Richard Zajac Sannerholm has been working with research on rule of law assistance to war-torn societies since June 2004 after finishing a degree in legal science at the University of Örebro.

Rule of law has emerged as an essential objective in assistance to post-crisis societies such as Somalia, Kosovo and Liberia. This has led to a host of externally promoted programmes and projects on law reform, constitutional development and judicial training.

Through UN Security Council resolutions and other means of conditionality, the rule of law is not simply promoted, but also enforced. A failure to adhere to the rule of law can result in donors withholding funds and political support. The employment of the concept as a standard and condition in state-building has national legal and political consequences. Clarity in communication on the rule of law is of first importance.

This thesis argues that despite past experiences of development assistance, rule of law reform in war-torn societies operates in an autonomous field where best practices and lessons learned are rarely or only superficially acknowledged. Furthermore, there is a need for a reorientation of rule of law assistance to the core values of the concept in order to retain its independent and ‘analytical bite’, and to develop criteria that can guide reformers in the field.