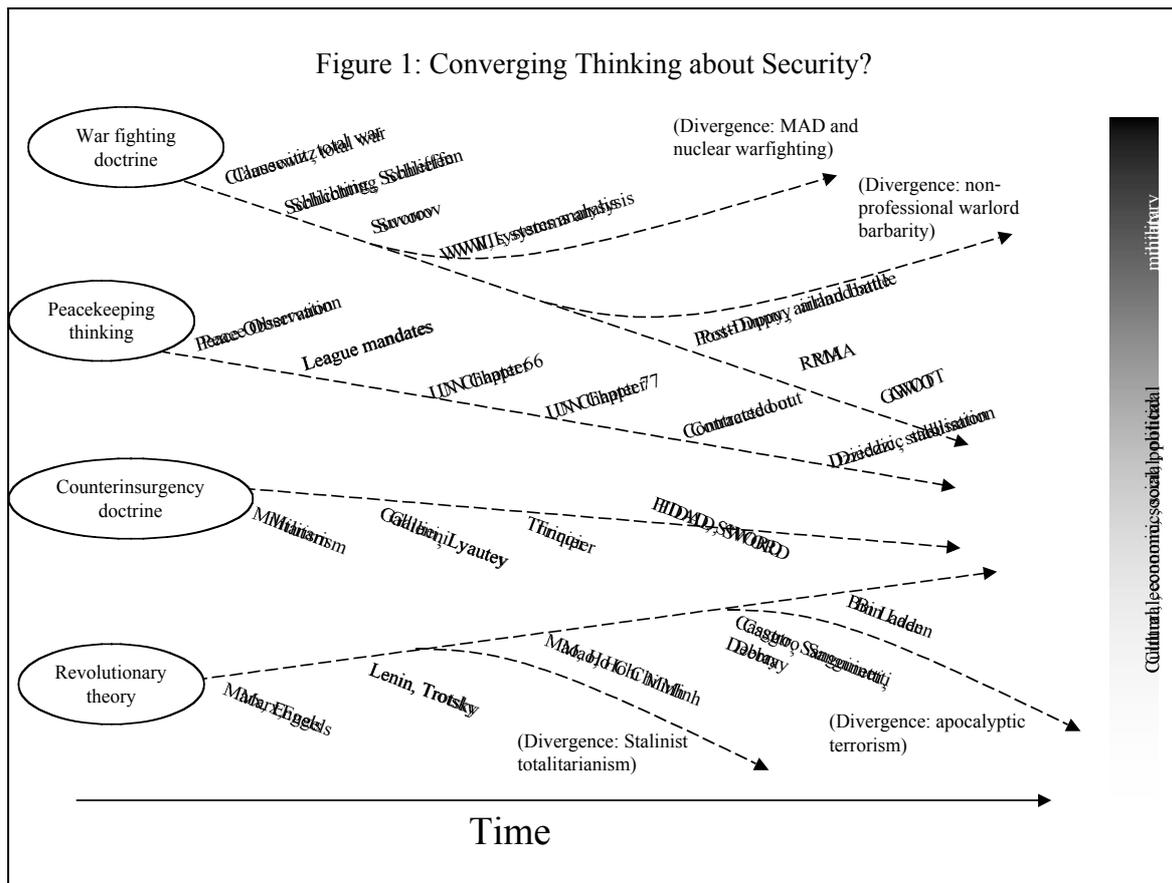

Figure 1: Converging thinking about Security?

The important conclusion to draw from Figure 1 is that a wide range of different goals may absorb a security sector, and these goals are amenable to being reshaped by evolving

thinking about how to achieve security. A state with threatening external enemies may need military forces capable of securing its territory and interests, but an internationalist focus on collective security and coalitions with neighbors may serve equally well. A state facing internal enemies, secession or revolution will find that military strategies for counter-insurgency are inadequate, but that integrating social and economic policies with cultural understanding will provide a stable foundation for security. Whether security sector reform is undertaken with minimal external assistance, or with massive foreign engagement, the long-term security needs of the state in question determine what combination of police, paramilitary and military forces are needed, and how they should be governed by law and supported by intelligence.

If we return now to the four key elements of RAP – emic approach, research teams, triangulation, and iterative process – we can see how each contributes to steering security sector reform. The emic approach is about understanding the world through the eyes of those affected. If we see bombs in Baghdad and fighting in Falujah only as clashes between outsiders and locals, and describe them only through the eyes of Western troops, intelligence, and media, then we can only understand part of the dynamic. Nor is it enough to have good human intelligence supporting interlopers' objectives in these fights. Many neighborhoods in Iraq have been won by foreign firepower, to be lost again by local police.

The emic approach presupposes that locals set the objectives themselves, as well as the means of evaluating them. A dilemma for international participants arises when local objectives appear to be inimical to their purposes for being there. This can happen when local strongmen hijack the process for their purposes, or when there are fundamental value clashes. The latter are more difficult to address because respect for local values is intrinsic to the emic approach. I think there is an acid test; if acceding to local values precludes reversal, then these values should probably be resisted. We have an historical analogue: communist parties that respected the democratic process participated in the West even after the Iron Curtain was drawn, but those which took "dictatorship of the proletariat" literally were restricted (Lange and Vannicelli, 1981). The implication is that those advocating religious values in politics might expect to participate, while those seeking to impose them would be resisted. There will always be debate about the line between these, but the debate itself is an indicator of toleration in emic categories. Foreclosing debate would be a danger sign – no less if outsiders rather than locals foreclose it.

The primacy of local objectives implies that research teams are established on the basis of equality, if not the subordination of external expertise to local direction. Again we have practical examples of this approach. From 1995 to 2000, international monitors and observers led the assessment of security sector reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina, ensuring that it met the criteria established in the Dayton accords and subsequent steering conferences. Since 2000, diplomats and senior officers of the entities have been increasingly active in leading observation and confidence-building missions (OHR, 2004). But mixed research teams do more than permit a transition from international to local assessment of progress. They permit different disciplinary perspectives to inform the assessment. It is unlikely that any individual will embody the military, policing, legal, political, and local language skills necessary to assess the progress of security sector reform. Since all such endeavors are therefore inherently collective, the composition of the research team should be given careful thought in light of the need for local input and buy-in.

Triangulation can be applied to security sector reform in at least four ways. The simplest is to consider the multiple perspectives of police, paramilitary and military approaches to physical security.   This might logically extend to the second form of triangulation – considering the perspectives of competing groups – communities, tribes, family groupings, socio-economic classes and so on. "War-gaming" and red-on-blue scenario building are familiar to military planners (Kretchik, 1991), and can easily be adapted to include local actors if researchers (or facilitators) understand some of the concepts of problem-solving workshops (Mitchell and Banks, 1996; Kelman, 1990). The third form of triangulation involves alternative research methods. Organizational theory can inform dissection of structural problems. Social psychology can help to identify destructive patterns of inter-group behavior. Police investigative techniques can close in on black marketing and organized crime that undermines institution building. But each of these research methods must be linked in a holistic vision of the central research problem. The fourth form of triangulation is perhaps the most difficult and necessary to support security sector reform efforts – the meta-analysis of different studies commissioned for different purposes. One of the early directors of Policy Planning for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq was Andrew Rathmell, who collaborated on a RAND study of lessons learned in establishing security (Jones *et al.*, 2005). While he was in Iraq in 2003-2004, the Swiss-based Small Arms Survey conducted field research on patterns of small arms and light weapons ammunition distribution (ABC News, 2004). Both studies were significant multi-disciplinary collaborative efforts undertaken over many months, and while each may have had some impact, it is difficult to identify any single policy or outcome associated with either. Neither study references the other. The point here is not just that triangulation tries to bring results together, but that research is purposive.

This brings me to the final characteristic. RAP is an iterative process, with a short cycle. We identify a problem, launch a multidisciplinary team to examine it and report with ground truth from multiple perspectives with a matter of weeks. The process recommends solutions to immediate problems. We try to implement the solutions with the help of local actors. These actions have (we hope) some impact, though it isn't immediately clear what that impact is. So we launch another team. Consider a training assistance visit, which identifies the need for police training. On the strength of its recommendations a training centre is established and generates graduates. Six months later the effectiveness of the graduates is evaluated, specific problems identified, and corrective action taken. The lessons are applied in other regions, but additional research teams are needed to confirm that they have been effectively applied. The iterative process is not a make-work project for researchers. It is a plea to practitioners to be empirically minded and research-oriented. It is the absence of practitioner-led research to solve practical problems that generates lengthy studies with results that practitioners cannot use.

CONCLUSIONS

Ellen Messer of the World Hunger Program at Brown University argues that RAP has made a significant contribution to the elimination of world hunger, by focusing efforts effectively (Messer, 2004). Not everyone agrees with her. Where it has been espoused as an alternative to other means of project evaluation it has been resisted by those who point to lack of precision and a freewheeling style that can have enormously varying utility. Despite this, it is gaining ground as a suite of helpful tools to guide action in difficult and often dangerous

circumstances. We should think of it as a framework for field experiments to improve human security, and if it is working in fields as diverse as agricultural development, community medicine and sexual health, then we should consider applying it to Security Sector Reform.

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