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5. Diagrams and tables should be avoided, or kept to a minimum.

Questioning the EU SSR in Guinea-Bissau

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Introduction

The European Union and the government of Guinea-Bissau have chosen Guinea-Bissau as a policy theatre for staging Security Sector Reform (SSR) policies. These policies aim at strengthening the governance of the security sector in order to guarantee the “freedom from want” and the “freedom from fear” to citizens.¹

This EU sponsored program (EU SSR Guinea-Bissau) is international policy makers’ response to a country where the population’s need for development and security is far from met. Using this case study as an illustration, I contend that the conceptual framework of these policies is already lost in the design, even before their implementation phase. The SSR paradox of financing governance of the security sector before financing poverty reduction programs has hollowed the meaning and nullified the objectives of addressing the development-security nexus which is the conceptual base of these policies. The will of policy makers to use the label SSR for policies deprived of all SSR constitutive elements could be a sign that SSR policies have become simply the latest fashionable tool for framing development assistance. Both the shortcomings of these policies in addressing development-security concerns and their booming popularity among policy makers need investigation.

I approach the case study question through an analysis of policy papers which constitute the legal framework for the EU SSR Guinea-Bissau. These documents provide a basis for investigating the conceptual adherence of these policies to the OECD’s interpretation of SSR.² I then study the language used in these policy documents and examine whether or not it is coherent with the conceptual underpinnings of SSR policies. I conclude by arguing that the EU mission in Guinea-Bissau is a simple defense advisory exercise, which has been publicized as SSR. This raises questions about the mission and policies of SSR Guinea-Bissau, and perhaps more importantly about the significance of the SSR score compared to the reality on the ground in Guinea-Bissau.

EU SSR Guinea-Bissau: The EU Script

Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is classified by the World Bank as a Low-Income Country Under Stress (LICUS); as a highly indebted country; as a conflict-affected country; and as a failed state.³ Today, policy makers have identified weakness in the governance of the security sector as a major cause of national poverty and have chosen SSR policies as the best manner to address it.⁴

The EU interpretation of SSR is in line with that of the OECD.⁵ According to the EU, SSR is part of a concern for the governance of the security sector, and part of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) vision which sees SSR as the “exit strategy for international military forces engaged in a given theatre”.⁶

The EU SSR Guinea-Bissau is situated within the wider cooperation framework of the Cotonou agreement. This treaty between EU and African states, signed in 2000 and revised in 2005, is primarily aimed at reducing poverty, while at the same time representing the EU's efforts to help integrate African, Caribbean and Pacific states into the global economy and promoting sustainable development. The financial instrument relating to this type of cooperation is the European Development Fund (EDF), an intergovernmental fund set up by EU member states.⁷ In a press release on the 12th of February 2008, the EU announced its involvement in supporting the security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau (EU SSR Guinea-Bissau) as part of the ESDP.⁸ The EU SSR Guinea-Bissau is legally framed by the Council Joint Action.⁹ The EU press release says that this EU mission will advise the Bissau-Guinean government on reforming its security sector and it is willing to cooperate with other donors.¹⁰ What the press release means by security sector is clarified in the Council Joint Action, which states that the EU team will guide the government in downsizing and restructuring the armed and security forces. For this military advisory mission, a General, Juan Esteban Verástegui, has been appointed as the Head of EU SSR Guinea-Bissau.¹¹

According to the Council Joint Action, which presents the mission, its rationale, objectives and structure, the EU SSR Guinea-Bissau is a EU technical mission aiming at advising the government of the recipient country on military and related security issues. It should be noted that this document is ambiguous about many issues. Its opening line says that the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa and Europe is a major priority of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy.

However, this statement missed a key conceptual component of this strategy: development. In fact, the aim of this Africa-EU strategy is to bridge the development gap between the two political areas by promoting sustainable development. The omission of the word ‘development’ cannot and should not be regarded as an error; it indicates that the mission focuses only on issues which relate to peace and security. The use of terms such as peace, stability, Africa, Europe, etc. implies that the meaning of the concept of security, in this context, is more closely related to state security rather than human

development/security, which are considered in the SSR literature to be the base of development-security nexus policies. The second paragraph also has a missing word. It says that SSR is “essential for the stability and sustainable development of that country”. Here the missing word is security, which should replace stability or be added next to development, considering that this paragraph is dedicated to SSR policies.

These first two paragraphs are highly ambiguous because they have not provided any explanation of how a strategy introduced to deal with peace and security is linked to a policy titled Security Sector Reform which, according with the text, does not deal with security. The European scribe tried to make up for this conceptual incoherence by stating, in the eighth paragraph, that a “European and Security Defense Policy (ESDP) action in the field of SSR in Guinea-Bissau would be appropriate, consistent with, and complimentary to, European Development Fund and other Community activity”. Thus this paragraph gives to the EU mission a security/defense identity which fits within SSR concerns. How and why this happens is left unsaid. Moreover, development, here, is not a concern to be addressed, but the title of a financial fund from which money for the mission is drawn. How these policies are essential for the sustainable development of Guinea-Bissau is not clarified. The only clear issue is that a Development Fund is used to finance a technical defense advisory mission in Guinea-Bissau.

The defense-military advisory character of the mission is clearly pointed out in the mission statement and in the description of the structure of the mission. In the text, terms such as “unified chain of command”; “exercise command and control”; and “theatre level”, are used several times, leaving no doubt that this is a document written for military personnel. The ambiguous contextualization of this mission within SSR policies is emphasized by its title. The title of this mission “EU SSR Guinea-Bissau” should instead be “EU Defense Advisory Mission to Guinea-Bissau”. The Council Joint Act explains that the objective of this mission is to give advice and assistance on SSR “in order to contribute to creating the conditions for implementation of the National SSR Strategy”. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the objective and the title of the mission. The former is to create the conditions and the background for implementing these policies; the latter says that the mission is implementing those very same policies. It follows that a precise title for this mission should then be “EU Defense Advisory Mission Preparatory to SSR implementation in Guinea-Bissau”. Is this faulty title a sign that when truth cannot be concise it has to be distorted?

EU SSR Guinea-Bissau: The Government’s Script

The starting date for “talking SSR” in Guinea-Bissau was 2006, when in a meeting in Geneva titled “Security and Development”, the government presented two national

strategy documents: the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Security Sector Reform plan. Out of US\$538 million requested by the government, pledges were obtained for US\$262.51 million.¹² The government of Guinea-Bissau formally launched the SSR program on the 23rd of January 2008 and presented it to a donors' conference soon after.¹³ In this presentation, the government clarified how development and security concerns find separate responses in separate policy papers: PRSP and SSR. It said that the PRSP on Guinea-Bissau aims at alleviating poverty, and it is "based on a profound analysis of the human development situation in Guinea-Bissau". The key pillars for achieving this objective are: strengthening governance, securing economic growth, and having access to basic services, above all for the most vulnerable people. In introducing SSR policies, the government says that "the SSR Strategy Document was based on different national and international documents, in line with the OECD guidelines", and that the key pillars of the SSR are: modernizing the armed forces; strengthening the security forces; and reforming the justice sector. The link between the two policy papers is their focus on governance, which includes the reform of security and defense forces.¹⁴

The government of Guinea-Bissau introduces the document which illustrates the reforms of the defense and security sector, declaring its conceptual debt to the OECD's guidelines, and agreeing with the interpretation that sees a transformation of the defense sector as a pre-condition for sustainable development.¹⁵ The background depicted to justify the need for SSR includes the strong influence of the army in the political life of the country, facilitated by a period of single-party regime and oversized bodies of aged, untrained and poorly equipped armed and security forces. In particular, the year of civil war in 1998-1999 is seen as the major cause of national poverty and stunted development. This is at odds with a quick look at the classification of Guinea-Bissau within the Human Development Index by the UNDP, which shows that in the last fifteen years the country has always been listed within the bottom ten countries of the index. While the destructive effects of any war are undeniable, this document does not extrapolate on the source of poverty, or the source of wealth from which the population would have benefited if the war had not occurred. Moreover, this document fails to provide any explanation of how and why a well-trained army and police force would impact the delivery by the state of human development entitlements to citizens.

From this presentation to donors, it emerges that the government's efforts to link development and security concerns have been translated into practice by two separate documents, the PRSP and SSR.¹⁶ The existence of these policy papers is not per se plausible evidence that these two sets of concerns are addressed in a nexus, as preached by SSR policies, because they follow separate conceptual trends (human development and OECD guidelines) and it remains unclear what should bridge the gap between the two. According to the OECD interpretation of SSR, it should be 'the governance of the security sector', the nexus between development and security. Considering that policy makers

have remained vague, but ambitious about the reasons, significance and implementation of SSR policies, a study of the SSR language might clarify this script.

SSR Language: Necessity, Fashion or Policy Deceit?

From the above reading of the government's SSR script, it derives that:

- a) SSR policies are aimed at the defense and security sector. This sector includes the Army and the various police bodies. The inclusion of the justice sector is seen as necessary for a complete reform of these bodies.
- b) The objective is to restructure and modernize this sector.
- c) The underlying belief of these policies is that a restructured and modern Army, trained judges and proper prisons will prevent conflicts and reduce poverty among the population.
- d) The driving force of these policies is governance, which also ensures that development concerns will be addressed once security sectors are modern and functional.

The study of SSR language provides more information about the essence of these policies and their objectives and also helps clarify whether or not this series of reforms in Guinea-Bissau deserves the appellation of SSR.

The policy document under investigation is the strategy document for this reform and is titled "Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defense and Security Sector".¹⁷ The language of the title reveals the subject and objective of the reform, respectively: the defense and security sector and its restructuring and modernization. The designation of this sector as defense and security is a modification of the OECD's definition of it: including core security actors; oversight bodies; justice and the rule of law; and non-statutory security forces.¹⁸ This definition is also endorsed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which has been at the forefront for the promotion of these policies. Thus the title of this document points out a distinction that policy makers had tried to bypass: the one between defense and security actors and the inclusion of other bodies involved in guaranteeing the freedom from fear to citizens. This title also introduces a fragmented and reduced view of security which jeopardizes and confuses the role of the judicial sector. If the title is aimed at clarifying the subject of the reforms, – namely concerning the army and police bodies –, is the absence of the judiciary sector within the title a sign that the judiciary is included within one of them or excluded? Or is it that the role of the judiciary – mentioned only in relation to the reform of the other sectors – is secondary? In fact, all three hypotheses seem to hold. This document simply states that the support of the judiciary is essential for these reforms.

Another document, derived from the previous document, illustrates the SSR action plan and indicates four separate sectors involved in this reform: defense, security, judiciary,

and the sector encompassing former liberation fighters.¹⁹ Both these documents discuss in their titles “the restructuring and modernization of the defense and security sector”. The wording of these documents shows a conceptual difference, not a simple linguistic ambiguity, *vis-à-vis* the original conception of SSR policies. It calls into question the unity among different state departments, which is the main constitutive feature of these policies; it fragments and traps the government’s concerns and efforts within isolated departments; and it blocks the domino effect of these policies which benefits the government as a whole.

The title of this document also states that the objectives of these policies are the restructuring and modernization of the defense and security sector. This creates even more ambiguity. In fact, it was not necessary to have such a long title, as it could simply have been “Security Sector Reform of Guinea-Bissau”. Those who drafted these policies felt the need to specify that this reform is about restructuring and modernizing. They did not use the word transformation, even if it is used several times in the text, but more importantly they chose not to use the term democratization. The “democratic control of the armed forces” is one of the famous SSR slogans because it includes all SSR beliefs: the importance of having a democratic state system capable of exercising control over the armed forces in order to prevent conflicts and reduce poverty. The SSR document for Guinea-Bissau does not mention this slogan at all, nor does it mention the need for a “civilian oversight” of the armed forces, another SSR favorite. Instead, prominence is given to the phrase “Rule of Law”, usually accompanied by the adjective ‘democratic’. This slogan is always capitalized to indicate that its conceptual meaning goes beyond mere wording. Rule of Law indicates the government’s will to operate within rules which have been democratically approved; to reform institutions in order to enhance their capacity and highlight their responsibilities to operate according to an approved legal corpus.

From this brief analysis it comes out that “talking SSR” means using a specific language which derives from a plurality of fields of knowledge. In fact, this language has to be a sort of policy Esperanto, in order to be used by a plurality of government departments. This because, according to the SSR literature, the security sector includes armed and security forces together with the judiciary, the prison system, and all government bodies in charge of guaranteeing the democratic control of a state’s means of violence. Additionally, SSR needs to be implemented through a cross-cutting, whole government approach. This means that SSR policies require the participation of many government departments whose actions and efforts are united under a common policy framework. This plurality of actors guided by one policy script is the real challenge of SSR, together with the challenge of cross-cutting communication between many government departments and between them and a myriad of foreign donor states’ representatives.

Furthermore, the appropriation of SSR language for designing policies other than SSR, like in the case of Guinea-Bissau, creates a new set of questions. This policy perfidy

might indicate that SSR language has become the new *passe-partout* to gain access to funds from donor states. Thus an SSR reality check is not only necessary to investigate their implementation, but to reveal the rationale behind the supply and demand for a booming market of counterfeit SSR policies.

Reality Check: SSR Guinea-Bissau

The examination of the legal framework adopted by the EU for their mission in Guinea-Bissau sheds light on the fact that SSR language is used to cover up the EU's confused vision about how policies can address both development and security concerns. Ultimately, the EU has financed and is implementing a defense advisory program within the limits of its cooperation mandate.²⁰ The EU's need to contextualize its defense advisory mission within an SSR framework is a sign that SSR is the latest fashionable trend for framing international cooperation.

Before placing the blame for this SSR deceit, all suspects should be investigated. The EU is guilty of having presented an advisory military mission as a SSR mission. Having clarified that it is not specifically an SSR mission, it can however be considered as a piece of the SSR jigsaw. The responsibilities of drafting and implementing national policies lie with the Bissau-Guinean government. While paying lip service to the OECD's interpretation of these policies, the SSR document was written using a narrow approach which did not take into account a whole-of-government effort. The point of securing the "governance of security" was reduced to a *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)* mission, complemented by the construction of new prisons and the creation of some training courses for judiciary personnel. A policy does not have to be ambitious in order to be good; the issue here is not the modesty, let alone feasibility, of these policies – it is that the adoption of an SSR language has caused a domino effect on international policy makers' expectations and commitment. This has put a strain on Guinea-Bissau, where a vast amount of opinions, advice and technical assistance are set off against scarce national economic resources, which should finance the bulk of SSR actions.

What was presented as a program for restructuring the armed and police forces with the support of the EU turned out to be a "crowded" program, one segmented with different donors. Indeed, both the plurality of "experts" and actors involved with different mandates and the setting of ambitious SSR objectives at odds with a country ravaged by poverty are contributing to the creation of a policy impasse. The misuse of SSR language is also part of this failure. While in the name of the development-security nexus the SSR framework foresees a large participation of security and development partners, development actors directly engaged in SSR and willing to tackle the development question find themselves without an adequate theoretical framework of action and without budgetary support. Only

by a policy re-appropriation of a development-security nexus centered on the concept of human security, followed by the implementation of policies which directly aim at addressing the development question, can the construction of “systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood” be facilitated.²¹

The reason behind the EU and Guinea-Bissau’s use of SSR as a title for this defense reform is that SSR has become a fashionable new way of funding development assistance. I contend that what is fashionable about SSR packages is that, after many lost development decades, they do not directly address the development question, despite being publicized as addressing the development-security nexus. By stating that SSR’s focus is on preparing conditions for development, they manage to get ‘development people’ on board, and can use all the bureaucracy linked to the development sector (financial resources, workers, access to government personnel) in order to smooth their implementation. However, this is not enough. The way SSR policies are implemented implies that development has become a situation of well-being which should occur once citizens have experienced ‘freedom from fear’ resulting from a democratic control of a state’s means of force. Thus, these policies are characterized by not directly addressing issues such as lack of food, health centers, and schools, while focusing on the governance of the security sector. SSR policies aim at supporting democratic governance, but how a starving demos can support democracy remains an unanswered question.

The original conception of SSR was not to hollow the development discourse of its significance, but to keep the fruits of development from being stolen by the same state actors in charge of defending them.²² The problem is that when conceiving the SSR, policy makers ended up relegating development to second place by using the development discourse as a background to contextualize its significance and objectives. This failure to address development concerns and the need to offer a new framework for development assistance is then the cause for the use of the SSR title for this EU sponsored defense reform. The culprit guilty of misnaming SSR in Guinea Bissau might not be the government, as it was trying to get donor attention to solve a specific state security issue. Responsibility may instead lie with the international community for its willingness to continue to avoid all direct efforts to solve the poverty question of the citizens of Guinea-Bissau.

(Endnotes)

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- 2 Considering that this program is ongoing, a balance cannot be drawn by observing empirical results. The study of this SSR focuses on the conceptual framework of these policies: technical details related to defense and security forces will be referenced throughout the text.
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- 4 "Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defence and Security Sector" (Republic of Guinea Bissau – Inter-ministerial Committee of the Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defence and Security Sector, 2006).
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- 6 Guide to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) (Permanent Representation of France to European Union, November 2006).
- 7 "EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa's development", [Commission of the European Communities, 12 October 2005]; "The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership – Joint Africa-EU Strategy and Action Plan" (EU/Africa Summit, 9 December 2007); The European Development Fund (European Commission, February 2002); and, Cotonou Agreement (European Union).
- 8 For a summary of the legal chronology of EU SSR Guinea Bissau, see European Security and Defence Policy and Guinea-Bissau (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008).
- 9 "Council establishes EU mission in support of security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau" (Council of the European Union, 12 February 2008).
- 10 Apart from United Nations agencies, there are also countries involved in SSR in Guinea-Bissau, such as Angola, Brazil, China, France, Portugal, the United Kingdom, as emerged during interviews with policy makers working in SSR in Guinea Bissau.
- 11 Council Joint Action 2008/112/CFSP (Official Journal of the European Union, 12 February 2008).
- 12 "Country Brief – Guinea Bissau" (World Bank, March 2008).
- 13 "Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peace Building Support Office in that country (United Nations Security Council, S/2008/181, 17 March 2008), p. 6; and, "Presentation of the Government's Peacebuilding Priorities and Challenges" (Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2nd Formal Country Specific Meeting on Guinea-Bissau – Peacebuilding Commission, 20 February 2008).
- 14 "Presentation of the Government's Peacebuilding Priorities and Challenges", p. 3.
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- 16 For more detailed information about the resizing and restructuring of the defense and security sectors, see Presentation of the Action Plan for the Restructuring and Modernisation of the Security and Defence Sector to the Steering Committee (Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2007).
- 17 "Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defence and Security Sector".
- 18 OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform, p. 22.
- 19 Presentation of the Action Plan for the Restructuring and Modernisation of the Security and Defence Sector to the Steering Committee (Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2007).
- 20 "Head of Mission for EU SSR Guinea-Bissau appointed" (European Agenda, 4 March 2008); "União Europeia Concede 7,7 milhões de euros a militares da Guiné-Bissau" (Agência Bissau Media e Publicações, 2008); "Cooperação União Europeia – Guiné-Bissau" (Delegação da Comissão Europeia na Guiné-Bissau, April 2007).
- 21 Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now* (New York, 2003), p. 4.
- 22 Short, "Security Sector Reform".