Mapping Civil Society in Defense and Security Affairs: An Agenda for Research

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Relevance of Civil Society to the Defense and Security Sector

Civil society has become a popular term in political analysis. A significant body of literature and research has developed around the concept, and its key role in consolidating and sustaining democracy is now widely recognized by academics and policy-makers alike. Successive waves of democratization in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe have led experts to view civil society as a crucial agent for limiting authoritarian government, strengthening the empowerment of the people, and enforcing political accountability. It is considered a crucial factor in improving the quality and inclusiveness of governance.

Yet the term is often used loosely and with imprecision as a more current replacement for the more general word "society". This is especially so in defense and security affairs, where there has been little research to date that has focused explicitly on the relevance of civil society and the non-governmental domain in general to this particular sector of public policy. The purpose of this article is to describe the concept of civil society and discuss how we think it contributes to good governance of defense and security affairs. We then describe a research program that we are initiating in the context of the Civil-Military Relations Working Group of the Partnership for Peace Consortium to further our understanding of the role of civil society.

Civil society refers to voluntary associational groupings in a society, and the public expression of the interests, priorities, grievances, and values around which those associations are based. In other words, people voluntarily form groups to advance their values and interests and to engage in public life outside of the family and the marketplace. Civil society as a sphere is distinct and autonomous from the state, but that does not mean that they are isolated from each other. On the contrary, the term implies the existence of a public that is capable of engaging with state policy and acting to articulate demands and promote interests within the context of civic groups. Civic action is mobilized around values and norms, which in a complex society are likely to be highly diverse. It is sustained by the sharing of information and communication. Civil society organizations (CSOs) serve as channels for expressing the diverse and sometimes contradictory social interests in

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a democracy. Furthermore, civic engagement is not always or necessarily "civil," as it may include demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, peaceful protest, and even violent protest, as well as the more benign elements of self-help, volunteerism, and constructive work in communities that is usually thought of when civil society is invoked.

In our view, civil society has become a significant concept academically and in policy circles because it reflects shifts in expectations concerning democracy and governance. People in consolidated democracies today tend to have higher expectations of governmental accountability, legitimacy, and inclusiveness than in previous generations. Increasingly in mature democracies the ballot box is acknowledged to be a necessary, but blunt, instrument of democracy. Although popular will is directly expressed and governments are elected every few years on average, this does not mean that governments represent the views of people all the time or on every issue. The growth in support for and endorsement of civil society as a political concept is based on the view that people in a democracy should be able to express their views and preferences between elections, and that this willingness to engage as groups in the social and (sometimes) political life of the state is a fundamental component of democracy. Therefore, the input of civil society actors in the realm of public policy is seen as a hallmark of pluralistic liberal democracy.

One of the most fundamental functions of the state is to provide for the security of its citizens. The security sector comprises those state institutions and structures whose primary function is to protect society and the liberty of its citizens. The term "security sector" expands the scope of security from its traditional focus on the military and national security to include "public security," or the safety of the individual from threats of crime, disorder, and violence. Because security sector reform is focused on the use of public resources to provide security for citizens, there is a necessary focus on state (often executive) institutions and public policy. These institutions include military forces, police and law enforcement services, paramilitary forces, border guards, intelligence agencies, the judicial system, and penal institutions as well as the government departments and ministries that exist to formulate policy and manage these institutions. Most of the institutions that are part of the security sector are authorized to use or threaten the use of force, if necessary, in order to fulfill their function. Nevertheless, the legitimate use of force against the state's citizens is strictly regulated in a democracy.

Of all the sectors of public policy, however, the security sector has historically proven one of the most resistant to public input. This is in part a function of the fundamental and overwhelming importance of national security to the continued existence of the state, and the prerogative of the executive arm of government to undertake the protection of national security. The right of states to restrict certain fundamental human rights for legitimate reasons of national security or public order is recognized, after all, in international law. Moreover, the requirements of

secrecy place certain constraints on the types and amount of information that is released by security sector institutions to the public. Nevertheless, states have also used national security as a justification for withholding information and avoiding accountability. Official secrecy, justified on grounds of national security, has been used to avoid political embarrassment as well as to cover up corruption or gross mismanagement of public affairs. The concept of "securitization" has been used to describe the process whereby policy-makers apply the label of national security to otherwise contentious issues of public policy in order to elevate them above the level of political debate and avoid unwanted scrutiny. The traditional secrecy and exclusiveness of the security domain has tended to constrain transparency, accountability, and civilian oversight of this most important sector.

Civil society can and should play an important, albeit often indirect, role in the processes of regulation, oversight, and control of state security structures. Civilian expertise in defense and security affairs is widely recognized as a vital element in democratic control of armed forces and security structures through civilian capacities for monitoring, research, and policy development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other elements of civil society are the crucibles in which most civilian expertise in defense and security affairs develops. Civil society organizations that are particularly relevant to defense and security affairs include university departments, human rights and civil liberties groups, peace groups and other interest groups, media actors, and lobbying groups. Civil society empowerment is crucial in the creation of civilian expertise and capacities to independently evaluate, challenge, or endorse governmental decisions and analyses of defense and security affairs and the requirements on which policy is based. At a practical level, when we are considering a sphere as specialized as the security and defense arena, the engagement of civil society actors often takes the form of public consultations by the government of the day on major issues of public interest (such as during a comprehensive foreign and defense policy review).

Because the focus of our Working Group is civil-military relations and the security sector – a specific area of government policy – we are interested in CSOs that seek to influence or shape the policy process or public debate on issues relating to security. That is, we are looking at the interface between government decision-makers in the security field and civil society actors. In defense and security affairs, most CSOs have a dual role. They are usually composed of members of the intellectual elite who stand between the government and the general public. On the one hand, members of such CSOs should assist the government in finding the right answers to public policy questions and take a role in responsibly criticizing government actions. On the other hand, defense and security CSOs should help to spread knowledge and create a climate of opinion that encourages wise policy-making.

But that is only one part of the equation of the relationship between the state and civil society. It is also important to understand the role of the state in en-

couraging civil society and facilitating the engagement of the public in defense and security affairs. What is the nature of the relationship between CSOs and the state? Is it a cooperative partnership, or do the state actors and civil society actors perceive themselves as opponents or antagonists? Some civil society actors may seek to act as a type of watchdog over the state and so function as a force for accountability (making officials explain to the public what they are doing, and holding them responsible for what they have done), and may even challenge some of its policies and decisions. More specifically, what is the role of the state in post-socialist contexts? The degree of state support for CSOs that is considered necessary and legitimate tends to be culturally determined; for example, U.S. expectations tend to be different in this regard than in other Western democracies.

Establishment of the Sub-Working Group on Civil Society

In order to examine these issues in a more systematic and comparative fashion, we proposed the establishment of the Sub-Working Group (SWG) on Civil Society at the meeting of the Civil-Military Relations Working Group on 13–14 December 2001 in Geneva. The PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, with its regular meetings, diverse membership, and focus on defense and security was considered to be an ideal forum in which to establish such a group. The purpose of the Civil Society SWG is to examine the role that civil society organizations (CSOs) play, or have the potential to play, in civil-military relations and in the democratic control and oversight of the security sector, both in consolidating and mature democracies. The Sub-Working Group is particularly concerned with understanding how civil society interacts with the state on defense and security affairs in different contexts, and with formulating a model of how civil society relates to the state across the different component sectors of security. It is also interested in discovering ways to foster greater engagement and participation by the citizenry in the political and administrative decision-making processes of that part of the public sphere concerned with security and defense policy.

The Sub-Working Group will focus on the impact of civil society actors on defense and security affairs in transition countries. The three key groups of civil society actors under consideration will be non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and research centers, and the media.

In the first year, the group's efforts will concentrate on research and presentation of research results on civil society and civil-military relations in each of the member states, as well as in transition countries more generally. The sub-working group will eventually address the three streams of activity that have been identified as areas of interest for the CMR Working Group: research, outreach, and expert formation.

The aims of the initial research phase will focus first on assessing the current stage of civil society development in each of the participating member countries

that is directly relevant for defense and security. Second, it will seek to evaluate how effective assistance from international democracies has been in promoting the establishment, capacity-building, and influence of civil society groups in defense and security affairs. Third, the sub-working group will identify strategies to widen the membership of NGOs and other civil society organizations, and to strengthen the capacity of such organizations to engage in policy discourse and advocacy surrounding the formulation of defense and security policy in countries undergoing the transition to democracy.

The Sub-Working Group also seeks to understand the role of the state in developing civil society and promoting the engagement of the public in defense and security affairs. The state is thus viewed as the cooperative partner of civil society, not its opponent. Specifically, what is the role of the state in post-socialist contexts? What degree of state support for CSOs is necessary, and what are public expectations regarding the facilitating role of the state?

The purpose of the Sub-Working Group is to examine the role that civil society organizations play in civil-military relations and in ensuring the good governance of the security sector. It will do so by assessing, first, whether CSOs have influence on the policy process and policy decisions in the security sphere. Second, it will assess whether civil society organizations and actors foster greater engagement and/or participation by the citizenry in that part of the public sphere concerned with security and defense policy. Do CSOs help make the voices and views of citizens heard? What is the structure and role of civil society in post-socialist democracies? To what extent is it true that civil society (specifically advocacy and engagement by citizens in the defense and security sphere) helps to rectify deficiencies in a government's accountability and representativeness? Alternatively, to what extent is the sphere affected by special interest groups (defense industry, intellectual-political elite, and so on)?

Research Project on Mapping Civil Society in Security and Defense Affairs

The first activity of the Civil Society SWG is a research and publication project which undertakes to map out the contours of civil society organizations that seek to influence security sector policy and public debate on defense and security affairs. It aims to describe, evaluate, and compare the array of civil society organizations that are relevant to the security sector in various mature democracies and emerging democracies, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe. The basic goal is to compare and assess the development of civil society in its relations with government decision-makers and with the public more generally within the area that has come to be known as the "security sector." It will also analyze the extent to which these civil society actors influence government decisions about security policy, and the extent to which they contribute to informing the public about such issues.

We have chosen to expand the scope of our focus from civil-military relations to the security sector more broadly for two reasons. First, the increasingly complex and inter-connected nature of security requires a more comprehensive approach with a more well-rounded conceptualization of security. Second, we think that comparing the influence of civil society actors across the various components of the security sector may help to sharpen our understanding of the concept itself.

The Civil Society SWG is inviting contributors to write individual case studies that map out civil society's influence in the defense and security sector of their selected state. Each case study should be an original article (unpublished elsewhere) of about 20–25 double-spaced pages, with manuscripts to be received by the editors at the DCAF address. The publication will be in English, and authors' contributions are to be submitted in English. Papers will be distributed to other project participants, and discussed at the next CMR meeting. The target date for publication is early 2003.

To ensure the comparative aspects of the assessments, each chapter should generally follow the suggested structure and outline provided by the main headings listed below. The questions and points listed below each major component reflect traits and issues that have arisen in the literature regarding civil society, and are meant to provoke further thought and research in application to civil society's role in the defense and security sector.

Format and Issues to Address in Individual Country Chapters

I. Describe the main types of civil society organizations that have been active in the security and defense field since 1989. Authors should also attempt to explain why there might have been a particular type of CSO that dominated, or explain the pattern of evolution in types of CSOs active in this field.

Civil society organizations discussed may include the types of organizations listed below. U.S.-based promoters of democracy have tended to equate civil society with the specialized set of policy-related NGOs that carry out advocacy work and civic education in areas such as elections monitoring, government transparency, and political and civil rights. In this project, we will aim to expand the focus somewhat to include all those CSOs that have some impact on policy or public debate on security and defense affairs. Note that this is not an exhaustive list, and that civil society may encompass an extremely wide range of groups. However, in practical terms, the experience of mature democracies has been that the range of relevant CSOs is considerably narrower concerning defense and security affairs than in sectors that have more immediate impact on citizens, such as health or education. The following are types of relevant CSOs:

a. Defense and security affairs:

- Think tanks
- Public policy research institutes (partisan and non-partisan)

- University-affiliated CSOs (academic departments, law schools, graduate schools, schools of public administration, or research institutes)
- Non-governmental organizations
    - Single-issue organizations in which members are devoted to a cause – e.g., for or against NATO membership, anti-conscription, anti-nuclear weapons. Regarding public security, examples are drawn from groups focused on such issues as domestic violence or drug trafficking. Example: the Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century, a group made up of concerned individuals (defense experts, heads of institutes, researchers, retired military) pressuring government for a comprehensive defense and security policy review.
    - Umbrella NGO group (the need for a unifying force and combined voice when there is a fragmented group of small NGOs with minimal impact working on a given issue)
- Advocacy and pressure groups focused on specific issues (human rights, environment, peace, corruption, press freedom, government accountability, media watchdogs)
- Churches
- Labor unions
- Cultural organizations
- Ethnic associations
- Community and neighborhood groups
- Professional groups (for example, federations of journalists, academic societies, bar associations, veterans associations, associations of police chiefs)
- In addition, we will include direct citizen action – i.e., individuals who take action (entrepreneurial policy types, individuals who make complaints to structures like ombudsmen, people who speak or write to parliamentarians).

b. Policing and internal security affairs:

- Community watch groups
- Neighborhood and local citizens' police advisory boards
- Human rights groups and networks
- Departments of criminology and sociology
- Police, legal, and criminal justice research institutes

- Business associations

- Bar associations

- Local branches of international NGOs such as Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch, Transparency International

II. Assess and evaluate the patterns of CSO relations with the following actors. How do civil society organizations draw attention to and raise interest in their activities among the following actors?

- The state, specifically in the sector under consideration (security and defense, or public security)

- Other CSOs in the field

- External actors (foreign donors, governments, international NGOs)

- The media

- The domestic public

III. In terms of attempting to influence policy in security and defense, describe the stage /stages of the security and defense policy-making cycle at which local civil society organizations tend to seek to exert influence. How effective are their attempts to influence policy?

Examples of stages or access points of the security policy process might include:

- Advising senior political candidates before elections

- Proposing programs and policies during the installation of a new government administration

- Advising governments on policy issues or on the interests of civil society groups

- Appearing before legislative committees

- Participating in governmental exercises in public consultation on security issues

- Having interviews and meetings with mid- to senior-level bureaucrats and cabinet ministers

- Distributing studies and policy briefs to policy-makers

IV. Assess and evaluate the types of activities aimed at influencing public opinion and public debate that local CSOs engage in. How effective are public outreach activities generally? Do they disseminate information in an area and on issues that were formerly monopolized by the state? Have defense and security CSOs been effective in educating the public on specific issues? Do they contribute to a climate of well-informed decision-making by both the public and the government? Do they facilitate networking among people with similar interests?

Such activities may include:

- Conducting research, publishing and distributing studies and publications to policy-makers, opinion-leaders, members of the public

- Writing op/ed pieces and articles to influence public policy debate and decision-making

- Establishing web pages on the Internet

- Maintaining databases of legislation or policy accessible to those who are interested

- Promoting public awareness on security related issues by giving public addresses and lectures or holding public forums

- Holding workshops and conferences

- Giving interviews to the media

- Educating members of security agencies (police, armed forces, border guards) and specialized groups (media, students)

- Educating the broader politically-attentive public through outreach activities

V. Describe and assess the stance of political leaders, ministries/departments, and government officials to CSOs and "interested publics" in defense and security affairs. What characterizes the stance of these government actors toward CSOs?

- Ignore

- Selective engagement (public consultation on certain issues, contract hiring)

- Consult with and bring experts from CSOs into ministries

- Support CSOs through research contracts, consultancies, etc.

- Establish CSOs with government funding (are such CSOs politically independent from the government? For example, do they have to report to the government?)

- Co-opt CSOs by creating dependency relations and pressure to conform to governmental views

- Strategic engagement in order to disarm critics and indoctrinate potential critics

- Use public hearings and consultations with the goal of consulting interested citizens

- Use of consultations to float trial balloons (new policies or changes in existing ones)

- Use public consultations to create appearance of inclusiveness (but is real scrutiny of past policies encouraged, and does security policy decision-making remain concentrated in the hands of a few members of the inner circle?)

- Is government receptive to CSOs in the role of criticizing government policies? Do state actors penalize CSO members who criticize government policy?

VI. Do local CSOs adequately reflect the interests and support of their constituents, namely local citizens and social groups? That is, are they sufficiently "contextually rooted"? In various C&EE NGOs, for example, the failure to create a domestic advocacy network is a major failing of Western aid. Certain groups have not had the incentive to become involved in mainstream politics. Independent of the state but dependent on the international community, they lack accountability and interest in grass-roots constituency-building. Moreover, dependence on the international community means that their activities are shaped by what the international community determines it will support. This limits the groups' effectiveness and influence domestically, and has resulted in the marginalization of such groups, which neither seek nor depend on domestic support. Foreign funding may also lead to the creation of new groups instead of working with already existing groups, spurring intense competition among groups with similar goals. There is often a lack of contact and cooperation among competing groups and individuals with similar objectives.

VII. Where do the defense and security-relevant CSOs tend to get their funding from, and what are their long-term chances for sustainability. Do the CSOs rely predominantly on foreign funding? If so, do they face problems of sustainability? That is, would these CSOs be able to survive if foreign donors stopped

giving them grants and/or technical assistance, or shifted their targets and priorities? Where would they get their funding alternatively? Are the CSOs successful in finding local sources of money? Does the state itself provide funding? If so, what is the impact on the freedom of expression and/or criticism for the recipient CSO? In some instances, state funding may severely compromise the credibility and effectiveness of certain CSOs. This is more likely to be the case concerning those CSOs that monitor human rights violations by the state and its agents (police, military, etc.).

VIII. Evaluate the effectiveness of foreign donor assistance in promoting and developing civil society organizations.

- Have foreign donors created CSOs in their own image? Do local CSOs follow their own agendas or that of their donor-sponsor?

- Do donors patronize the same circle of familiar, Westernized faces and institutions? To what extent do they attempt to extend their reach beyond the capital to engage with rural and other regional actors?

- What types of foreign assistance are provided to defense and security CSOs?

  a. Technical assistance: training, advice, and information about organizational development and management, advocacy methods, fundraising, writing grant proposals, issue analysis, and media relations

  b. Direct funding: provision of equipment (esp. computers, fax, photocopiers)

- Is the assistance given with specific conditions – i.e., is the politically engaged but non-partisan nature of the recipient CSO threatened?

IX. Describe and assess the role of the media in facilitating the participation of civil society organizations in public policy and public debate on security and defense affairs. Although not strictly considered a civil society organization, but more correctly as part of business firms, the media play a crucial role in transmitting public preferences and opinion to policy makers. The media are also a key means by which civil society organizations seek to draw the attention of policy makers and the wider public to their programs and positions. Most profoundly, the media function as watchdogs of democracy. This requires more than just the publication of facts; journalists have the opportunity to publish information that spurs people to think about what is right and what is wrong, and to contribute to developing critical debate and moral dialogue in their societies.

X. Where do/did representatives of civil society receive their knowledge and expertise, and what would eventually need to be done to enhance the quality of civil society contributions to governance?

The question here is to what extent civil society actors can make real contributions to governance, and how the quality of their insights could eventually be improved. Note also that basic legal knowledge is of considerable importance in some states where authoritarian governments try to limit and/or control the work of civil society actors.

XI. What insights do the descriptions and evaluations of civil society development suggest?

- What problems remain and need to be addressed?

- Discuss the reasons for successes and failures in civil society development in the country.

- How does the state of civil society development in the defense and security sector fit into the larger societal and political changes that are going on?

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