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UNU Editor Albrecht Schnabel is available for interviews. Please call to schedule a time. Media may access the full book, to be published in February, online (1.5 MB, pdf) at <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/temp/9280811096.pdf>

Efforts to Reform Security Making Iraq “Less Secure”: UN Experts

Centralised, “Oppressive” Power Encourages Terrorism and Criminals

International efforts to restore stability to Iraq are having the opposite effect, say the editors of a new UN book on the reform of the security sectors in post-conflict societies.

“Instead of stabilizing places like Iraq, international efforts to centralise power are creating a more fragile security environment than ever before,” says Dr. Albrecht Schnabel, a co-editor of the book “Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding” and a former researcher with United Nations University.

Occupying powers and international organisations such as the United Nations are trying to help a number of post-conflict societies restore law and order by reforming their military, police, intelligence services and judiciaries. The book, published by United Nations University Press in February, draws on experiences in the post-conflict environments of Macedonia, Bosnia, Russia, Georgia, Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Guatemala, Columbia, Chile, Haiti, and the African continent.

The editors warn that the anti-terrorism agenda is centralising power and fostering disruptive elements. The terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001 and the US-led international war on terrorism have had a major impact on the methods used in international post-war

peacebuilding. “There is a great fear that unstable states and post-war societies provide an ideal breeding ground for terrorist training and activity,” Schnabel says. “Yet, almost three years after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, Iraq is characterized by chaos, violence and disintegration. The methods used to rebuild Iraq’s security sector are simply making matters worse.”

“International criminals and terrorists exploit states with poorly functioning security sectors. This should be a strong incentive for regional and international organisations to help these states reform their security sectors and prevent the spread of cross-border crime and international terrorism,” the editors state.

However, the editors warn that: “increased focus on terrorism should not lead to the misguided support for further centralization and an empowerment of unaccountable and oppressive security structures, in the belief that strong security structures are required to fight terrorism.”

Post-conflict environments are highly fragile and unsafe, creating a major challenge for the many organizations involved in the slow process of rebuilding a country’s security systems, providing stability and developing its economy.

The editors argue that international military engagement in conflict and post-conflict theatres, and efforts to reform security sectors, have usually been characterized by good intentions and honest concern about the security of post-war societies “but all too often they have not been blessed with much success”.

“Iraq is a glaring example but it is not unique,” says Schnabel.

The editors insist that external military powers must create a basic security environment that allows domestic peace- and nation-building efforts to succeed, and that prevents internal forces from spoiling the fragile stability typical for post-conflict environments. “Internal forces must be put under democratic control, restructured and retrained to become an asset, not a liability, in the long-term peacebuilding process,” they state in the book. “Security sector reform efforts are only successful when external actors are able and willing to stay the course and support an irrevocable process towards security consolidation and security sector reform, and where national and local authorities are committed and able to sustain such progress once external actors retreat.”

The book was written by an international group of academics and military commanders who examine the record and challenges of security sector reform around the world, including training requirements for peace operations in the post-conflict environment, donor policies,

and experiences with security sector reform. “The authors want the book to contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of and opportunities for constructive and sustainable security sector reform,” says Dr. Schnabel.

Dr. W. Andy Knight, the McCalla Research Professor at the University of Alberta, Canada, said the book will be useful to policymakers interested in understanding the complexity of addressing security sector reform and civil-military relations. “It should appeal to military, peacekeeping, and police forces who are increasingly being asked to insert themselves in conflict zones to bring a level of stability so that peace can be built and sustained.”

Dr. Albrecht Schnabel is a Senior Research Fellow in the Research Program on Human Security (HUSEC) & FAST International in Bern, Switzerland, and is a former Academic Programme Officer in the Peace and Governance Programme of United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan.

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Book Details

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