



Security Sector Reform Process in Mali

Executive Summary

Niagalé Bagayoko

The SSR process initiated after the 2012 crisis by local authorities with international partners' support, did not start from scratch in Mali. Indeed, since the late 1990s, many initiatives driven by both state and non-state local stakeholders were adopted to improve Mali's security system which has been marked—since the colonial era—by strong military influence in politics and the management of the state. Some of these initiatives, like the Shared Governance for Security and Peace Program (PGSPSP), deserve more attention in the current security context. Also, it is crucial to underscore and incorporate the national programs launched before massive support came from international donors, so as to achieve a reform process driven internally by actors of the Malian security system, rather than mere “ownership”.

Though significant challenges remain as of autumn 2017, it is important to highlight several achievements. First of all, the bulk of the institutional architecture directly responsible for the SSR process (SSR National Council –CNRSS-, the commissariat à la RSS, the CNDDR National Commission and the Integration Commission) has been established. More broadly, in terms of commitments, the Malian State has fulfilled many of its responsibilities, notably by appointing representatives within the newly created bodies and by harmonizing and modernizing (legal?) texts or adopting legislative and regulatory measures. Though the government has also invested substantial financial resources in the SSR process, its involvement has proven to be ambiguous and

even uncertain in regards to the political will that actually underpins the above-mentioned initiatives.

The bloated composition of the CNRSS, as well as its attachment to the Prime Minister's Office -and not the Presidency- are likely to create operational problems. There is also the challenge of reconciling inclusiveness and technical expertise of the members appointed within the different bodies, namely by armed movements which are themselves characterized by dissension. In fact, disagreements between the Platform and the CMA armed groups have contributed in delaying the launch of the process, as the two coalitions, both of which signed the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, have remained slow in choosing their representatives within the SSR institutional architecture. Clearly, the conflicts between both movements have impacted the SSR process, and will likely persist as obstacles.

At the executive level, leadership in the SSR administration appears to be widely exercised by the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection (MSCP). Improvements seem to have been made in the way inter-ministerial cooperation occurs. For instance, there seems to be better mutual understanding between the different Ministries, despite that, at least initially, lack of coordination between the Ministry of Security and the Ministry of Defence and War Veterans (MDAC) risked thwarting the entire process. However, rivalries still exist within the ministries, particularly between different offices struggling to benefit from the budget allocations agreed

upon in adopting defence and security programming laws.

It seems essential not to design the SSR process in Mali purely and exclusively in terms of capacity. Rather, SSR progress should be measured using three inseparable indicators:

- improved operationality¹ of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS);
- enhanced governance of the whole security system;
- and better advocacy for human security and human rights by defence and security forces.

Yet, SSR as a concept seems problematic. Even at the highest levels, including among international partners, the philosophy behind an SSR approach is not always understood. Some believe that SSR initiatives are primarily a task of restructuring institutions rather than reforming the entire security sector itself. A particularly high number of initiatives that were adopted out of the SSR for Mali have focused on institutional set-up without regard for holistic operationality. For example, the efforts deployed to assist Mali in building counter-terrorism capacities and acquiring means to secure its borders seem to have been developed outside the SSR process. Even though the reform process cannot be restricted to institutional set-up, it is important that the efforts made in each sector –including the LOPM (Military Orientation and Programming Law) and the LOPSI (Interior Security Orientation and Programming Law)- remain based on a holistic approach to SSR. The mainly sector-specific approach deprives the SSR process of a long-term vision. For instance, no comprehensive assessment of the Malian security system has been carried out so far, which makes it difficult to propose a genuine strategic approach to the reform. More generally, a reflection on the purpose and missions of that security system in a security context, which is fundamentally different from the one that helped design it during the post-colonial era remains essential and yet impossible without an holistic approach to SSR.

There are also deep-rooted conceptual differences between local stakeholders and international partners, especially regarding the links between defence and security: some local soldiers are still reluctant to embrace SSR, as “security”.

¹ However, operationality of the defence and security forces should not be considered as a global concept. Instead, it should be defined as a combination of the four following elements:

- Effectiveness of security providers which considers operationality from a technical perspective (mission performance);
- Efficiency of security sector institutions which envision operationality under the lens of human and financial capacities to fulfil their missions sustainably;
- Readiness which is related to the state of preparedness of personnel, systems, or organizations to meet a situation and carry out a planned sequence of actions.
- Professionalism which refers to a normative perspective on operationality (unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality, equality)

Instead, they view SSR as an essentially police-centered approach of the reform. In reality, such different views or understandings of SSR raise a fundamental issue regarding changes to or even the inversion of the role played by the military in the current security context. The debate suggests that today, the distinction between missions of the military and those of domestic security forces may not be in terms of internal and external differences, but in the involvement of the justice system, which is necessary for a success of some missions like dismantling criminal or terrorist networks. This criterion urges us to think on a new division of competences and complementarities between the forces in charge of fighting enemy groups and those in charge of bringing them to criminal courts.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that the Mali SSR process is not taking place in a post-conflict context, as initially hoped for upon signing the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, but in a context of crisis and even war. The Malian army has been incurring heavy losses in an extremely tense political and strategic environment, whereas domestic security forces are seemingly running out of financial resources to address increasingly violent insecurity and criminality.

The case of Mali equally raises a basic concern on the link that can be established between peace agreements and the SSR process, which can be problematic if considered in its entirety. Therefore, stakeholders should welcome the need to include a thoroughgoing reform of the Malian security system in the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. However, it is vital not to narrow the SSR process down to merely implementing provisions of this Peace Agreement (such as establishing a police force under the authority of local governments as provided for in Article 27 or creating local security committees). Indeed, the requirements of SSR in Mali are much more wide-ranging than the few issues raised in the Agreement. Several inherited ills continue to affect Mali’s security system, many of which were partly responsible for the crisis that resulted in the 2012 coup by non-commissioned officers and the emergence of northern armed groups.

The success of SSR in Mali largely depends on how the DDR process will be conducted. But there seem to be a number of hurdles to overcome in this area. DDR stakeholders (Government and ministerial departments, FDSs, the Plateforme and the CMA) have diverging views on the implementation of certain points of the Agreement. Moreover, with the increasingly deteriorated security situation in central and eastern Mali, the DDR process will have to be considered beyond the provisions of the Peace

Agreement. Apart from doubts on the relevance of the arrangements envisioned to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants in the private economy, integrating some of them in the FDSs and the administration is a particularly sensitive issue. There are profound disagreements over the definition of the selected integration criteria. Also, the budget for the integration of new staff was not provided for in defence and security programming laws. It is therefore up to the Malian government and its technical and financial partners to address this issue, given that a specific budget is set for the implementation of the Agreement.

The support provided by international actors to the SSR process is unquestionably tremendous. Hence, international partners have made a considerable effort to underpin reform in the Malian security system. Immediately after Operation Serval, international support was massively geared towards developing credible operational capabilities for the FDSs, mainly through training and equipment programmes. Less international support is still being directly provided to the bodies in charge of coordinating the SSR process, with technical and financial partners focusing their assistance mainly on the ministries. Even though budgets cannot be compared in terms of size, most international actors involved in governance issues whether internal (reforming the legal framework by standardizing texts, modernization, compilation or dissemination; managing human and financial resources; strengthening inspection mechanisms; restoring the hierarchical chains of command and other issues concerning military or police conditions) or external (strengthening the capacities of actors like the Parliament, the Office of the Auditor General or civil society organizations) are now operating in a medium or long term perspective. Thus, the support currently provided to Mali's security system encompasses all sectors (defence, homeland security in its various components, border management etc.) and is situated at the crossroads between several levels: political (taking provisions of the Peace Agreement into account), ministerial (orientation and programming laws and action plans adopted or in the process of being adopted by the different departments), operational (training, logistic and equipment), tactical (basic training to the FDSs with a view to enhancing their effectiveness on the field) and territorial (growing consideration for the key issue of decentralized security management both in local governments and border areas). Communication policy (both internal and external), a key requirement for the promotion of SSR, is one of the few areas that still remains unfortunately under-addressed.

However, problems of coordination between the different partners – a classic issue in such a context - remain

prominent. It turns out that conceptions sometimes radically differ about coordination, as MINUSCA, for instance, has experienced difficulties in its own perception being accepted. From an interagency standpoint, much work continues to be pursued as if in a silo and tensions are still evident between the different international stakeholders. This explains why cases of duplication are particularly observed in training offers. Given the huge number of initiatives supported by international donors, it is very difficult to get a comprehensive overview, though mappings are produced on a regular basis. The difficulty experienced in avoiding duplication and competition between different programs partly stems from the fact that each partner does not inform the others of its projects until they are approved internally to insure each project meets each agency's internal objectives and mandates, while, ideally, program coordination should be done at the planning stage rather than following approval.

Another issue is whether the Malian Government is able to effectively utilize all international support. For now, international support appears to be fundamentally consistent with the country's human and financial capacities, as well as the pace at which reforms are being implemented in the country. Yet, the rent-seeking strategies that are being structured around international SSR budgets should also be considered. Determining the impact achieved by this massive support is, of course, a major challenge: in particular, the relevance of some indicators –benchmarks, milestones, log frames, monitoring and evaluation...- should be questioned to take into account some bottlenecks encountered in implementing programs. This more broadly relates to the method used to capture progress and development within a security system whose functioning is built on a plurality of networks and practices (both formal and informal) generally reflecting the governance and regulation system prevailing in Mali.

Indeed, the increasingly significant involvement of partners in issues related to Mali's security system governance faces the predominantly informal functioning of the local armed forces. This is perceptible through:

- the influence of family, community and social solidarity that seems to undermine any effort to introduce streamlined -and computerized- supervision of human resources (especially in recruitment, advancement and promotion procedures);
- the bypassing of hierarchical chains of command partly broken with the 2012 coup conducted by Captain Sanogo, but also as a result of prevailing internal solidarity bonds based on corporatist (tensions between red and green berets, though this division appears to have diminished),

educational (influence from academy training) or political considerations generally faced by inspection services;

- difficulties to exercise expenditure control, tightly linked to the lack of transparency that has always surrounded the real size of the FDSs and the allocation of social benefits associated with military or police conditions;

- the critical issue arising from the nature of the democratic control exercised on defence and security forces, as well as the bodies under which they operate: the institutional existence of these supervisory bodies does not, in any way, guarantee that they can adequately fulfil their role. One question rarely asked is whether the levers of action are effectively independent from the executive sphere of these bodies, be it the Parliament or institutions essential to the rule of law (Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman, Auditor General etc.).

To be able to better meet these challenges, it is vital to carry out an in-depth sociological study of the defence and security forces. Insufficient or no consideration to such key aspects reveals one of the major weaknesses of SSR, a concept that if not contradicts, at least diverges from the approach based on “civil-military relations”. While this approach has effectively failed to take adequate account of the holistic nature of the reforms needed as well as the significance of governance issues, it has sought to provide a very precise focus on the micro-politics and power relations existing within the armed forces and which need to be looked at once again.

In a final analysis, it appears that the third point of the SSR process –related to human rights violations by the FDS forces- is still insufficiently addressed, despite the existence

of programs aimed at strengthening the oversight capacities of the National Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman. Indeed, this criterion serves as basis for appraising the relevance and impact of the ongoing SSR process. FDSs ethics and behaviours, influenced by a culture of military and brute force particularly reflected in policing and originating from colonial and post-colonial periods, need special attention. For instance, training curricula can be revised and extended beyond teachings on international humanitarian and armed conflict laws.

In conclusion, SSR reform is currently being carried out at two non-contradictory paces in Mali: a relatively accelerated operational pace and long-term pace which is often determined by political and societal factors. Today, the problem undoubtedly lies in the fact that people fail to consider this long-term pace in which the whole SSR process occurs, and expect or require rapid and immediate results.

Niagalé Bagayoko is a member of the Centre FrancoPaix’s Mali Project and Chair of the African Security Sector Network (ASSN).

The full report - in french - is available here: [Le processus de réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Mali](#), by Niagalé Bagayoko, february 2018

UQÀM



RAOUL DANDURAND CHAIR
IN STRATEGIC AND DIPLOMATIC STUDIES
Centre FrancoPaix

