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USIPeace Briefing

The Future of Kosovo' s Security Sector

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The Kosovo Internal Security Sector Review (ISSR), conducted by the United Nations Development Program, was a non-traditional approach to security sector review. The program evaluated Kosovo's security situation from the inside out, looking at the threat of insecurity with the help and participation of the citizens of Kosovo. The ISSR team, along with numerous parties who have a vested interest in Kosovo's security, took inventory of the factors that make local citizens feel most insecure. With this knowledge the team was able to craft recommendations for the way forward in developing Kosovo's internal security apparatus.

With talks on the future status of Kosovo well underway, the international community must prioritize security sector reform. Stability in the region will hinge on Kosovo's ability to maintain security for all its citizens. Security will be the key to economic development, civic responsibility, and productive relations both among Kosovo's citizens and between Kosovo and its neighbors in the Balkans.

USIP held a public discussion of the ISSR on November 20, 2006. ISSR report coordinator, BG Anthony Cleland Welch, presented the key findings of the report and discussants Soren Jessen-Petersen, guest scholar at USIP and former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo, and Michael Dziedzic, senior program officer at USIP, provided observations. This USIPeace Briefing highlights the central points made during the discussions.

Defining a Relationship between the Government and the People

The ISSR team premised its work on the notion that if one is to help a country in transition, the first thing to do is to understand the relationship between the government and the people. This involves taking a holistic approach to determining what the people require from the government in order to feel secure in their communities.

The riots of March 2004 made three things clear: the imperative of assuring the security of all communities; the need to understand citizen requirements for security; and the importance of local ownership in this process. The riots brought the lack of information sharing between leaders and citizens and the widespread perception of insecurity to a head. According to

KFOR soldiers respond during a mass casualty exercise in April 2005. (Photo Courtesy: KFOR Photos)

Jessen-Petersen, "March 2004 was a message to all of us, the locals and the internationals, that we had to change directions and more diligently pursue security sector reform in Kosovo." Up until that point the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) troops shared responsibility for security in the region. The 2004 riots catalyzed the need for a review of the security sector. The first step was to conduct a survey of what existed, where the gaps were, and what was needed to fill the gaps. The review aimed to recommend a framework for Kosovo's future internal security architecture and suggest improvements in those institutions of government that impact its security.

Surveying Security through a Wide Lens

Attention to local concerns and the development of a multi-faceted perspective set the parameters of the ISSR project.

The security sector review project served four main purposes. First, it began the preparation for post-status Kosovo by looking at future arrangements for a security system. Symbolically, this sent the message that the international community was serious about addressing the status issue. Second, it was a way to clarify the role of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), and to manage the growing frustration within this force regarding their future by bringing them inside the process. Third, the project began the process of developing parliamentary oversight of security institutions. Finally, the project educated politicians and the public alike on security matters. This education process will pave the way for eventual local ownership of the security institutions.

The team began their work within the context of locality. Above all else, emphasis remained on the local population--their needs and concerns for security. With an overarching goal of transparency and local involvement, the ISSR team began their review with town hall meetings on security. The team went from municipality to municipality in order to hear citizens' thoughts on security issues in the community, society, or family.

The ISSR team worked with international and local experts, consulting with over one hundred groups from academia, business, and civil society. The wide range of opinions that these groups contributed served as a "reality check" on what the ISSR team was thinking and how they went about formulating recommendations. Over 8,000 people voiced their opinions during the process, including considerable numbers of minorities and women. As Welch pointed out, "Although this was not a scientific survey, the important factor was in getting a very good cross-section view of what people felt about their security ... it was important not only to get views across ethnic divides but also to demonstrate that we were listening to all ethnic groups."

Key Findings

The key findings of the report revolve around the nature of the threat perceptions of Kosovo's ethnic communities. Not surprisingly, fear of ethnic violence (20%) is the leading concern for the Kosovo Serb population, followed by unemployment and poverty (15%). For the composite of Kosovo's population surveyed (of which Kosovo Albanians made up 90.2%) the ISSR report "puts economic instability at the center surrounded by a ring of democratic deficit." Unemployment, poverty, and electricity were other top perceived threats.

The continuing lack of reliable electrical power is linked to economic instability, lack of investments, unemployment, and the resultant threat of insecurity. Public attitude polls show almost universal dislike of the KEK (Kosovo Electro-Distribution Company). Clearly, it is unrealistic to expect viable business growth without reliable electric supplies, Welch said.

In his remarks, Dziedzic speculated about what the findings of a report on external security sector reform might have been, suggesting that the top priority would be to assure the safety of the Kosovo Serb population. "Kosovo will be secure in its neighborhood," he said, "if Kosovo's Serbs are secure in theirs."

It is also important to recognize that organized crime and corruption are significant sources of insecurity for the entire region. This point, made by both Jessen-Petersen and Dziedzic, underscores the need for local level inclusion during the security reform process. As Jessen-Petersen emphasized, "international institutions will always have serious limitations on dealing with corruption due to the fact that it extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate the local environment."

The Way Ahead: A Small, Professional Defense Force

The ISSR recommends a small defense force of no more than 2,500 people that would absorb the functions currently performed by the KPC. The defense force would be recruited from across the population with no ethnic bars and no restrictions on current members of the KPC applying for posts individually--but also no rights to posts for KPC members. The ISSR report points out that if this recommendation is adopted, the international community must help fund the resettlement and pensions for former KPC members not transferred to the new defense force. What Kosovo and its neighbors do not need is trained, disgruntled, and unemployed ex-KPC with grudges against a new Kosovo government and defense force.

In sum, the new security service must be transparent, accountable, and subject to parliamentary oversight. This force must also have solid links with NATO and the future EU border management force in the Balkans. Welch stressed that "after status the population needs to see their defense force as being a symbol of coming of age."

Conclusion: Bring on Status Sooner Rather than Later

Status is the sine qua non for security sector reform and the basis for the majority of the report's recommendations. Jessen-Petersen captured the imperative of status in his concluding comments: "Let us get it done sooner rather than later and without any further delay." The aforementioned economic stability, employment generation, and international defense partnerships are the desired outputs of a more secure environment. The time is now to begin consideration about how to implement these recommendations.

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- Kosovo Negotiations: Is Progress Possible?
  Event, May 2, 2006 (Audio Available)

This USIPeace Briefing was written by Yll Bajraktari and Christina Parajon of the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

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