CONFLICTS, PANDEMICS AND PEACEBUILDING:

New Perspectives on Security Sector Reform in the MENA Region

edited by **Andrea Cellino** and **Annalisa Perteghella**
introduction by **Thomas Guerber** and **Paolo Magri**

ISPI

DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
20TH ANNIVERSARY

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of the institutions referred to or represented within this publication.

The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance - DCAF is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

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Introduction

In the last decade, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been shaken by a number of violent conflicts, including bloody civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya, which continue to this day and have to a great extent triggered a process of security fragmentation and deterioration. At the same time, such dynamics have caused and been compounded by two major and closely related factors: first, the weakening and partial delegitimisation of state institutions and control in a number of countries in the region, and second, the ascent of armed and powerful non-state or para-state actors, ranging from semi-official state-sponsored militias to violent terrorist groups. As governments across the region fail to deliver effective governance – and security – to their citizens, the institutional vacuum has been filled by multiple actors that often pursue competing agendas and reflect the interests – social, political and economic – of specific constituencies. These developments have a lot of negative or detrimental effects on the affected communities, or even for the state itself, and this process of security fragmentation away from the state's authority poses both urgent questions on, and formidable challenges to the sustainability of centralised models of security governance in the region.

Adding to this, the Covid-19 outbreak is exerting extreme pressure on governments and states' healthcare systems, exposing governance deficiencies and exacerbating socio-economic grievances. The pandemic is not only a health crisis.

It also poses wider risks that may have long-lasting repercussions on human and state security in the region. More specifically, the health and economic crisis adds to the existing security challenges and puts additional burden on the security actors as well as those in charge of exercising effective democratic oversight on the sector. As public health is catapulted in the realm of "national security". Security actors, including non-state militias, take on major roles in managing the pandemic in a context of limited or absent democratic scrutiny, the risks of unaccountability, ethno-religious discrimination as well as human rights and gender-equality violations grows hand in hand with that of vertical and horizontal exclusion.

Against this backdrop, the question arises on which Security Sector Reform (SSR) strategies and programmes international organisations and stakeholders should adapt under these circumstances. Indeed, traditional approaches to SSR find themselves at a crossroads in conflict and post-conflict environments across the region: as governance crises remain pervasive on a regional scale, weak and fragile state institutions are struggling to cope with the complex reality in which they operate, thus failing to meet expectations of efficient Security Sector Governance (SSG) and properly address the needs of their citizens. After decades of attempted operationalisation, traditional top-down and institution-centric SSR approaches are thus increasingly considered ineffective, and progressively traded for more decentralised and tailor-made approaches that favour informal civilian forms of oversight.

With these elements in mind, this report aims at shedding light on existing, envisaged, and deployed SSR doctrines across the MENA region, providing a thorough evaluation of security structures and security provisions in light of the prominent role of hybrid and non-state actors and the impact of Covid-19. Even more ambitiously, this publication seeks to enrich the debate on SSR and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) strategies in the Middle East and North Africa by delving into three key, and most debated, case studies

and identifying the main obstacles as well as lessons learned in each case according to local specificities.

In the first chapter, Ranj Alaaldin considers the contextual dimension of conflict-ridden and transitioning societies in the region and explores the consequences of inadequate governance, short-sighted or biased policies on the part of the state, or the proliferation of non-state militias and the novel coronavirus on the deployment of effective SSR and DDR initiatives. According to Alaaldin, the priority should be to abandon our traditional understanding of the state as the one and only guarantor of security and instead focus on how to reconcile SSR efforts with new scenarios of hybrid or even non-state sovereignty, directly including non-state interlocutors rather than excluding them. The author concludes by highlighting the often-underestimated impact of external actors and international organisations on SSR and other peace-building initiatives, suggesting the need for ad-hoc strategies tailored to the local context and the real interests of local stakeholders, free from foreign machinations.

In the second chapter, Jérôme Drevon focuses on the phenomenon of hybrid actors and analyses their defining features in the context of war-torn countries or weakened state authority after 2011. According to Drevon the military dimension whereby hybrid groups contend political power and territorial control with the state cannot fully explain their rise and success. Specifically, the author proposes "governance capacity" as a key concept. This concept tries to capture the ability to deliver services to the population, organize civil and political life and, ultimately, provide security alongside state institutions "without necessarily trying to subvert them". Drevon concludes by highlighting the difficult challenge of identifying as well as separating more ideological groups and including the political and ideological perspectives of hybrid actors in future SSR and DDR strategies.

In the third chapter, Jalel Harchaoui analyses the complex Libya case study. The author starts by arguing that of the several security-related initiatives carried out in Libya since 2011 none

was a full success. The reasons for this stem from a combination of factors, including a mixture of old and new societal splits, the extreme frailty of state institutions, pervasive and at times unrestrained foreign interventions, and the reaffirmation of personalised forms of power and political authority. After focusing on each factor and offering an assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on the Libyan security landscape, Harchaoui provides a series of specific recommendations, and concludes by suggesting that any future SSR effort must be part of a broader and more inclusive political deal. In his view, professionalism, a more balanced ethnic composition, and a recast national identity should inform the creation of the next generation of security forces.

In the fourth chapter, Irene Costantini examines the case of Iraq. The author frames her analysis along three different periods, covering the interlude from 2003 until the present day, in order to better identify the shortcomings that have jeopardised successive attempts of SSR in the country. In the first phase, from 2003 to 2008, the primacy of donors' security interests and the impact of a bloody insurgency rendered SSR projects often unilateral and detached from Iraq's real state-building needs and priorities. Between 2009 and 2014, SSR efforts were impaired not only by a drain of resources caused by the US withdrawal at the end of 2011, but also by the authoritarian tendencies of the Shia-dominated government of Nuri al-Maliki that "served the objective of regime security" rather than a genuine design of state and citizens' security. The last phase of SSR was launched in conjunction with the operations of the International coalition against the Islamic State in 2015 and has continued in a context of surging geopolitical tensions, but has so far followed the same faulty patterns of previous years, with Western-led projects largely indifferent to the prominent role acquired by para-state militias integrated within the Popular Mobilization Units, especially in the fight against Covid-19.

The fifth and last chapter is dedicated to Yemen. Author Eleonora Ardemagni acknowledges the complexity and

fragility of the Yemeni context, suggesting a departure from the traditional "army-centric" approach so far adopted by Western states and international organisations with regard to SSR initiatives in the country. In a context of extreme political and security fragmentation, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the author proposes a "network approach" that would be more receptive to Yemen's variety of local dynamics and security priorities and conducive to more effective state building efforts. In particular, Ardemagni proposes an innovative approach to integration by way of a Yemeni National Guard. These elements entail the adoption of a bottom-up perspective based on the concept of "community building" to frame new SSR policies, aimed at decentralising the security structure and provision without compromising the core chain of military decision-making.

As this publication strives to contribute to the current debates around security sector hybridisation and its impact on reform processes, we hope it may stimulate a more thorough reflection on how work on SSR and SSG can better incorporate hybridisation and seriously consider inclusivity with a more open attitude towards non-state and hybrid actors. We hope you will enjoy reading this report.

Thomas Guerber   *Paolo Magri*
Director, DCAF   *Executive Vice President, ISPI*

1. Building Security in Transitioning Societies

Ranj Alaaldin

The Covid-19 pandemic has added a sense of urgency to addressing Security Sector Reform (SSR) gaps in transitioning societies that have undergone, and in some cases are still undergoing, transformational political and security crises. Countries like Iraq have suffered civil wars at least twice over the past decade; others like Syria, Libya and Yemen are also likely to be engulfed in political and violent instability for years to come. In the midst of these crises, outside actors have traditionally strived to implement comprehensive SSR strategies designed to address local capacity building needs, the empowerment of civil-society, local accountability mechanisms and the professionalisation of militia groups. However, traditional SSR approaches are in urgent need of reform so that they are compatible with, and better positioned to address, security landscapes that have undergone significant transformations over the past two decades.

Covid-19 has already complicated attempts to address challenges to effective and sustainable security provision. The challenge facing policy-makers across the globe is developing a response that is focused on the pandemic but also builds on existing measures and strategies designed to address shortcomings in governance, both to curtail the potential for the pandemic to re-emerge and suppress its long-term implications for existing governance challenges. This will face considerable

hurdles. SSR efforts will be complicated by the possibility that the global economic slowdown will cause a decrease in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for SSR, not least since ODA is usually associated to gross national income of donor states, while donor states and international non-government organisations will struggle to implement reform strategies in the midst of lockdown and social-distancing measures.

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a reversion to decrease dependency on conventional forces; world powers have opted instead to rely on a combination of hybrid warfare (the use of irregular local fighters, cyberwarfare and drones, among others) and indigenous local forces whose capacity and willingness to either fight on behalf of, or in in partnership with, outside powers makes them a useful alternative to the more politically sensitive dependency on conventional national forces. In recent years, the US and its European allies have increasingly worked with these actors, sometimes simultaneously. In Iraq, they have relied on the Iraqi armed forces and Iraqi police units, Arab Sunni tribes in northern Iraq, irregular Shiite fighters and the Kurdish Peshmerga. In Syria, the West has supported and relied on Arab rebel groups and tribes who have fought the Assad regime as well as the Kurdish fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG). In Libya, European countries effectively sit on opposite sides of the conflict between the Government of National Accord and the Libya National Army (LNA).

Indeed, the complications and contradictions of these policies present substantial challenges to re-establishing peace and security, establishing accountable and professionalised armed forces and to eventually rebuilding societies and states. This chapter highlights the policy voids that have diminished reform efforts, and focuses on the emergence and proliferation of militia groups, the painstaking process of professionalising these forces, the role of external belligerents and the changes that need to be implemented to establish more viable and sustainable SSR approaches.

Regional Security Challenges

Contrary to the popular understanding of armed groups, their origins can be attributed to the state-building that unfolded in Europe during the Middle Ages, when citizens were called upon to collectively defend the realm.[1] As Charles Tilly points out, these so-called "citizen militias" enabled the creation of protection rackets that saw civilians pay for protection against external threats but also against abuse and intimidation from the militias themselves. As these rackets became more formalised, they served as the basis for the creation of state institutions: the dues became "taxes" and the militias eventually became standing armies.[2] American militias also played a crucial role in the formation of state institutions. Militias were the first to fight for independence at Lexington and Concord, were frequently called upon to supplement the Continental Army, and were used to suppress counter-revolutionary efforts. The legacy of these militias remains in the National Guard and Reserve components of the US military[3] who, ironically, played an outsized role in combat against Iraqi militias after the 2003 toppling of the Baath regime.

Since 2011, the Arab world has undergone radical changes that have had far-reaching consequences for the security landscape. Sovereignty has become increasingly challenged, while state institutions have weakened or collapsed. Changes at the domestic and regional level have created conditions conducive to the ascendancy of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) or armed non-state actors (ANSAs), who have

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[1] For a history of the role of militias in the formation of medieval states, see J.R. Strayer, *Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1970.

[2] C. Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime", in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[3] C. Thurber, "Militias as sociopolitical movements: Lessons from Iraq's armed Shia groups", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 25, no. 5-6, 2014.

undermined state institutions, fragmented authority, and pushed ideological, regional or secessionist agendas. In 2014, the so-called Islamic State even declared the end of the nation-state system established a century ago in the Middle East. At the international level, policy-makers are uncertain about how to respond to these challenges to statehood and sovereignty and, more urgently, how to promote stabilisation and reconstruction efforts amid growing economic dislocation and humanitarian crises.

In the MENA region, history has generally been kind to the Arab state: since the Westphalian nation-state system was established from the ruins of the Ottoman empire in the early XX century, the international system has resisted any challenges to sovereignty, as well as attempts to disrupt territorial boundaries and the delicate balance of power in the region. Resource-rich governments aligned with and propped up by the West were also equipped with immense oil-wealth and resource-rich armed forces. Rag-tag armed groups – and even the most sophisticated and organised of armed groups – were no match for the security institutions that were at the disposal of regional governments. This regional order was seemingly impermeable, particularly with the advent of Nasserism and the toppling of monarchies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. But it was soon beset with cracks in the 1940s and 1950s, when anti-colonial sentiments were coupled with a rise in Arab nationalism, economic injustice and failures in governance, as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The 1970s brought further uncertainty and volatility to the region, with the rise of political Islam and the 1979 Iranian revolution. Politics and security in the region were transformed with the emergence of a Shiite theocracy in Iran and the subsequent 8-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Despite the far-reaching impact of these factors, and of Baath-Party-controlled Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the first Gulf War, the Arab state remained resilient, despite serious political and economic challenges. For a while, it seemed as though the regional system would remain intact, despite the destabilising consequences of

the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For almost a decade, Iraq's sectarian conflict and the ascendancy of militant groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the previous incarnation of the so-called Islamic State), militant Arab Sunni insurgents and a plethora of Shiite militia groups, were confined within the borders of Iraq. Moreover, the autonomy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its relative political and economic success did not provide the structural opportunities for similar Kurdish autonomous or quasi-independent regions to emerge in Turkey, Iran and Syria.

That said, with the advent of the Arab uprisings in 2011, the political and territorial configurations of the region have been cataclysmically disrupted. The fragility of the state and sectarian conflict in Iraq became replicated across the region. State institutions have become severely weakened and it is now questionable if statehood can ever be rehabilitated as sub-national identities based around ethnicity and religion continue to thrive in uncontested and ungoverned spaces. This is not to suggest that the entire MENA region has suffered the same fate but, rather, that the transnational element of conflict in the region has led to multiple ungoverned spaces, in which armed groups have become powerful mobilisers of people and resources, and have replaced the elites as the administrators of territory.

With support from regional patrons, these transnational actors have become the providers of services and security, and their networks extend across the region, rendering meaningless the once resilient and impermeable boundaries of the region. Sub-national identities and actors have thrived in violently contested spaces where the state has weakened or collapsed, and have become powerful mobilisers of people and resources. The odds may consequently be against conflict-ridden countries. The conflicts of the region may subside, but this likely to be a deceptive calm. Indeed, studies show that of the 105 countries that suffered civil wars between 1945 and 2013 globally, more than half (59 countries) experienced a relapse into violent conflict – in some cases more than once – after peace had been

established. A study conducted by the University of Denver's International Futures model, a statistical simulation of human and social development indicators, shows that while many countries were experiencing armed conflict before the pandemic, an additional 13 countries are likely to see new conflicts between now and 2022 – an increase of 56%.[4] The study goes further to stipulate that it now expects 35 countries to experience instability between 2020 and 2022, more than at any point over the past 30 years. According to the UN, 90% of current war casualties are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, compared to a century ago, when 90% of those who lost their lives were military personnel,[5] while more than half of all states affected by ongoing conflicts are also affected by protracted armed conflicts persisting for more than 10 years.

Militias As Enablers of Stability and Services

With the weakening of the Arab state, the array of local and national actors will grapple over power, resources and post-conflict power-sharing arrangements. The relationship between citizen and state will be fragile and will continue to violently disrupt governance and stability in the short and medium term.

Despite the resilience shown by the state-centric framework that the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and other transnational actors have attempted to erode, armed groups will still aim to reconfigure the state according to their own ideologies and worldviews, and those that do not will continue to contest the state for power and resources. Many, if not all, will continue to weaponise the state and its resources, interact with state-actors and enjoy the international recognition that comes with such interactions. In this environment, states are likely to continue relying predominantly or even entirely on militias because of

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[4] J.D. Moyer and O. Kaplan, "Will the Coronavirus Fuel Conflict?", *Foreign Policy*, 6 July 2020.

[5] *Conflict and Violence in the 21st Century*, World Bank Group, 1 October 2016.

the inadequacies of their own military and security forces, and the added political capital that can be generated from working with or co-opting actors that in some cases have substantial local and popular legitimacy.

There needs to be a re-evaluation of how policymakers view and address complex, inter-connected issues: the future of sovereignty, the role, responsibilities and accountability of the state; and the role, responsibilities and accountability of non-state actors; and the relationships that external powers want and should have with local state and non-state actors are questions that are central to achieving a durable peace. The orthodox approach to engaging issues of political violence, state fragility and the reconstruction and stabilisation of war-torn or unstable countries has involved working through the state, despite the inability of the state to monopolise the use of force and deliver adequate justice and security, and despite the extremely poor track-record of assistance with reconstruction and stabilisation in recent years. Investing billions of dollars in capacity building and institution-building processes or SSR have failed to yield the necessary dividends.

There are additional normative and practical implications of continuing to defer to the state in contexts where it has committed mass atrocities and yet exploits the benefits of state sovereignty, which has notably been the case in Syria. International institutions such as the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank defer to sovereign states, irrespective of whether such states have forgone the right to sovereignty by committing mass atrocities against their own people.

Irregular militia groups are now at the forefront of some of the most pressing security challenges in the region. These forces do not emerge from and operate in a vacuum, but derive from the legacies of war that have shaped the society, environment and communities they operate in and depend on for support. On the surface, that means their administration of territory or monopoly over violence does not bode well for the state and

society as it moves forward, since armed groups often operate amid fragile states and, therefore, are likely to operate without accountability, making the state-building exercise a trigger for conflict. When armed groups that mobilise on the basis of ethnicity or sect are deployed, this merely creates long-term challenges in pursuit of short-term goals. Indeed, in Iraq it can be argued that it was the dominance of Shiite militias and their sectarian atrocities that enabled an environment conducive to the emergence of ISIS in 2014. Similarly, the conduct and atrocities committed by the Northern Alliance in the battle against the Taliban, sometimes with the acquiescence of US forces, can be said to have laid the foundations for the conflict and tensions that exist today between the plethora of different Afghan factions and their militias.

However, the conduct and socio-cultural legitimacy and entrenchment of militia groups can at times play an enabling role in fostering critical security and service delivery. In Idlib, for example, welfare services are provided by civilian-run city and town councils, in cooperation with armed groups, who provide protection and order, but who also use service provision as a means of acquiring local legitimacy. The bodies that provide services consist of a central administrative council linked to specialised offices focused on emergency relief and municipal services, such as waste removal and water supply.[6] Similarly, in Syria's Kurdish-controlled regions there are legislative, judicial and executive councils that have played an important role in establishing order and stability in a part of a country that is otherwise engulfed in immense bloodletting.[7]

Indeed, armed non-state actors across the globe take advantage of failures in governance and the breakdown of institutions to exploit the resulting voids, both by mobilising their fighters and by providing services and protection to local communities. In

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[6] See J. C. Martínez and B. Eng, "Stifling stateness: The Assad regime's campaign against rebel governance", *Security Dialogue*, 2018, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 235-253.
[7] R. Khalaf, *Governing Rojava Layers of Legitimacy in Syria*, Chatham House, December 2016.

Iraq, Covid-19 has provided Shiite militias with an opportunity to enhance their reputational standing and position themselves as a viable alternative to formal authorities, particularly as the political class has failed to adequately respond to the pandemic. Indeed, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) has initiated a series of campaigns focused on the pandemic, providing medical support to victims, burial services and distributing food to the vulnerable. It has also built temporary and mobile hospitals, drawing on its experiences of providing medical aid and support in times of crisis from the anti-IS military campaign. At times, these activities also position militias as allies of the state, which helps enhance their own formal legitimacy, particularly if these actors, like the PMF, have only recently become recognised as constitutionally mandated members of state security forces.

The question that this chapter argues is fundamental to resolving the issue at hand is in fact a response to a question itself; namely, that we should not ask whether the domestic security arrangements that have emerged from conflict and tumult are sustainable but, rather, whether it is possible to establish a new equilibrium from these recently emerged configurations of non-state and para-state actors, and whether these actors are capable of working constructively with the remnants of the state. There is plenty in the existing literature to suggest that this is in fact possible. ANSA actors are not necessarily anti-state just because they are non-state, and the prominence of ANSAs does not necessarily lead to state failure. Groups ranging from those in Southeast Asia to the Middle East emerge and function not necessarily because of state failure, but because of historical animosities, long-term oppression, and perceptions of injustices and denial of rights. Further, existing studies also show that non-state violence cannot always be attributed to state failure, as reliance on non-state violence wielders has been a common form of military development in states where decentralised institutions of violence have been a response to changes in the regional and international system.[8]

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[8] A. Ahram, *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias*, Palo Alto,

On the surface, the transformation of militia heads and armed groups into the administrators of a state or swathes of territory, combined with groups spawned by religious conflicts, and which have little regard for international norms and human rights, is not an ideal formula for good governance. At the same time, the orthodox approach to combating groups like Shiite militia groups in Syria and Iraq, militias in Libya, or Kurdish secessionists in Syria is no longer plausible.

Rather than replacing or defying the state, major armed groups in Iraq are engaged in defining the state. It is now probably near impossible to eliminate the PMF and other militias within Iraq and its administrative structures. From a purely public administration perspective, these groups command salaries and resources from state coffers. Still, different militia groups have yet to determine how they will engage with civilians in the territories they hold, how to relate to democratic norms and practices, and what type of relationship to pursue with outside powers and sponsors. This is in some respects typical of armed groups that emerge from the cataclysm of revolutionary turmoil. The dilemma for policymakers is whether such engagement with the state can yield an environment that is conducive to stability and democratic norms. There is some evidence that militias' access to political power has actually improved receptivity to rule of law and transitional justice mechanisms. For example, the leaders of some militia groups that had attacked Western forces in the 2000s now regularly meet with Western emissaries and have moderated their actions in accordance with international laws and norms, in large part as a result of the pressure from Iraqi civil-society organisations, but also because adherence to these laws and norms allows for a more expanded base, social and political legitimacy and greater access to resources. What the experience across the region indicates is that armed groups are neither the problem nor the solution, but the reflection of a new and often disconcerting political reality.

CA, Stanford University Press, 2013.

These actors do not necessarily emerge from conflict and power-vacuums but are ingrained in the communities and environments they operate in as a result of interactions that have developed over prolonged periods. These contentions come from existing studies that posit that the study of armed groups should not be confined to their interactions with their host states but also society, other movements and other ideologies.[9] Moreover, local communities and civilians have agency in conflict zones and can help nudge armed groups into adopting certain behaviours, policies and international norms.[10] Any scholar who has studied contemporary militias and armed groups in places, among others, like Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia over the past two decades will be painfully aware of the defining features of their interactions with the state and society. The process and environment that enables armed groups does not take very long to emerge, but once established, such groups can be very difficult to dislodge. Even attempting to do so can result in the proliferation of armed groups, particularly where there are external powers involved in the conflict and whose own vested interests add to their resilience.

Devising a Policy Response

It is necessary to adapt SSR strategies to take account of the shifting rationales and conditions that drive militia conduct, and even avoid rigid DDR and SSR processes that do not take account of constantly evolving security dynamics undergirded by local socio-cultural dynamics. This becomes all the more important in light of the likely increase in reliance on armed

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[9] "Beyond Arabism vs. sovereignty: relocating ideas in the international relations of the Middle East", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, October 2012; Y. Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From Insurgency to Statehood*, London, Routledge, 2014.

[10] O. Kaplan, "Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection", *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2013.

non-state actors moving forward. Whereas previously the space in which these groups operated could be severely constrained, they now operate in environments that are gripped and engulfed in a plethora of inter-connected regional conflicts, weak state institutions, and porous borders. They have tremendous resources at their disposal as a result, and varying options when it comes to securing foreign patronage or securing resources in a globalised international order.

Although conventional SSR approaches envision the government as an important and neutral actor in the process, it is now almost invariably the case, across the region, that the government is an enabler of militia groups and is directly complicit in the proliferation of sub-state actors that impede attempts to establish professionalised and accountable armed forces. In Iraq and Libya, for example, owing to a combination of security crises that require urgent action and, as a result, increased dependency on sub-state militia groups, the government has directly financed and armed militia groups, at times with the direct support and blessing of Western powers. Militias have become a feature in their electoral politics, operating either independently or in alliance with other groups. The military prowess of these groups and popular support among average Iraqis makes them attractive political partners for political parties. In 2018, for example, ahead of parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi moved to partner with the PMF in order to secure another term in office. Al-Abadi's outreach to the PMF elevated the status of an organisation that was making its electoral debut. This helped pave the way for other armed groups to normalise within Iraqi politics. Militias thus gained recognition as stakeholders in Iraqi politics.

The Kurdish Peshmerga forces similarly straddle the line between aconstitutionally mandated Iraqi force and a national liberation movement. But many Peshmerga units remain products of the main Kurdish political parties. This hampers their political unity and fighting effectiveness. The lack of a central command is a strategic liability.

As a result, governments become directly complicit in constraining reform efforts by limiting the remit of international organisations and protecting certain militia groups from exposure to local and external accountability mechanisms. This requires re-visiting the role of national governments and state institutions altogether, both to mitigate the implications of their increased reliance on hybrid security actors and to ensure that urgent, short-term security crises do not produce the generational problems and challenges that come with the engagement and empowerment of militia groups. This could potentially be achieved by establishing mechanisms that create some measure of disconnect between political elites and the militias that are the focus of SSR strategies, by working with civil society, Parliament and the media to foster a pathway that ensures SSR does not become an exercise in futility.

A critical driver of hybrid security environments is the external support and patronage afforded to militia groups. In some cases, sponsor-proxy ties develop out of an urgent need to protect communities who would otherwise be forced into violent subjugation and brutal repression. While Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) was known to the world as the official voice and opposition entity, it was equally a conduit and mouthpiece for the opposition, crucial in garnering international support, aid and arms. However, support for the NTC should have been only one part of the strategy, particularly as it became apparent that there were pivotal organisations and militia brigades exerting greater operational and political influence on the ground, especially in semi-autonomous cities like Misrata.

The net result is usually the demarcation of fragile societies and countries along geographic spheres of influence that are propped up by outside powers. Syria's Idlib and its most dominant rebel forces, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), function under the tutelage of Turkish patronage. The Kurdish-dominated Same Deutz-Fahr (SDF) presides over the territories it controls in Syria's east with the support of the US. Reconciling

SSR strategies with these on-the-ground dynamics could also potentially alleviate the constraints faced by international actors in situations where they need to provide direct support to local, sub-state actors in the midst of a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Development organisations therefore face difficult questions as they attempt to engage self-governing territories, without coming into conflict with international laws and norms and without becoming mired in politically sensitive issues and questions over the future territorial integrity of states.

That said, the Iraqi Kurdish experience in the 1990s and the experience with Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) during the 2011 Libyan revolution, among others, show that it is perfectly plausible to engage semi-autonomous actors and deliver much needed services and security without becoming active drivers of territorial disintegration. This is particularly important because in some conflict-ridden countries security provision issues and challenges have implications for other critical basic necessities for local populations, including access to electricity, clean water and healthcare. In other words, there are alternatives to traditional state-building modalities that could have a direct influence over how SSR strategies are devised, namely by engaging conflict and security landscapes as they are to ensure reform efforts are not incompatible with local political and governing structures. This shift in approach ensures development assistance and funding does not become weaponised and does not discriminate between different sections of local communities. Medical supplies to state and non-state actors may otherwise reinforce conflict dynamics, reward some sections of society, and penalise others. In other words, Covid-19 could expand and intensify existing crises. to which they see the state as the legitimate forbearer of violence and public goods or whether they envisage radically different infrastructures.

Fundamentally, these approaches should not enable openings for other militia groups to form. Militias are often products of pre-war legacies and long-standing socio-political dynamics.

While little can be done about actors that are ingrained in the socio-political landscape, outside actors can do something about ensuring the local environment does not become conducive to the growth of additional actors. This requires making difficult choices, including working with pre-existing groups that have a dominant influence over local political and security orders to prevent the growth of new armed non-state actors looking to exploit a combination of instability, disorder and the influx of external resources.

Secondly, although traditional DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) and SSR approaches aim to equip militiamen with the skills and capacity to put their weapons down and enter the job market, more often than not that means acquiring a public sector position, but in the current economic climate, regional governments are looking to downsize their public sectors and it is simply no longer economically feasible to achieve grand bargains based on demobilisation in exchange for the re-allocation of combatants to state employment.

Finally, SSR tends to reflect subjective threat perceptions of multilateral organisations invited to consult or advise host countries, but the nature of modern-day warfare is such that these same host countries are often either directly or indirectly implicated in the conflicts that unfold, meaning that the politics of warfare will invariably pave the way for a contest within the local landscape that is fought by external actors by proxy. That risks undermining the security equilibrium that is needed to stabilise the security environment before SSR has even started, since it reinforces the domestic rivalries between disparate militia groups and their political backers.

An enclave-based approach to peace-building warrants closer attention. Under such an approach, territories held and dominated by armed groups and in which state institutions have limited influence, should be integrated into a localised approach designed to create localised success stories as stepping stones to a broader national consensus. Both Syria and Yemen

are shaped by competing spheres of influence, territorial enclaves that are dominated by a plethora of local and external actors, but also areas that are self-governing and engaged in service, security and justice delivery to local populations. One of the misplaced notions is that these territories should be ceded to the state, but in some cases that effectively means forcing local communities to subjugation and repression, or, put more simply, calling for the outright victory of one side to the conflict. Adopting localised designs for SSR approaches makes them better suited to factional and political landscapes that have emerged from years of conflict, and avoids imposing alternative designs that are not applicable to dynamics of governance and political contestations. This may also provide the opening for substantive and impactful dialogue and mediation efforts that are underscored by attempts to generate consensus over security sector governance, thus essentially developing the pillars that will allow for the implementation of the comprehensive objectives that SSR approaches seek to achieve.

2. The Challenge of Hybrid Actors on Security Governance Structures in MENA

Jérôme Drevon

Post-2011 political developments have transformed the Middle East and North Africa. The large-scale uprisings of civilian populations destabilised regional and domestic political orders in the region. The protests promoted the emergence of new political systems or their substantial reconfiguration to cater for new bottom-up political demands for change. The underlying factors of the social movements that formed after 2011 were widely similar across cases. They include an array of rationales, ranging from opposition to cronyism, demands for accountability of the political leaderships, and pressure for political change. In addition, the destabilisation of many domestic political systems exacerbated regional rivalries, which realigned to best adapt to the new environment, including through major direct and indirect military interventions of regional states in affected countries. But post-2011 developments led to substantially different outcomes despite largely similar causes. Some countries descended into civil wars that are still raging. A limited number managed to sustain some level of political opening, whether temporarily or as part of a significant long-term transformation processes. Only the more resource-rich countries generally stabilised without substantial political change.

One of the most notable changes of the past decade is the upsurge of new hybrid actors. The past decade has witnessed the consolidation of new types of non-state armed groups that bolstered their national roles, as central governmental authorities weakened. Some of them have even expanded regionally outside their national borders, where they competed or even allied with other states and armed groups. These groups' key distinctive feature is their hybridity. In contrast with more traditional non-state armed groups, hybrid groups are not merely involved in conflicts against governmental authorities, but can also act in support of domestic governments, operate alongside them, or even be included in state institutions, such as ministries, without necessarily trying to subvert them.[1] These groups therefore have more leeway than is normally accounted for by the term "proxy", which does not necessarily recognise these groups' independent agency and changing alliances. This term also differs from the concept of hybrid warfare, which primarily stresses the multifaceted dynamics of war beyond armed violence only.[2]

Most of the current focus on hybrid actors is on their security consequences, but their defining feature is governance. These groups' consolidation after 2011 has been most apparent in the notable security functions that they have performed in different countries – including policing local populations and conducting military operations in support of or opposition to state authorities. The most visible security functions pursued by hybrid actors have directly affected local developments and international perceptions. But the range of functions implemented by hybrid groups inside

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[1] This definition is therefore more inclusive than Berti, who considers hybrid organisations only the armed groups that operate political parties as well. B. Berti, *Armed political organizations: From conflict to integration.* JHU Press, 2013, p. 2.

[2] As initially emphasised by Frank Hoffman (F.G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st century: The rise of hybrid wars*, Arlington, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007, p. 51) in the case of Hizbullah, before being applied more widely to Russia's new approach to warfare (O. Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare": Resurgence and Politicization*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018).

or outside state structures suggests that the core issue is not merely security, but governance. The concept of governance is more encompassing than security. Governance generally refers to the organisation of civilian life in some territories, including through the provision of social services and local political institutions. Governance is usually considered only in the case of full-scale direct ruling over civilian populations, the so-called "rebel governance" paradigm, where hybrid entities effectively replace the state.[3] Comprehensive governance nonetheless only represents the most sweeping case. The hybrid groups that have broadened their prerogatives within or in parallel to governmental institutions are engaged in governance, although security is their most visible feature. Focusing on governance instead of security only is critical to better analyse these groups' strategies and understand how to address them.

The consolidation of hybrid actors' governance challenges existing understandings of security structures in the region. This dimension is not included in traditional approaches to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) processes in the region. These processes are often separated into two tracks, covering short-term versus mid-term prospects in conflict-affected versus transitioning countries. DDR would focus primarily on dismantling armed groups and reintegrating former combatants, while SSR would pursue a more long-term endeavour of building more transparent and accountable security services.[4] Focusing primarily on security entails either dismantling, professionalising or institutionalising existing security apparatuses. But security cannot be addressed in isolation from larger political processes, as already recognised in existing approaches to security reform. The inclusion of hybrid actors' governance suggests the need to develop a stronger political

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[3] See for example A. Arjona, N. Kasfir, and Z. Mampilly (eds.), *Rebel governance in civil war*, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

[4] See also C. von Dyck, *DDR and SSR in War-to-Peace Transition*, Ubiquity Press, 2016, p. 84.

understanding of these groups' strategies as well. Inclusive approaches to governance expose the complementary functions played by hybrid actors that are not necessarily tied to security structures. This approach suggests new avenues for engagement with these groups, including through the promotion of their gradual transformation. More importantly, it illustrates the specificities of the new statelets that have emerged in several countries, especially Syria.

This chapter is structured into three sections. First, it discusses the consolidation of hybrid actors in the MENA region over the past decade. This section specifically argues that, beyond security, a notable characteristic of hybrid groups is governance. Then, the chapter explores hybrid actors' governance and its international dimensions, before discussing their implications on security structures in the MENA region after 2011.

The Rise of Hybrid Actors After 2011

Hybrid actors are not an entirely new phenomenon. Many regional regimes historically relied on hybrid actors to achieve their domestic and regional objectives, long before 2011. Domestically, hybrid actors structured around ideological, local, sectarian, tribal or other forms of loyalty were used by regimes that could not simply count on their national armies or security services to protect them. These regimes instead preferred to maintain weaker national armies and rely on informal actors who were, in turn, allowed to pursue non-military activities as well. Moreover, hybrid actors were – and continue to be – instrumentalised externally to project regional power and influence beyond national borders, while maintaining some level of plausible deniability (e.g. Iranian support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syrian support for Hezbollah and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the current UAE support for the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) in Libya). Reliance on hybrid actors, despite its considerable utility, was a feature of regimes that often appeared stronger on paper than in reality.

The 2011 uprisings destabilised the region and empowered hybrid actors *vis-à-vis* local authorities in several countries. The mostly shared grievances of local populations led to substantially diverging outcomes. Tunisia was the only country to undertake a relatively steady political transition without significant challenges by hybrid actors. Egypt witnessed pluralistic elections and democratically mandated rule for two years, before the reassertion and empowerment of the military. However, several other countries in the region became plagued by armed conflicts. Yemen was taken over by a political armed group, Ansar Allah (aka the Houthis), that effectively replaced state authorities in certain key governorates against the backdrop of escalating waves of protests, governmental divisions and clashes against other political movements. In the meantime, parts of the country in the South fell outside the control of Yemen's various authorities. In Libya, the regime was replaced by contending armed groups that have hitherto failed to unify the country around a single governing structure. The Syrian regime, conversely, survived by increasingly relying on domestic and foreign armed groups, later bolstered by the game-changing Russian military and diplomatic intervention,[5] while large parts of the country escaped central authorities and effectively fell under control of Islamist or Kurdish groups. Lastly, the Iraqi government withstood the impact of armed conflicts, despite the temporary loss of parts of the country to Islamic State (ISIS), at the cost of substantial empowerment of hybrid actors, agglomerated under the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), vying to supplant the security services and reinforce their political dominance.

The popular uprisings transformed the relatively classical top-down approach to hybrid actors. The destabilisation of many domestic regimes forced them to rely increasingly on hybrid actors to survive, which decisively empowered the latter and sustained their hybridity. Hybrid actors can no longer be

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[5] S. Jones, *Moscow's War in Syria*, Lanham, MA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

considered merely as tactical or strategic instruments. They have gained a substantial level of autonomy that has, in many instances, allowed them to play on quasi-equal standing vis-à-vis states. The traditional conception of a patron-client relationship dominated by states is no longer as relevant. Many states have lost substantial leverage vis-à-vis hybrid actors and often, more importantly, their external supporters. They do not necessarily have the ability the rein them in as in the past, even if they wanted to.

The destabilisation of MENA regimes after 2011 has promoted the re-assertion of hybrid actors. Weakening state authorities have enabled the transformation of local groups based on communities, commanders or political organisations into new entities playing a wider range of roles and functions. The most obvious cases materialised when hybrid actors simply replaced state authorities with their own governing structures. This phenomenon is not new, considering that many insurgencies consolidated similarly in the past. The scale of so-called "rebel governance"[6] has nonetheless considerably expanded in the MENA in the past decade, with millions of civilians now living directly under armed groups' rule. In many other cases, however, hybrid actors have not replaced state authorities. They have instead contributed to the establishment of local organisations that provide different types of services to the population, as well as political institutions vying to organise civilian life too. These institutions parallel state authorities. In the foremost instances, hybrid groups additionally participated in elections, joined different types of governing structures, or created partial alternatives to them. Despite operating independently from the government, these actors can be officially recognised as state apparatuses, , have their commanders named in local, regional, or national authorities, and even join governments to shape their country's strategic decisions – including through veto mechanisms.

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[6] A. Arjona, N. Kasfir, and Z. Mampilly (2015).

These developments suggest that governance is one of the defining features of hybrid actors after 2011. Hybrid actors do not merely perform security functions, although policing the population or conducting military operations might be their most visible aspect. At its core, the consolidation of hybrid actors is an issue of governance. Governance takes different forms that cannot be simply reduced to the full-scale control of territory and civilians. The latter tends to be dissociated from mainstream approaches to DDR and SSR processes in the region. Understanding governance as a spectrum largely determined by the structural configuration of each armed conflict necessitates a better understanding of these groups' strategies. It is therefore critical to explore governance in detail, to better understand how to address hybrid actors and their consequences.

Hybrid Actors' Governance

Governance is better understood as a spectrum of activities associated with state sovereignty. A broad definition underlines the regulation of civilian life, which can take place through different channels.[7] Hybrid groups might shape civilian behaviour through the creation of or participation in local institutions, the provision of services to the population, or the direct imposition of regulations and norms. The scope of governance therefore varies from loose influence over civilians to direct control over them. This approach is more encompassing than a narrow conceptualisation of full non-state armed group (NSAG) sovereignty over specific territory and population,

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[7] N. Kasfir, "Rebel governance-constructing a field of inquiry: definitions, scope, patterns, order, causes", in Ibid. discusses the features of armed groups' governance and specifies three scope conditions: territorial control, a resident population, and violence. On insurgent strategies, see also A. Arjona, *Rebelocracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016. The approach of this chapter is more inclusive as it does not necessarily entail hybrid actors' full governance.

which does not capture internal variations properly. In many cases, a variety of hybrid groups performs governance functions without full control over territory, whether in agreement with the authorities, as substitutes to state vacuum, or in opposition to the existing political order. The key characteristic of governance is therefore political, since this concept primarily concerns the defining features of the state.

A key feature of security structures after 2011 is indeed their hybrid nature. Post-2011 political developments have reconfigured security structures around a combination of peculiar new formal and informal arrangements. Pre- and post-2011 state institutions had to delegate security functions to local actors, or simply acquiesce to their new roles, in absence of a viable alternative. Some of these actors have been recognised as part and parcel of the state security services. In Libya, for instance, an array of local groups progressively entrenched themselves within the Ministry of Interior as official security apparatus. These groups include local security committees, as well as more ideological and organised forces, such as the salafi madkhali-inclined Special Deterrence Force in the capital, Tripoli. Similar steps were taken in Syria, with the status granted to the National Defence Forces, and in Iraq with the PMF. These new arrangements are characterised by their fluidity. A combination of local and regional dynamics shaped these groups' reconfiguration over time, as well as their changing loyalties. In this sense, securitythus merely became a visible feature of governance.

However, the evolution of the security sector suggests that governance itself is hybrid. The projection of political power and regulating mechanisms over the population is most visible in the security services, yet the security sector is only one dimension of post-2011 rearrangements. Hybrid groups have not merely engaged in security provisions. Many groups have also sought to organise civilians in their areas of influence. Trajectories of hybrid groups' governance vary. Some groups start as social movements that gradually structure themselves,

before developing new functions locally, including governance and its security components. Other groups start as NSAG that seek to transform their gains politically over time. These two contending trajectories are historically clear in the case of Hamas and Hezbollah. Hamas started as a social movement that became an armed group in 1988, and a local government in 2006. On the other hand, Hezbollah emerged as an armed group that decided to integrate into the Lebanese political system through electoral participation in 1992, before joining the government in 2005. More recently, the pro-governmental armed groups that engaged in military combat in Iraq and Syria, for instance, later participated in elections to consolidate their gains. Factions of the PMF entered the political arena and run for elections in Iraq.[8] Recent parliamentary elections in Syria similarly confirmed important gains by pro-regime armed groups' leaders, as an acknowledgement of their previous security functions.[9] Regardless of the rationales underpinning the early formation of hybrid groups, their consolidation often implies a political transformation.

Governance is not a goal pursued by all NSAGs. Many armed groups that just conduct armed activities[10] do not explicitly vie to broaden their scope to non-military domains. Most armed groups do not have the resources to be involved in governance or the willingness to do so. Their external environments often prevent this transformation because of the presence of other entities that constrain their actions, including other armed groups or incumbents. Governance is a strategy pursued by hybrid groups trying to secure the gains achieved militarily, sustain themselves in the long run, or project power beyond their military capabilities. These transformations occur

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[8] Center for Global Policy, *The Role of Iraq's Shiite Militias in the 2018 Elections*, 20 April 2018.

[9] A. Nour, *Syria's 2020 parliamentary elections: The worst joke yet,* Middle East Institute, 24 July 2020.

[10] This includes a range of activities from political participation, to the provision of social services, adjudication mechanisms, and policing social norms.

in different conditions. The main common denominator is a conducive environment. Governance has been a key feature of the hybrid actors that consolidated in several MENA countries after 2011, precisely because of the scale of the changes.

The impact of governance on hybrid groups remains contested. A key question pertains to the nexus between military and non-military activities. NSAGs that become involved in governance must adapt to new structures of incentives that might change their perceptions of their environments, as well as their behaviour. Their new functions and changing interests might be at odds with their previous focus on armed violence only. External pressure might therefore force them to adapt and develop new patterns of relations with local populations and state authorities. This question has framed many debates on Hamas and Hezbollah in the past,[11] but similar issues can be raised with NSAGs like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in North West Syria too.

This question additionally points to the leading role played by ideologically committed actors among MENA hybrid groups. Aside from the community-embedded groups, major hybrid actors embrace distinctive ideological projects. Apart from groups like the PKK-linked Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, most of the hybrid groups are Islamists – whether Shia or Sunni –Ideological groups have arguably played a stronger role than more localised units, whose influence is weaker or more constrained. This characteristic is the outcome of regime policies that have long repressed the development of strong local civil societies, while Salafi networks, whether violent or non-violent, managed to survive either openly or underground.[12] It is also the outcome of these groups' own

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[11] J. Gunning, "Peace with Hamas? The transforming potential of political participation", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2, 2004, pp.233-255.

[12] As in Libya (see ICG (International Crisis Group), *Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis*, Report no. 200/Middle East and North Africa, 25 April 2019, p. 5; or Syria (see A. Lund, Syria's salafi insurgents: The rise of the Syrian Islamic Front, UI Occasional papers, issue 17, March 2013, pp. 7-8).

organisational abilities.[13] The dominance of ideological-based groups is not significant simply because of the nature of their ideological commitments. It is also significant externally.

The international dimension of hybrid actors' governance is manifested on two fronts. The first issue is a matter of external perception. The nature of these groups' ideological commitments shapes the perceptions of regional and international actors. This is reflected on several fronts: the regional conflict between Iran and its contenders, political Islam after 2011, Sunni Islamist groups and counter-terrorism, Turkey and the Kurdish issue. Ideologically committed groups are embroiled in regional competition between contending political projects. They face the hostility of prominent regional states and, at times, international terrorist designations. They therefore need to develop specific strategies to legitimise themselves internationally and maintain a sufficient level of support.

The second international dimension is patronage. The example previously set by ISIS, which not only refused to accommodate regional states but also launched wide-scale armed attacks in the region, is an exception rather than the rule. The most significant hybrid groups seek to build patronage relationships with external sponsors. Fostering external alliances is important to sustain their projects in changing regional and domestic environments. Independent governing structures cannot withstand external pressure on their own. Foreign state support can help them leverage international military and political support to survive. The nature of foreign states' support therefore has a major effect on their immediate survival and long-term sustainability.

Both international features have informed hybrid groups' willingness to align governance with regional security. Considering the fluid and precarious nature of external support, NSAGs across the spectrum, from the PKK-associated YPG

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[13] V. Mironova, *From Freedom Fighters to Jihadists: Human Resources of Non-State Armed Groups*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

Kurdish insurgents in Syria to the former Al-Qaeda--affiliate HTS, strive to position themselves as responses to prominent security concerns. They understand the need to demonstrate their commitments on security, considering the impediments on engagement posed by international terrorist designations. That is particularly the case for a group like HTS, which was formed by ISIS commanders before becoming an AQ affiliate and later asserting its independence. The two main areas are terrorism and refugees. Hybrid actors understand that foreign states, especially Western states, are no longer willing to project large numbers of troops on the ground. They instead rely on aerial bombing in coordination with local partners. Hybrid actors therefore seek to bolster their credibility as local partners that can provide information, dismantle other armed networks deemed "terrorist" internationally, and maintain prison facilities for detainees. The YPG (later transformed into the Syrian Democratic Forces) is the most notable example, but even HTS (the former AQ affiliate in Syria) tries to position itself in a similar manner with Turkey and, ultimately, European states. Another noteworthy example is that of Iraq, where hybrid actors played a role against ISIS – although these groups' ties to Iran continue to be perceived as a regional security threat.

Governance and Security Structures

Hybrid actors' governance has important ramifications on security structures in the region. The main lesson is that the consolidation of new security structures after 2011 is not merely the outcome of short-term processes, but of failed state construction. The hybrid groups have not merely filled a short-term security vacuum. They are a direct response to state failure. This is not a new finding, but it does confirm the limits of traditional DDR and SSR approaches in the region. Analysing hybrid groups' governance suggests additional avenues for engaging them.

Community-embedded hybrid groups are the most traditional case. Their expansion after 2011 confirms the need

to address DDR and SSR with local communities as well. Holistic visions of security reforms cannot be dissociated from other political developments, including at the local level. Both DDR and SSR must be accompanied by political reforms, such as the transformation of state authority and its potential decentralisation, as understood in holistic approaches to SSR. These cases are also less controversial or contested regionally.

It must be noted, however, that the more organised, and often ideologically committed, hybrid groups pose additional issues. Hybrid groups cannot necessarily be demobilised or gradually integrated into the security services. Their involvement in governance suggests that their engagement should not be limited to security only, but that additional possibilities of transformation exist. Hybrid groups can also be transformed over time by preserving parts of their organisational structures. Integration through political means has been pursued in MENA as well as other regions, where former insurgents have become mainstream political parties too.[14] These steps can only occur when these groups manage to preserve their organisational cohesion to prevent splits and internal spoilers, although their external environments also have to be conducive to transformation. There are real trade-offs pertaining to the consolidation of (former) armed groups through their institutionalisation into domestic political systems, especially regarding the legitimisation of actors that are potentially highly contested locally. These cases are not always clearly understood, however. These groups' trajectories and their consequences on their behavioural and ideological evolution remain contested. The predominant focus of counter-terrorism policies, as opposed to more traditional counter-insurgency views, on the systematic targeting of some of these groups still impedes real attempts to change external structures of incentives to transform them.

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[14] J. Ishiyama, Introduction to the special issue "From bullets to ballots: the transformation of rebel groups into political parties", *Democratization*, vol. 23, 2016.

The statelets pursuing full governance are more problematic. The formation of statelets is essentially different from the seizure of central authority by armed groups, such as Ansar Allah in Yemen. The seizure of central authority by a hybrid group is a relatively traditional case that has already been addressed. The consolidation of statelets within national territories is more contentious, since they threaten the integrity of states. It is opposed, as such, by most regional regimes. Statelets are unlikely to be as sustainable, but their rulers' external patronage, willingness to develop alternative forms of government, and security responsiveness offer different avenues on security. Comprehensive DDR cannot occur since hybrid groups ultimately rely on their armed forces to survive. The stabilisation of rebel governance nonetheless changes the nature of military necessity. Over time, hybrid groups develop more professional military forces, combining more elite units with local brigades manning their areas. These military units are responsive to their military interactions with external partners. This qualitative change offers a real possibility for the demobilisation of more loosely organised units, which lose their military relevance in these new conditions. In addition, hybrid actors' positioning as credible security partners and the creation of more technocratic forms of government reinforces internal and external needs. Hybrid governments seek to build internal legitimacy to sustain themselves in the long run. Assistance to their embryonic security sectors responds to real pressure for transparency and legitimacy. Internationally, SSR sends signals to other reluctant actors that hybrid groups are willing to undertake the necessary steps towards normalisation and are capable of responding to international security requisites.

Conclusion

The consolidation of an array of hybrid actors over the past decade has challenged many countries in MENA since 2011. These actors are not merely defined by their non-military roles,

but by their ambiguous relationships with state authorities. Hybrid actors can support, parallel, or contend with established governments. The weakening of state authorities in several countries has enabled the expansion of their national and regional roles over the past decade

Beyond their most obvious security features, hybrid groups' core defining feature is governance. These groups, to varying extents, seek to regulate local populations by adopting different roles independently, in parallel with, or within state institutions. They have managed to expand their prerogatives thanks to a conducive environment since 2011. The new roles taken on by these groups range from different types of political participation, to the provision of social services, adjudication mechanisms, and policing social norms. The complementary functions performed by hybrid groups have important ramifications for security considerations.

The consolidation of hybrid groups' governance suggests that these groups need to be distinguished from one another more clearly than is the case in traditional SSR approaches. The challenges posed by the more ideological and organisationally structured groups are particularly prominent. They cannot be addressed only through SSR, but through wider political re-integration too. We therefore need a better understanding of their transformation and prospects beyond the confines of security. Statelets also pose their own set of challenges. Their medium-term prospects are primarily contingent on external developments, which will define their international acceptability and viability. These characteristics inform these groups' positioning as regional security providers, and avenues for some type of SSR in the short-term.

3. Security Sector Reform in Libya: Avoiding the Risks of Politicisation

Jalel Harchaoui

Introduction

This chapter takes as an implicit starting point the security-related initiatives in Libya between 2011 and 2020, none of which was a full success. Against that backdrop, it delineates lessons for future Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts, the primary goal being to avoid past mistakes.

Libya's internationalised civil war, which in some ways began in 2011, is characterised by a complex mix of foreign-state interference on the one hand, and highly localised conflict drivers on the other. The warring parties tend to cater to local, provincial, national and external constituencies in addition to pursuing their own interests in gaining power and riches at the Libyan nation's expense. The situation as of October 2020 can be simply summarised as a face-off between the Government of National Accord (GNA), under Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj in Tripoli, and the Libyan National Army (LNA) under Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar headquartered in northern Cyrenaica. The reality on the ground however is both more fragmented and more fluid.[1] It includes: militia rule in and around Tripoli,

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[1] J. Harchaoui, "Tarhuna, Mass Graves, And Libya's Internationalized Civil War", *War On The Rocks*, July 2020.

a phenomenon that sometimes confines the GNA's authority to the buildings it operates from; an amorphous Fezzan, which straddles smuggling, crime and cross-border activity; the use and mobilisation of tribal identities and allegiances throughout much of the country; the prevalence of at least two dozen key militias – revolutionary, tribal and other – that often profit from both the state payroll and illicit revenue simultaneously; and armed groups driven by a religious argument.[2] In June 2020, Turkey's military intervention managed to put an end to the LNA's offensive on Tripoli.[3] The subsequent months saw formal members of the GNA attempt to become more powerful, while some, but certainly not all, of the long-standing militias in central and peripheral Tripoli wield a decreasing amount of sway. Meanwhile, northern Cyrenaica is suffering from growing internecine divisions. Although seldom documented, they may become more visible in the foreseeable future given that Haftar experienced a high-profile defeat in the west. Said differently, eastern Libya also has its own "militia problem".

The root causes of the current situation are a mixture of old and new splits in Libyan society and increasingly brazen foreign intervention, combined with a profound frailty of state institutions, which, during the decades before 2011, were deliberately kept weak to enable colonisation or personalised regime rule. The result has been an internationalised civil war, the intensity of which has remained lower than the calamities that have befallen Yemen, Syria and Iraq.

This essay begins by offering a few generic considerations about SSR and how the enterprise should be framed in post-2011

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[2] Examples of the latter category are Salafist-inspired battalions. For more on the topic, see V. Collombier and F. Barsoum, *To engage or not engage? Libyan Salafis and state institutions*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2019. See also F. Wehrey, "Exploiting Chaos in Libya: The 'Madkhalis' Rise from the Salafi Firmament", in F. Wehrey and A. Boukhars (eds.), *Salafism in the Maghreb: Politics, Piety, and Militancy. Salafism in the Maghreb*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

[3] For a description of Turkey's 2020 military intervention, see J. Harchaoui, "The Libyan Civil War Is About to Get Worse", *Foreign Policy*, 18 March 2020.

Libya. From there, the essay proceeds to articulate a number of pragmatic recommendations, operational observations and methical suggestions for the successful implementation of future SSR initiatives in Libya.

Sketching a Framework for Libya SSR

This essay calls "SSR effort" any manoeuvre, thrust or policy seeking to shape, alter or re-model some components of the country's existing security landscape, whether in the short term or over the long haul.[4] Although the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) definition of the security sector also includes judicial-and-penal institutions, this essay will not broach the latter.[5] Instead, it was decided to concentrate on armed parties writ large, including a priori all existing armed groups, regardless of the degree of their legitimacy, legality or formal character. All of those, taken as a whole, constitute the initial security sector that any SSR programme endeavours to confront, fashion and shape.

The objective is to transform said set of security players and make their sum more coherent, effective and efficient. Importantly, the objective is also to render all security players that are not dismantled or disarmed more responsive (a) to control by the civilian leadership, (b) to the safety and justice needs of the population at large and (c) to the security of all public institutions. One corollary to the effectiveness and efficiency objectives stipulated above is that armed units must be made less likely to attack, or compete with, each other using violence not mandated by the state. Furthermore, the need for responsiveness to civilian control makes it necessary that any valid SSR effort seeks to increase the robustness and discipline of

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[4] More short-term SSR endeavors are sometimes called security-sector stabilization or security-sector development.

[5] For the OECD's definition, see *The OECD DAC Handbook On Security System Reform (SSR): Supporting Security and Justice*, 2007, OECD, Paris, 2007, p. 5.

the overall chain-of-command. If a given armed group ignores its hierarchy and disobeys the state's top civilian leadership, we say the SSR has failed. All in all, the assessment of "successful" or "failed" SSR efforts is done on the basis of such criteria.

In summary, the main priority for SSR planners is to influence, coordinate, re-shape and, in some cases, dismantle existing armed groups so they form a relatively coherent nationwide security apparatus. This needs to be accomplished in a way that takes account of their interests, is reasonably well regulated and contributes as much as possible to 'people-oriented' security and professionalisation / institutionalisation at national level.

On many occasions since 2011, one political faction or another other has attempted to weaken specific armed groups in Libya while bolstering others, depending on their political allegiances. Sometimes, such moves merely seek to modify armed groups incrementally. In other cases, such attempts are more abrupt, with no consideration given to the integrity or cohesion of the state or the safety of the population. Regardless of how destructive and unlawful such drastic actions might be, they are always and invariably portrayed as legitimate by their Libyan instigators and their foreign sponsors.

Indeed, throughout the Libyan conflict, powerful armed groups have unleashed brutality to advance partisan political agendas, and capture prestige and economic privileges, but not at all to improve security. This makes more constructive, better thought-out efforts to transform any facet of the existing security landscape a daunting task. Deeply-entrenched, vested interests will resist such efforts using all means necessary. This is why SSR is highly susceptible to being politicised: conflict players will in fact go to great lengths to instrumentalise it and acquire a competitive advantage over their enemies. This behaviour is driven by a desire to win the conflict, not to build a less dysfunctional state. As part of that dynamic, some foreign meddlers help Libyan players subvert and weaponise any attempt to implement SSR.

Given the risks outlined above, SSR planners must equip themselves with: (a) detailed mapping of the incentives, motivations, ideological underpinnings, relations and power dynamics within and between Libya's top 20 armed groups; (b) a breakdown of the internal composition and interests of large coalitions like the Libyan National Army (LNA) so that those coalitions are not perceived by planners as more monolithic and cohesive than they really are; (c) an analysis of political and security developments, in particular geographic areas with their own internal idiosyncrasies; (d) acknowledgement of the influence of ideologies like modernist political Islam or purist Salafism on the conduct of the war and expectations of future governance; and (e) an explicit articulation of the precise objectives, relations and type of support of meddlesome states such as Turkey, the UAE, Egypt, Qatar, Russia, France, etc., for particular Libyan armed actors. Together, an analysis of these constraints will generate the strategic insights and operational parameters necessary to develop pathways for future SSR in Libya.

An example for point (b) above has to do with the self-proclaimed LNA. The coalition, led by Khalifa Haftar, is a fractious ensemble of armed groups more than it is a unitary national, or even provincial, force. Any comprehensive SSR effort for Libya must involve pressure on the LNA to promote a more transparent, better-integrated modus operandi for the loose alliance. These requirements are made even more pertinent by the fact the LNA may splinter and end up giving rise to brand-new conflicts in Cyrenaica.

Role and Influence of External Players in SSR

Libyan society has been, with no meaningful interruption, caught in a civil war since 2014. Concretely, this means the overwhelming majority of Libya's leaders and politically relevant elites are – and will likely remain – deeply committed to making sure their own faction or party prevails by forcibly defeating its enemies in the conflict even if that wreaks irreversible

destruction. This partisanship, continually fuelled by some foreign states, has had direct consequences for the prospects of valid SSR efforts by Libyans without a somewhat neutral framework. As a result, unless Libyans receive support through strong engagement, guidance and supervision from the UN, Libyan elites are unlikely to pursue a genuine SSR initiative across Libya's entire security landscape. Instead, a plethora of separate SSR pushes will focus on limited parcels of territory in uncoordinated ways, and the risk of fighting between factions will persist – an unproductive scenario similar to what has damaged Libya since 2011.

This is not at all to say local players can be excluded from the process. Once the UN and formal Libyan authorities have approved an SSR framework, and committed to it, local players must be involved in both the design and implementation. Without their buy-in or sense of ownership, any reform process will lack viability. This means non-Libyan planners must strike a delicate balance between two typical pitfalls. One is the illusion an entirely Libyan process can achieve proper SSR. The other is the illusion Libyan players on the ground can be treated as mere subjects of such processes, rather than drivers and essential partners.

Some foreign states, in all likelihood, will continue acting as major spoilers in Libya SSR for many more years. As a result, an end to foreign meddling cannot be adopted as a prerequisite. In fact, foreign interference in itself is not inherently unfavourable to SSR in a pluralistic setting. If only for selfish reasons, Turkey is incentivised to pursue a relatively authentic form of SSR in northwest Libya, as it needs stability there. The same thing can be said about Egypt in eastern Libya. Yet, in all cases, the other foreign states (such as the UAE and Russia) that remain intent on denying their military involvement in Libya constitute a greater obstacle. Their policies of systematic denial make it impossible to debate some of the problems affecting Libya's security. If a given SSR initiative features no forum to allow explicit, candid dialogue with all meaningful foreign meddlers, then that SSR initiative

is almost certain to be derailed by clandestine interference. Openness of discussion about all foreign meddlers behind closed doors, in a diplomatic setting, is a more urgent objective than any unrealistic attempt to stop foreign interference per se.

By way of example, it is possible to look briefly at Turkey's overt military mission in northwest Libya and its foray in the realm of SSR. Indeed, the loose coalition of armed actors aligned with the Government of National Accord (GNA) that managed to prevail over the LNA in the first half of 2020 in north-western Libya now benefits from the military protection of the Turkish state. Those armed groups are actually pursuing agendas that are mutually contradictory. Moreover, although Turkey's declared SSR intentions are genuine to some degree, it is unlikely to adopt a thorough, uniform approach to the GNA's entire territory. For several reasons, including economic, Ankara will tend to view SSR implementation in some areas as a high priority for its own interests, while neglecting other areas. These parameters, taken together, make SSR prospects under Turkish supervision difficult and uncertain – but not impossible.

At the time of writing, Turkey was backing the ongoing formation of a new "Joint Force" as part of what is said to be a broader SSR effort in Tripolitania. Various clues suggest pro-Turkish sentiment and other ideological considerations may affect who is included in the Joint Force and who is not.

Beyond the Joint Force, in early-September, Salah Eddine al-Namrush became the GNA's Minister of Defence. Namrush, who worked closely with Ankara during the second half of LNA's April 2019 - June 2020 offensive, visited Turkey several times. Turkish officials have announced an ambitious restructuring of the GNA's armed forces, including the Navy and Air Force. All these qualify as SSR efforts. Furthermore, Turkey's drones support the Ministry of Defence. Indeed, when a serious clash erupted in late September 2020 in Tajura, a neighbourhood located on the eastern flank of Tripoli, Namrush ordered the dismantlement of at least one of the two protagonists and deployed a third armed group in an effort to impose order. In

addition, Turkish drones hovered over the site of the clashes, thus acting as a deterrent. This shows how the Turkish mission in north-western Libya is being used to help the GNA project power as part of its attempts to shape the security players in the greater Tripoli area. Similarly, the several thousand Syrian mercenaries garrisoned in military camps near the capital can also be used by the Turkish state as a means of bolstering the GNA's authority as it pursues its SSR efforts.[6]

The latter will stand a greater chance of succeeding if Turkey stays away from political favouritism and, instead, manages to be inclusive. Lack of neutrality or inclusiveness is a potential danger. For instance, Turkey may potentially back the creation of a new Islamist-leaning force in north-western Libya, which would cause further polarisation there. The international community can help avoid this by being part of the SSR process and working closely with Turkey, whose first priority, for the time being, remains stability rather than ideology. Another risk would be to see Turkey help the GNA form and train units with an emphasis on combat readiness, when Libya's most acute need is for robust policing or gendarmerie-type forces.

The Libyan Civil Conflict and SSR Considerations up to 2020

The decade since 2011 has seen about a dozen security-related initiatives often portrayed by their instigators as a form of SSR[7]. From that experience, a series of observations and considerations related to SSR can be articulated:

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[6] On the presence of thousands of Syrian fighters in Libya, see A. Zaman, "Will Syrian rebels kill each other in Libya's proxy war?", *Al-Monitor,* 23 July 2020. See also U.S. Department of Defense, 2020, *East Africa Counterterrorism Operation North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation*, Lead Inspector General Report to The United States Congress, September, p. 6.

[7] For a detailed retrospective on Libya SSR, see H. Al-Shadeedi, E. van Veen, and J. Harchaoui, *One thousand and one failings: Security sector stabilisation and development in Libya*, Clingendael Institute, April 2020.

A poor track record

None of the security initiatives in Libya since 2011 comply with the internationally agreed SSR paradigm.[8] In fact, they were mostly partisan efforts intended to gain the upper hand in an active conflict, often disguised as SSR interventions. Only a couple of initiatives feature scattered elements worthy of proper SSR practice.[9] By global standards, these initiatives have produced poor results across the board.[10] Nevertheless, lessons can be derived here for future SSR purposes.

Many of the past security initiatives suffered from pursuing integration efforts on an armed-coalition level rather than small-unit or individual-member level. They failed to create compelling enough incentives to co-opt armed-group leaders.

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[8] ADE, *Thematic Evaluation of the European Commission Support to Justice and Security System Reform*, Final report ref. 1295, Bruxelles, European Commission, November 2011; Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), *Review of UK Development Assistance for Security and Justice*, Report 42, London, March 2015; E. Van Veen (2017); E. Van Veen, *Improving Security and Justice Programming in Fragile Situations: Better Political Engagement, More Change Management*, Paris, OECD, 12 April 2016; S. Eckhard, *The challenges and lessons learned in supporting security sector reform*, Berlin, FES, 2016; S. Penksa et al., *Evaluation of EU Support for Security Sector Reform in Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries (2010-2016)*, Bruxelles, European Commission, 2018; L. Denney and C. Valters, *Evidence synthesis: Security Sector Reform and organizational capacity building*, London, Department for International Development (DFID), 2015.

[9] For a detailed retrospective on Libya SSR, see H. Al-Shadeedi, E. van Veen, and J. Harchaoui (2020).

[10] In addition to the previous footnote: S. Eckhard (2016); K. Bärwaldt (ed.), *Strategy, Jointness, Capacity: Institutional Requirements for Supporting Security Sector Reform*, Berlin, FES, 2018; E. Van Veen (2016); CIGI's work on "second generation SSR", (2013-2017); Sedra (2010), cit.; J. De Catheu, *Security, justice and rule of law survey*, Paris, OECD DAC, 2016. More on programmatic approaches as a tool to stimulate developmental change, including SSD: The research streams on "Thinking and Working Politically" and "Doing Development Differently"; see also: E. Van Veen and A. Rijper, *Re-perceiving results: Aid programs and change in fragile societies*, The Hague, KPSRL, 2017; R. Kleinfeld, *Improving Development Aid Design and Evaluation: Plan for Sailboats, Not Trains*, Washington, DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015.

They also failed to establish clear lines of authority, while introducing unjustifiable salary disparities and neglecting to ensure adequate geographical representation in newly-constituted, or -integrated, security forces. These all represent fail factors that must be avoided going forward.

Hybridity everywhere

A great many armed groups in Libya warrant being called 'hybrid' in the sense they continue behaving as partly independent non-state actors while maintaining a formal position in state institutions, such as the Interior Ministry or the Defence Ministry. This phenomenon, observable both in the east and the west, effectively amounts to a *modus vivendi* between state and non-state authority. That is the definition of hybridity.[11]

   A large number of informal armed groups do receive funds from the nation's public treasury, including in the form of monthly wage monies for individual members. Yet, the origin of funding is not the only source of hybridity in Libya's security landscape. Hybridity also stems from the lack of clarity characterising the command-and-control channels. Quite often, armed groups respond to informal lines of authority distinct and different from the formal hierarchy that exists on paper. Hybridity can also be found in the lack of integration and diversion of personnel. Some armed groups enjoying formal recognition do not concentrate on security provision and some entirely informal armed groups do assist the state in security provision.[12]

   Owing to its ubiquitous nature across Libya, hybridity of security players must be accepted as a starting point. Planners must also accept the degree of hybridity varies from one unit

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[11] M. Sedra, *Security Sector Reform in Conflict-Affected Countries: The Evolution of a Model*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 10-11.

[12] F. Wehrey, "Libya's Policing Sector: The Dilemmas of Hybridity and Security Pluralism", POMEPS Studies 30, *The Politics of Post-Conflict Resolution*, Middle East and Politics Sciences, 2018.

to another. Knowing this, the purpose of SSR is to gradually reduce that degree of hybridity on a case-by-case basis, either by integrating or dismantling the various armed groups. For instance, to the west of Tripoli, on 9 July 2020, the Fursan Janzur group was involved in clashes with another group called Awlad Fakar, resulting in several deaths, none of whom were civilians. Both armed groups involved in this violent score-settling incident are known to receive funds from the government. In this example, the two players are not equally close to the formal state in general, or the Interior Ministry in particular. The fact the Interior Ministry did not treat both armed groups in exactly the same manner is not a major obstacle. While it must be mitigated, political favouritism cannot possibly be eliminated altogether.

Given the above, it is important for any SSR planner to introduce and use a grading system to help measure the alignment of each unit with the notional state, in relative instead of absolute terms. Some groups undermine the authority of the latter on a frequent basis while receiving funds from it and belonging formally to a ministry. These constitute a greater threat than those whose behaviour is more consistent with the central authorities' agenda. In this case, SSR will consist in constricting or dismantling the former, while attempting to integrate the latter. An absolutist approach to SSR that would see all irregular armed groups equally is unrealistic.

Not about capacity building

Moreover, most of these initiatives focused strongly on building capacity without much thought given to stimulating the quality and harmony of security governance, let alone accountability. Another recurring flaw through the years has been a lack of clarity about the force these new trainees were supposed to join. Recent examples include training programmes offered by Turkey and Jordan to cadets from northwest and northeast Libya, respectively. In the best case, this type of initiative increases existing technical capacity in some quarters of the

security apparatus. However, it seldom addresses the main SSR challenge, which is to increase coordination, cohesion, coherence and overall discipline, while reducing partiality and informal affiliations in the system. Failure to adopt such a comprehensive approach leads to action by international players being either partisan or limited in nature. In turn, this exacerbates the fragmentation of Libya's security landscape rather than reducing it. These elements represent fail factors in terms of their durability and legitimacy.

Economic dimension

It must be emphasised here that no SSR effort should be approached in a way that ignores economic considerations. Indeed, for several years, most Libya SSR pushes failed to offer a careful, detailed analysis of economic expectations and incentives and how to address such drivers as part of a comprehensive strategy. On this front, the economic grievances of each given area's civilian population, not merely those of armed actors, must be taken into account. This is because the latter are often socially embedded in broader communities.

The last few years have seen attempts to consolidate or strengthen existing armed groups responsible for the security of strategic assets or areas, without addressing the socioeconomic expectations and grievances of locally-dominant tribes. This happened with the Magherba in the Oil Crescent, the Tuareg in the greater Awbari area, and the Ahali and Tebu communities in the Murzuq Basin. In all these cases, social resentment across a given community always seeped into armed groups hailing from the community in question, and ended up causing a security crisis. A concrete example is the blockade that engulfed Libya's largest oilfield, al-Sharara, near Awbari, in December 2018.[13] Two months before the incident, a group of young activists from the Awbari area formed the

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[13] "Libya's NOC declares force majeure on El Sharara oilfield", *Reuters*, 17 December 2018.

Fezzan Anger movement. Their main goal was to make their socioeconomic grievances heard by northern elites and demand greater economic support for the province's population. Amid negotiations and disruption, Brigade 30, a largely Tuareg unit responsible for protecting al-Sharara, saw these circumstances as an opportunity to exploit the Fezzan Anger movement and pressure the National Oil Company. The armed group stopped oil production at the field. That incident cost the nation $1.8 billion and played a role in catalysing the LNA's January 2019 military campaign in the Fezzan.[14]

Owing to the above, the economic, or socioeconomic, facet must always be incorporated going forward. For instance, starting in 2018, the LNA began to cooperate closely with the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-linked paramilitary company, particularly when it comes to the security apparatus protecting oil assets in eastern Libya and other areas.[15] From a strict security perspective, the LNA handing the protection of oil assets over to Russian mercenaries could conceivably, in some narrow sense, be perceived as an improvement. Indeed, a destructive attack by a Libyan party like warlord Ibrahim Jadhran,[16] an Ajdabiya native, on the Oil Crescent is less probable if Russian

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[14] On the Sharara blockade's cost, see S. Zaptia, "NOC lifts Sharara force majeure", *Libya Herald*, 4 March 2019; Regarding the LNA's military campaign in the Fezzan, see J. Tossell, *Libya's Haftar and the Fezzan: One year on*, The Hague, Clingendael Institute, January 2020.

[15] S. Sukhankin, *Continuation of Policy by Other Means: Russian Private Military Contractors in the Libyan Civil War*, The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, February 2020. See also the following two items. A. Borshchevskaya, *Russia's Growing Interests in Libya Anna*, The Washington Institute For Near-East Policy, ICG, 24 January 2020; *Averting an Egyptian military intervention in Libya*, International Crisis Group, 27 July 2020. On Russian armed presence in the Oil Crescent, see "Les Émirats et le bouclier noir: quand des centaines de Soudanais sont envoyés sur le front libyen", *Le Vif*, 30 April 2020. On Russian armed presence in the Sharara oilfield in the Fezzan, see B. Faucon, "Russian Fighters Help Tighten Rebel Control of Libya's Largest Oil Field", *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 June 2020.

[16] J. Harchaoui and M.-E. Lazib, *Proxy War Dynamics in Libya*, Blacksburg, Virginia Tech Publishing, 2019.

mercenaries are in charge of security there. But such a positive assessment only holds true if one ignores the socioeconomic ramifications of any form of reliance on foreign mercenaries. The use of foreign elements insulates the Libyan authorities from any sense of accountability towards the local population at large. The latter feels more neglected and that, in turn, makes crises and disruptions more probable over time.

To be viable and stand a chance of success, any given SSR push must be comprehensive and include a socioeconomic mechanism that ensures the incentives for parties involved and grievances of communities are realistically addressed. Libyan authorities must be pressured into guaranteeing steady socioeconomic investment in traditionally-neglected territories. Such mechanisms are more likely to make local groups feel less estranged from the state's security apparatus. Conversely, without sufficient injection of state resources into local communities, no SSR in the area will be stable or conclusive. Discontent on the part of the wider population will always tend to spill over into the local armed groups and translate into behaviour that is hostile to the state.

Another economic consideration has to do with anti-corruption measures, which sometimes are incorporated in SSR programmes. On multiple occasions in recent years, the international community applied anti-corruption pressure on some Libyan factions while sparing others who engaged in equally illicit schemes. Such bias is attributable to the fact basic security has often been seen as a much higher priority than combating corruption. It also reflects the political favouritism of some nation-states. To avoid this particular pitfall, SSR initiatives must always be even-handed regardless of the political orientation of the various players.

The international community must seek to weaken links between armed groups and the illicit economy they profit from in Libya by strengthening institutions as well as international devices that can fight corruption and misappropriation. Meaningful SSR should minimise bias when combating

corruption, even though some of the most corrupt armed groups do sometimes perform a useful role in terms of local or semi-national security provision. Still, they should not be shown more leniency if corruption is to be fought effectively.

Covid-19 as a game-changer?

By October 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had reached a worrisome, if not alarming, scale across all of Libya. Yet, the phenomenon has not, thus far, triggered meaningful shifts in security governance.

Unquestionably, more time is needed to analyse thoroughly and in detail the various responses to the pandemic across Libya. But some data points already available in the east, south and west, indicate that armed groups, by and large, have failed to view the Covid-19 challenge as an opportunity to play a constructive role in society.[17] Instead, indications show that, through their existing links with businesses, many of them have approached the Covid-19 situation and the requirements related to it, as a money-making opportunity for themselves, while delivering a sub-par service to the population. In some cases, no service is delivered at all, despite being charged to public institutions. This form of abuse is possible because state authorities, which have mobilised out-of-budget funds to face the pandemic, display a tendency to outsource Covid-19-linked activities in the same way they have been outsourcing day-to-day security to informal or semi-formal groups. Examples of tasks, services or contracts armed groups have been able to capture in 2020 through their business connections include hospital protection (needed to avoid crowds); new checkpoints (to impose curfews, check on the wearing of masks, etc.); additional sterilisation and garbage-collection (to burn potentially infected items, for instance). These tasks, although seldom performed efficiently, have tended to be charged at artificially high prices.

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[17] Phone interviews conducted by the author with inhabitants of Tripoli, Zawiyah, Brak al-Shatti, Sebha and Benghazi, October 2020.

In addition to the largely parasitic schemes outlined above, some armed groups have continued to use their strength to obtain privileged access to health facilities. The unhelpful behaviour of armed groups reflects their degree of alignment with political players who have a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo. In the summer of 2020, for the first time in several years, Libyan cities witnessed social protests caused by several grievances, including the Libyan authorities' failure to adequately respond to the threat of Covid-19.[18] These demonstrations primarily involved disgruntled and relatively apolitical youth. They can, in some ways, be viewed as an organic, bottom-up process whose aim is not just to force an improvement in services, but also disrupt existing power dynamics.

The responses by security forces to these expressions of dissent have ranged from repression to tacit support, highlighting the disparities in their relationships with local communities. Armed groups that have chosen to repress protests using violence have largely done so by way of insulating themselves from local communities, relying more on institutionally-bestowed legitimacy and state-derived revenue generation mechanisms — as opposed to social legitimacy – for the sake of continued relevance in the realm of security governance. On the opposite end of the spectrum, those with close links to local communities generally share their grievances and discontent over governance deficiencies. Analysing the response of armed parties to this pandemic-induced development speaks to the fact that several of them may effectively have a vested interest in entrenching and maintaining the existing forms of institutional dysfunction. Taking into account these relative discrepancies in the stance of armed groups has relevance for SSR. They provide yet another indicator by which to pre-emptively identify armed groups likely to resist a holistic reform process focusing on professionalisation, transparency and accountability.

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[18] F. Bobbin, "En Libye, l'émergence d'une société civile protestataire rebat les cartes politiques", *Le Monde*, 16 September 2020.

Idiosyncrasies and Libya-Specific Lessons

One constant theme throughout the post-2011 period is the remarkable commitment by Libyan players to disguising their war-fighting efforts as legitimate SSR initiatives. Such storytelling often proves capable of mobilising Libyan constituencies and, more importantly, attracting foreign benevolence. This lets the most aggressive factions buy time as their war efforts make headway using indiscriminate violence. Recent history shows Libyan factions almost always make sure their security work is inextricably intertwined with their civil-war agenda as well as their illicit-business ambitions. The challenge for planners is to promote dynamics capable of avoiding situations of unconditional foreign support, a recurring trap throughout the post-2011 era.

Avoiding a binary depiction of Libya's armed-group universe

Given what is stated above, perception is of paramount importance. In hindsight, Libyan elites interested in making advances using military force while benefiting from diplomatic cover from Western states have demonstrated a keen ability to engineer persuasive narratives. The latter have systematically involved a binary perception of Libya's armed groups: some of them are on the side deserving international support while the rest are to be weakened or destroyed using brute force.

The main downside associated with this type of worldview is the implication the ultra-complex landscape of post-2011 Libya could possibly be simplified into a basic dichotomy. This insidious temptation sometimes affects even experienced planners and has played a role in almost all SSR failures of the last 9 years. To avoid it going forward, new SSR efforts must offer decision-makers and planners the opportunity to visualise the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in the set of armed groups that populate the country. Indeed, the universe of armed groups cannot be broken down into two categories:

"good" and "bad". A more evolved system of grading could be one on five gradings. For instance:

- Discipline & Professionalism (untrained civilians [1] to professionally trained [5])
- Security Provision Efficiency (poor [1] to high [5] security contribution)
- Commitment to Ideology (pragmatic [1] to rigidly dogmatic [5])
- Dependence on Direct Foreign Aid (no foreign support [1] to full foreign dependence [5])
- Illegality of Domestic Revenues (reliant on illicit activities [1] to fully transparent funding [5])

Separating these uncorrelated characteristics clearly and visually makes it easier to navigate the universe of Libyan armed groups. It helps show tolerating one entire armed coalition and favouring the destruction of another very often comes with adverse consequences for SSR. Such a policy should therefore be seen as a debatable trade-off to be decided consciously and on a case-by-case basis. For instance, some armed groups are structured like transparent, professionally-trained brigades. At the same time, those very brigades, despite their reassuring appearance, lack the robustness or ability to act as effective security providers. Additionally, some armed groups, which depict themselves as being part of a formal army or police body, are actually detrimental to basic citizen safety. In these examples, favouring formal armed groups unilaterally triggers a security deterioration. In order to calibrate such difficult decisions and counterintuitive phenomena, SSR planners must always reason in terms of compromise, which cannot be managed or monitored if their representation of the Libyan scene is influenced in any way by binary narratives peddled by Libyan groups and their partisan foreign sponsors.

The coastal city of Zuwara is an example where a trade-off approach maximises the chances of successful SSR. As early as 2013, many armed groups in northwest Libya adopted an

anti-crime narrative to gain socio-political legitimacy. One proponent of this trend is "the Masked Men" of Zuwara that distinguished themselves through a positive contribution to local law and order.[19] The group was launched by an assortment of frustrated citizens, typically between 20 and 35 years of age, and managed to reduce the grip that human smugglers had long held on Zuwara in 2015. Established and funded by the municipal council, the Masked Men combated smuggling, secured the town's borders and helped bolster civil and security institutions. Nowadays, the GNA's Interior Ministry is more robust than it was a few years ago, both in terms of leadership and ability to project power. Also political rivalries in the Zuwara area have become less pronounced, which means less contestation between different factions to control the lucrative Ras Jdir border-crossing with Tunisia. These phenomena combine to make the Masked Men more dispensable today than they were in their heyday. Still, the informal group remains in existence and the state must decide what should become of it. The vigilante group contains many members of Salafi persuasion, while also clearly belonging to the Amazigh community that inhabits Zuwara. These characteristics make it inherently an informal group warranting reform. Yet, it also possesses several qualities, including a certain degree of local legitimacy given that it contributed to law and order in a difficult phase of Zuwara's history. Therefore, a judicious trade-off here consists in avoiding an abrupt, total dismantlement of the Masked Men, instead pursuing a partial re-orientation and re-shuffling of the group's members (training, return to unarmed life, etc.) while formally hiring a large percentage of them into various ministries.

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[19] M. Coker, "Libya's 'Masked Men' Hunt Human Smugglers", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 October 2015.

Geographic pluralism

A second principle worth underscoring here has to do with the importance of geography. Libya is a vast and immutably diverse country, so any SSR endeavour must embrace a pluralistic (or pluriform) approach. This also applies to programmes articulated over the long haul. As some profound structural differences between localities have been felt over numerous decades, they are likely to persist in the foreseeable future. Concretely, this means a given SSR plan should accept the security of some areas will tend to be insured by the local population even when the latter happens to be an ethnic or tribal minority nationally. A tangible example is the Murzuq municipality, where multiple national players, including the LNA, tried to impose security without including the minorities that dominate that swath of territory. In the example of the LNA in the Fezzan during 2019, relatively stable security became more feasible only when arrangements enabled the LNA to include, work with and lean on local Tebu leaders.[20] As far as the Ahali community in Murzuq is concerned, it was forced to flee the municipality in August 2019 following reprisals by Tebu armed groups – arguably, another consequence of insufficient inclusiveness in the local security apparatus.

Conclusion

All in all, the few findings, lessons and remarks discussed in this essay point to two strategic implications for future SSR in Libya:

1. Any valid SSR initiative must be part of an inclusive political deal negotiated based on the interests of key elites, including meaningful armed-group leaders. Existing players can be attracted using promises of recognition and state resources. At the same time, any political deal

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[20] J. Tossell (2020).

should contain provisions that require armed groups to accept a gradual process of SSR, including penalties for non-compliance, namely forfeiting payments. Thus, a credible monitoring and verification procedure combined with sufficient enforcement power will also be needed.

2. Any reconfigured or newly-established security forces will need to be balanced in their geographic and ethnic composition. The focus of their development should be on the professionalisation of individuals and organisations in terms of their behaviour and performance standards. This must include the infusion of such forces with public and organisational values that can gradually heal the divisions that have emerged in the Libyan political and security landscape in recent years. Newly-minted national affiliations and a national identity will be key to organisational success.

3. The limited nature of the internationally-recognised government's domestic legitimacy throws into doubt the validity of a conventional state-centric approach for rebuilding a formal security apparatus nationwide. Indeed, such a state-centric approach is likely to reinforce dominance patterns that favour vested interests concentrated in a few privileged cities on the coast. This would amount yet again to ignoring traditionally-neglected areas such as the Fezzan. To mitigate this risk, SSR plans must always have a sophisticated economic component.

4. SSR in Iraq Before and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Irene Costantini

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has become a key pillar of international interventions in conflict-affected contexts.[1] Such reforms include a range of policies and programmes targeting the security apparatus (i.e., the army, the police and the judiciary) in order to restore the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of violence and guarantee that security providers respond to a civilian authority and are accountable to the population. They are often promoted in parallel to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, the latter aimed at incentivising armed groups to transition into a civilian life or into the state security apparatus.[2] The rationale behind SSR appears, at a first glance, quite linear: a consolidated and functioning state needs a responsive and transparent security apparatus capable of ensuring national security without threatening the population's human security.

However, the poor track record of SSR in a diverse set of contexts has undermined the credibility of such a view. The literature has highlighted issues related to timing, sequencing, coordination, ownership and financing of SSR programmes to

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[1] P. Jackson, "Security Sector Reform and State Building". *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 10, 2011, pp. 1803-22; UNSC, S/RES/2151', 2014.

[2] N. Ansorg and E. Gordon, "Co-Operation, Contestation and Complexity in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 2-24, 2019.

explain the poor results they have obtained. At a deeper level, and in line with studies evaluating international interventions, other authors have questioned the assumptions and model upon which they are built; the security objectives they pursue; and the type and nature of relationships they create. This critique points out that traditional SSR mostly reflects and promotes a state-centric view of security: success and failure are measured against a Weberian ideal-typical state (the monopoly over the use of legitimate force) interpreted mostly through a Western model of security, which is often at odds with the reality on the ground. Additionally, SSR is often donor-driven, thus, at times it serves external actors' security objectives rather than national ones. Lastly, SSR is implemented following a technical approach that does not reflect the impact that SSR has on local power relations. Such problematic aspects have recently pushed scholars to propose a new generation of SSR capable of overcoming the limits encountered so far.[3]

The critical elements of SSR briefly introduced above are magnified in the context of Iraq, a case that testifies to the limitations of post-conflict SSR. Such limitations cannot be analysed in isolation from the broader state-building intervention, which has become paradigmatic of international state-building interventions, despite the circumstances under which it occurred – military occupation, on-going conflict, and a marginal role for the UN.[4] This chapter intends to examine the limits of SSR in Iraq. In order to do so, the chapter identifies three periods: 2003-08; 2009-14; and 2014-20 and shows that in each of them, some basic conditions for the success of SSR were missing. If SSR was meant to advance *human security*, it hardly achieved this objective as it became entangled in advancing donor security first (2003-08), and regime security

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[3] P. Jackson, "Introduction: Second-Generation Security Sector Reform", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1-10; N. Ansorg and E. Gordon (2019).

[4] R. Paris and T.D. Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding : Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peacebuilding Operations*, London-New York, Routledge, 2009.

later (2009-14), neglecting its impact on the wider population. The most recent application of SSR in Iraq (2014-onward) is instead challenged by both a tense geopolitical context and by the disjuncture of SSR from other governance aspects in the country.

SSR 2003-2008:
Human Security *vs* US Security Objectives

Attempts at reforming and rebuilding the Iraqi security sector have been promoted from the beginning of the US-led occupation of the country.[5] One of the first measures, through the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)'s Order no. 2,[6] was the disbanding of the Iraqi army as well as the Iraqi intelligence infrastructure. The rationale was to signal a rupture with the previous regime's brutal control over the population through the highly militarised Iraqi security apparatus. However, as many commentators noted, the order let loose trained soldiers from the barracks and into the streets, with some later joining the ranks of a nascent insurgency. From a traditional (national) security point of view, the order left the country without a military apparatus capable of defending the country from external threats. From a human security point of view, the disbanding of the Iraqi army meant that "the United States turned as many as one million Iraqi men loose on the streets with no money, no way of supporting their families, and no skills other than how to use a shovel and a gun".[7] This occurred while the US-led occupation launched a broader de-Baathification

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[5] The role of the Iraqi Shia diaspora leadership was crucial in shaping the political and security model that informed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (see O. Kadhum, *The transnational politics of Iraq's Shia diaspora*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 1 March 2018).

[6] K.M. Pollack, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, The Brookings Institution, 2006, p. 8.

[7] NATO, *Relations with Iraq*, 14 February 2020.

campaign and resorted to ethno-religious identity as the main pillar to reform the Iraqi political system.

As the army was disbanded without a proper DDR programme in place, the Coalition Forces' task was to build it anew, while reforming the country's entire security sector. According to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, "from 2003 to 2012, the United States obligated US$27.30 billion and expended US$26.16 billion in this reconstruction area", including resources devoted to training, infrastructure, and equipment of the Ministry of Defence and Interior,[8] some of which were misused due to the high level of corruption surrounding the reconstruction process. The United States were not the only actor operating in SSR in Iraq. NATO, for instance, established the NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) in 2004, following a request from the Iraqi Interim Government in accordance with Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1546. During its existence (2004-11) NTM-I focused on training and mentoring, reaching 5000 military personnel and 10,000 police personnel, with over US$17.5 million in trust fund contributions provided by the NATO allies.[9] Despite the presence of other actors in SSR, the United States remained the leading actor in this sector.

Although the financial and political resources devoted to SSR in Iraq were enormous, the results fell far short of the goal of a secure Iraq. This was due to at least three sets of problems. First, the foundation of the Iraqi SSR occurred as the country experienced a dramatic increase in a complex, two-pronged insurgency: a Sunni-led one focused on Baghdad, Fallujah and Ramadi; and a Shia-led one against the occupying forces in Baghdad and the south of the country. In 2004, General David H. Petraeus famously commented that "helping organize, train and equip nearly a quarter-million of Iraq's security forces is a daunting task. Doing so in the middle of a tough insurgency

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[8] D.H. Petraeus, "Battling for Iraq", *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2004.
[9] R.M. Perito, *The Iraqi Federal Police. US Policy Building under Fire*, Special Report no. 291, Washington, D.C, United States Institute of Peace, 2011.

increases the challenge enormously, making the mission akin to repairing an aircraft while in flight – and while being shot at".[10] The security situation in Iraq precluded a key condition for SSR to succeed, – a minimum level of security – but it also constrained the policy options available for reforming the security sector. For instance, the reform of the Iraqi police favoured the creation of a militarised counterinsurgency police force over a community-based police force, with responsibility for training transferred from the State Department to the US military.[11]

Second, and as a consequence of the evolving insurgency, the US approach to SSR programming in Iraq favoured a hard interpretation of security; that is, an approach geared towards a "train and equip" mentality, rather than one aimed at strengthening the rule of law (i.e. parliamentary and independent oversight, inclusive governance, transparency, accountability). In addition, the necessity of having the manpower to face a growing and capable insurgency meant that less attention was paid to the actual preparedness and motivation of the trained forces to assume an effective role in providing security. This was evident early in April 2004 when Sunni insurgents attacked Fallujah, Ramadi, Baghdad, Samarra and Tikrit and the *Jaish al-Mahdi* took control of Najaf and Sadr city, a neighbourhood of Baghdad. The Iraqi security forces, called to respond, "failed to turn up for duty, declared neutrality and refused to engage the insurgents, or joined them to fight on the same side".[12] As the transfer of responsibility to the government of Iraq approached, the Iraq Security Foces (ISF) had a reported strength of 560,000 trained and equipped personnel, but they were still dependent

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[10] R.M. Perito, *The Iraqi Federal Police. US Policy Building under Fire*, Special Report no. 291, Washington, D.C, United States Institute of Peace, 2011.

[11] M Sedra, "Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan and Iraq: Exposing a Concept in Crisis", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2007, pp. 7-23, cit. p. 8.

[12] E. Herring and G. Rangwala, *Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and Its Legacy*, London, Hurst, 2006, p. 197.

on external forces, primarily US military forces, for intelligence, logistics and sustainment.[13]

Third, as violence was escalating in the country, US-led SSR in Iraq pursued tactical rather than strategic objectives. The US launched the "surge"[14] (January 2007-July 2008) in Iraq with the deployment of more than 25,000 troops as a way to create the security conditions for a settlement to be reached. However, to do so, it tolerated and sponsored security providers outside the formal state security structure. Although the Iraqi Constitution (2005) forbids them (art.9), various militias were still active in the country. Some of them, such as Muqtada al-Sadr's *Jaish al-Mahdi* were openly fighting the occupying forces; others, such as the *Badr Organisation*, the Iran-led military wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), entered the federal security structure while maintaining a separate line of command in a process known as *damj* (amalgamation); others again, such as the Peshmerga, maintained an intermediate position between state-sanctioned and non-state sanctioned security structures.[15] In fact, parallel security providers were fundamental for the surge, as demonstrated by the experience of the *sahwa* (awakening) movement whereby the US, through the Commander's Emergency Response Program money, paid for a 100,000-strong Sunni tribal force (the so-called Sons of Iraq) to defeat the Sunni insurgency in the western provinces in exchange for their reintegration, which never followed.

Reliance on or acceptance of the role of militias was key in the battlefield, but detrimental to the strategic goal of having a functioning, civilian-led, and norm-abiding security apparatus centred on the state. The ramification of militia penetration

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[13] SIGIR (2013), p. 94.

[14] In January 2007, former US President George W. Bush ordered the deployment of additional American troops in Iraq in order to deal with an increasingly violent insurgency.

[15] O. Al-Nidawi and M. Knights, *Militias in Iraq's Security Forces: Historical Context and U.S. Options*, Policy Watch 2935, Washington D.C., The Washington institute for Near East Policy, 2018.

into the formal security apparatus was particularly evident in the National Police, which unlike the Iraqi army was not disbanded and was instead called to report for duty during the US occupation. As sectarian violence increased in 2005-06, the Iraqi police became a vehicle for infiltrated Shia militias acting "as death squads, kidnapping, imprisoning, torturing, and killing Sunnis".[16] Such penetration was directed by the same Ministry of Interior, which had become as of 2007 a "ministry of fiefdoms" where different militias were controlling the recruitment process through political and sectarian appointments as well as violence.[17] The excess of abuses against the civilian population forced a renewed process of police reforms, which included removing officers responsible for sectarian violence and re-training the personnel of the National Police, later renamed the Iraqi Federal Police.

SSR 2009-2014:
Human Security *vs* Regime Security

In parallel to the *Sahwa* movement in and around al-Anbar province, the Iraqi Security Forces launched in 2008 Operation *Saulat al-Fursan* (*Charge of the Knights*) against the Shia insurgency led by the *Jaish al-Mahdi* in al-Basrah, which was defeated only thanks to the support of Coalition-led military transition teams and Coalition and Iraqi airstrikes. The success of the surge in al-Anbar, al-Basrah and Baghdad consolidated the premiership of Nuri al-Maliki and the Shia-centric state-building process that started in 2003. To secure a second mandate in the 2010 election, the latter became increasingly reliant on Shia forces close to Iran and confrontational towards the presence of foreign troops in the country, which acted as an obstacle to al-Maliki's identity-based view of the Iraqi state. In

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[16] R.M. Perito (2011), p. 6.
[17] N. Parker, "The Conflict in Iraq: A Ministry of Fiefdoms", *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 2007.

accordance with the US-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement approved by the Iraqi Parliament in November 2008, US troops redeployed to military bases in July 2009 and began withdrawing from the country in a process that was completed by December 2011.[18] However, when US combat troops left the country the task of having a functioning security sector in place had not yet been fully completed, despite being the benchmark to plan the US exit strategy. The withdrawal of US troops not only meant a decrease in available resources (i.e., logistics, intelligence), but also left the country with "no clear direction in the transition to police primacy for the provision of internal security".[19]

The withdrawal of US forces coincided with a turning point in regional politics, the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, which heightened existing animosity between regional powers. Domestically, the withdrawal of US forces coincided with a dual trend. On the one hand, the US started losing influence on Iraqi political developments at the expense of Iran, which was able to exert its leverage through political, economic and military means. On the latter, Iran was key in training and equipping a number of Shia militias, the above-mentioned *Badr Organisation* headed by Hadi al-Ameri, as well as *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq*, a splinter of the *Jaish al-Mahdi* led by Qais al-Khazali, and *Kata'ib Hezbollah* led by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (Jamal Jafaar Mohammed Ali al-Ibrahim) – some of which fought in the Syrian civil war and all of which gained prominence after 2014 in the fight against the Islamic State. On the other hand, the withdrawal of US forces coincided with the consolidation of al-Maliki as a key actor in the Iraqi political landscape and his increasingly authoritarian tendencies.[20] If in the period 2003-

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[18] A small number of US military personnel remained in the country under Chief of Mission authority operating under the Office of Security Cooperation -Iraq, whose mission was to advise, train, assist and equip Iraqi Security Forces.

[19] United Nations Development Programme Iraq, "Support to Security Sector Reform – Phase I Final Narrative Project Report", UNDP, 2015, p. 7.

[20] T. Dodge, *From War to a New Authoritarianism*, London, The International

08 SSR were US-led and serving US interests, in this second period the reforms of the security sector in Iraq were dictated by al-Maliki and his close associates and served mostly the goal of preserving the security of the post-2003 regime.

The gradual acquisition of control over the monopoly of violence was part of al-Maliki's authoritarian tendencies, rather than a re-establishment of the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. As the country witnessed an increase in the number of people employed in the security sector, which reached 933,000 people in 2012, or 12% of the total adult population,[21] its control was increasingly dependent on al-Maliki and his close entourage of loyalists, which hollowed out the security apparatus of its professionalism and efficiency. After the 2010 election, Nuri al-Maliki came to control the Ministries of Defence and the Interior and most institutions in charge of national security.[22] He extended his control over the three security arms in the country – the Office of the Commander in Chief, the Provincial Command Centres, and the Iraqi Special Operations Forces, and his son, Ahmed al-Maliki, became the deputy chief of staff of the Iraqi security services and was in charge with his father's security.[23] The sectarianisation and politicisation of the Iraqi security sector continued and was particularly felt in those areas of the country that later fell under the control of the Islamic State. For instance, in Mosul "the top military officials were replaced no fewer than seven times, and the provincial police chief twice".[24] The UNDP, leading a programme in support of SSR in the country from 2012 until 2015, lamented that "this particular administration

Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013.

[21] Ibid., p. 120.

[22] T. Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: The Rise of a New Authoritarianism", *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2013, pp. 241-57, cit. p. 247.

[23] Ibid., p. 245.

[24] M. Knights and A. Almeida, "Reshuffling Iraqi Generals: Who Benefits?", *Policy Alert*, Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2019.

[al-Maliki's] had created an environment where parliamentary capacity and oversight was severely restricted".[25]

The dramatic failure of the Iraqi security apparatus in responding to the advancement of the Islamic State, which resulted in the conquest of Mosul in June 2014 and the subjugation of one third of the country marks the end of this second phase. In this circumstance, as reported by Michael Knights "19 Iraqi army brigades and six Federal Police brigades disintegrated, a quarter of Iraq's security forces".[26] The US withdrawal from Iraq certainly removed an obstacle (i.e., intelligence coordination and airstrikes capabilities) for the Islamic State to regain its strength. However, the weakness of the Iraqi security sector was a key condition for the organisation's success. Requested by Prime Minister Haider al-ʿAbadi, an initial audit of the military revealed the existence of at least 50,000 ghost workers,[27] while according to other estimates, the phenomenon was so widespread as to include "300,000 of the men on the roster of Iraq's security forces, or 30-40% of the total force".[28] By 2014, the Iraqi Security Forces had become a vehicle for corruption and a money-making opportunity, with battalion or division command open for purchase and fed by patronage networks, corroding the entire structure. Corrupted practices extended also to a growing black market of military equipment, from fuel to spare parts (Transparency International 2017).[29]

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[25] United Nations Development Programme Iraq (2015), p. 8.

[26] M. Knights, "Bringing Iraq's "ghost" Forces Back to Life", *Al Jazeera*, December 2014.

[27] Transparency International., "The Big Spin: Corruption and the Growth of Violent Extremism", London, Transparency International, 21 February 2017, p. 20.

[28] F. Wehrey and A.I. Ahram, *Taming the Militias: Building National Guards in Fractured Arab States*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015, p. 8.

[29] Transparency International (2017).

SSR 2014-2020:
US Security Objectives *vs* Regime Security

A new phase of SSR was launched in parallel to the military campaign to defeat the Islamic State, an objective that saw the international community re-engaging militarily in the country. On 10 September 2014, the US launched the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which now counts 82 members, with the objective of "degrading and ultimately defeating Daesh" in Iraq and Syria.[30] Through the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), established to coordinate the members' military actions, the Coalition acted on the grounds that "the military victory over ISIS will be accomplished *by* the indigenous forces, we will accomplish our mission *with* those indigenous forces, and improved regional stability will be attained *through* those partners" [*emphasis in the original*].[31] Reiterating the "no boots on the ground" imperative, the Coalition provided essential military assistance (training, equipment, airstrikes, and intelligence) to the Iraqi army, Iraqi air force, Counter Terrorism Service, Federal Police, and Kurdish Peshmerga.[32]

Thanks to such combined efforts, Iraqi security forces managed the defeat of the Islamic State, officially proclaimed in December 2017, and regain some public trust. The ISF, and in particular, the US-trained Counter Terrorism Forces under the command of Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi, were saluted as the heroes on the battlefield, despite their success having

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[30] See the Global Coalition website: https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/

[31] CJTF-OIR, "Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve - Our Mission", 2014.

[32] During the Global Coalition efforts to combat the Islamic State, military assistance and equipment was sent directly to the KRI. For instance, the coalition has run the Kurdistan Training Coordination Centre (KTCC), a 300-person training mission with troops from Germany, Italy, UK, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Hungary and US (Knights 2016). The capacity of the KRI to act as a direct recipient of foreign assistance has been a long-term controversy between the region and the federal government.

been dependent on the coalition airstrikes and artillery to hit Islamic State operatives.[33] However, another set of actors gained prominence in the Iraqi public and political eye due to their decisive but controversial role in defeating the Islamic State: the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMU, in Arabic, *Hashd al-Shaabi*). Their formation, conventionally but erroneously attributed to a fatwa issued by Gran Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani,[34] stems from Nuri al-Maliki's efforts to establish Shia-centred Popular Defence Brigades, which culminated in Cabinet Decree 301 issued on 11 June 2014 granting the Prime Minister the power to "organise the volunteers and to provide them with necessary logistic and financial support").[35] Al-Sistani's fatwa amplified the call and provide the PMU with a legitimate mantle.

Aware of the possibility of the Islamic State (or a similar organisation) to regroup and threaten again the stability of Iraq, and exploiting the momentum following IS's defeat, members of the Coalition re-engaged the country to pursue SSR. At the request of the Government of Iraq, NATO began a number of

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[33] The counter terrorism service (CTS) is in charge of coordinating all counterterrorism efforts in the country. As no law regulated the CTS, it acted with no clear legal status and with insufficient resources. In August 2016, the law on the CTS regulated the force and designated it as a Special Minister whose budget is specified in the Iraqi annual budget. The force, of around 13.000 men in 2013, paid a high price in the battlefield against the Islamic State (D.M. Witty, 'The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service'. Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institute, 2105; idem *Iraq's Post-2014 Counter Terrorism Service*, Policy Focus 157, Washington, D.C, The Washington institute for Near East Policy). The CTS's commander, Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi, has become a public symbol of integrity and competence during the fight against the Islamic State. When Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi demoted the General in October 2019, it triggered a new series of protests in the country.

[34] On 13 June 2014, through his clerical representative, ʿAbd al- Mahdi al-Karbalai, Ali al-Sistani called for the Iraqis to defend the country from the expansion of the Islamic State by volunteering and joining the security forces, without any reference to the *Hashd al-Shaabi*.

[35] M. Knights, H. Malik, and A. Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Honored, Not Contained. The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces", Washington, D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2020, p. 3.

"trainings of trainers" courses held in Amman and in October 2018 launched its Mission Iraq (NMI), with the objective of strengthening the ISF through training, advising, and capacity building.[36] In 2017 (and later renewed until April 2022) the EU launched the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Iraq with the objective of supporting "coherent implementation of the civilian related aspects of the Iraqi National Security Strategy and the security sector reform".[37] The UNDP engaged the Office of National Security Adviser and assisted the Iraqi government to outline the Iraqi National Security Strategy. At the bilateral level, other countries implemented other SSR programmes, engaging with different actors on the ground, including the Peshmerga.[38] Despite the presence of various organisations and countries, the US is once again the key actor leading SSR in Iraq with around 3,500 staff present in the country following its return in 2014.[39]

As these and other SSR programmes are ongoing in Iraq, it remains to be seen what impact they will have on the country's security sector apparatus and on the country's security situation. However, the conditions on the ground remain problematic for SSR. Foremost, Iraq continues to be characterised by the presence of non-state providers of (in)security.[40] The PMU brings together a highly diversified and decentralised group of established and newly created militias, only loosely coordinated within the Popular Mobilisation Commission and responding to different command lines, of a tribal, political, and/or ethnic nature, totalling around 30 to 50 groups and 150,000

[36] NATO, "NATO Mission Iraq", 17 February 2020.

[37] European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM), "About EUAM Iraq", Text. EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission. 18 October 2018.

[38] M. Fantappie, "The EU in post-2003 Iraq", in *Routledge Handbook on EU-Middle East Relations*, 2020.

[39] M. Knights, *International Engagement in Iraq Is Tied to Military Presence*, Policy Watch 3082, Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2019.

[40] I. Costantini, *Statebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa: the aftermath of regime change*, London, Routledge, 2018.

members.[41] At its core is a group of Shia militias and militiamen seeking greater control over the formal Iraqi security apparatus, but whose relationship with Iran determines their controversial position within it, often referred to as resistance formation (*fasa'il al-muqawamma*).[42] It is no coincidence that the NATO mission in Iraq needs to specify that "it only trains members of the Iraqi security forces under direct and effective control of the government of Iraq".[43]

Various attempts have been made to sanction the existence and operation of the PMU. In November 2016, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Law on the PMU, which established that the forces are part of the Iraqi armed forces. Thus, they are subject to military laws in the country. The law replaced Order 91 (February 2016) issued by Prime Minister al-ʿAbadi, which already in February 2016 sought to bring the PMU under state jurisdiction and to exclude them from the political process, a point that is re-established in the law. Later on, in March 2018 (prior to the May election) Haider al-ʿAbadi issued Executive Order 85, reiterating the Prime Minister's control over the forces and specifying their structure, rights and duties. Under Prime

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[41] A useful analytical distinction is provided by Haddad (F. Haddad, "Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units: A Hybrid Actor in a Hybrid State", in A. Day (ed.), *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions*, New York, United Nations University, Centre for Policy Research, 2020, pp. 40-42), which distinguishes between the shrine-affiliated formations; Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam; the Iran-aligned groups; and local, minority, Sunni or tribal units. R. Mansour and J.A. Faleh, *The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017; D. O'Driscoll and S. Fazil, *The Resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq: Political and Military Responses*, SIPRI commentary. Stockholm, SIPRI, 9 June 2020; D. O'Driscoll and D. van Zoonen, "The Future of Iraq: Is Reintegration Possible?", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2017, pp. 34-47; N. Ezzedine, M. Sulz, and E. van Veen, *The Hashd Is Dead, Long Live the Hashd!*, CRU report, Conflict Research Unit, The Hague, Clingendael Institute, 2019.

[42] Belonging to this group, in addition to the already mentioned *Badr Organization*, *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq*, *Kata'ib Hezbollah*, are *Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada*, *Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba*, *Kata'ib al-Imam Ali* and *Kata'ib Jund al-Imam*. F. Haddad (2020), p. 32.

[43] NATO, "NATO Mission Iraq"…, cit.

Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, new statements and orders were issued to regulate the phenomenon: a prime minister's written statement (18 June 2019); Executive Order 237 (1 July 2019); Executive Order 328 (14 September 2019) and Executive Order 331 (17 September 2019). Nevertheless, some of the most powerful militias continued to operate outside of the state's authority and to challenge it by engaging in political activities; perpetrating gross human rights violations against the civilian population; and threatening and attacking foreign states.[44]

As the demobilisation and eventual reintegration of the PMU appears difficult to pursue, Iraq's formal security apparatus is far from holding the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Moreover, SSR is not contributing to bridging the gap between state and non-state security providers. The ISF, and some of its most successful elements, such as the Counter Terrorism Service, are seen as US products. On the contrary, some segments of the Iraqi leadership and of the wider public see the PMU as the necessary force for the security of the post-2003 Shia-centred regime.[45] This disjuncture over the legitimate use of violence is also increasingly reflecting the tension between the US and Iran over the country. In a growing escalation that reached its apex with the death of Qasem Suleimani – commander of the Iranian Quds Force – and al-Muhandis – a US designated terrorist – as a result of a US attack on 3 January 2020, some of the Shia militias have carried out a number of attacks throughout 2019-20 on US personnel and facilities in the country. Due to the death of Suleimani and al-Muhandis, Iran lost a solid link with the Iraqi security apparatus and the PMU are suffering from a leadership issue, which while granting greater autonomy to individual formations, may also offer an avenue for bringing them under state control. At the same time, a US withdrawal due to an increasingly hostile environment may reduce funding for SSR, with broader impact on the country's security apparatus as a whole.

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[44] M. Knights, H. Malik, and A.J. Al-Tamimi (2020).

[45] H. al-Hashimi, *The Popular Mobilization: Challenges and Solutions*, The Centre of making policies for international and strategic studies, 12 July 2018.

Concluding Remarks:
SSR, Covid-19 and the Economic Crisis

The path of SSR in Iraq is further complicated by political, social and economic factors. In October 2019 the country witnessed the return of an even stronger protest movement requesting much-needed political reforms and leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi in November. In what is notoriously a long and troublesome process (particularly when it comes to the appointments of the Ministers of Defence and Interior), the formation of a new government went through two failed attempts and it was only in May 2020 that Mustafa al-Khadimi managed to take office and swear in a new cabinet, more than six months from Abdul-Mahdi's resignation. Although al-Khadimi appears more resolute on the necessity to integrate the PMU and reform the security apparatus, his government needs to handle pressing issues, namely the health crisis due to the Covid-19 and a daunting economic crisis caused by the collapse of oil prices in addition to the necessity of addressing the long-term challenges of fighting corruption, ending the ethno-sectarian quota system (*muhasasa taʾifia*) and leading the reconstruction of the territories liberated from the Islamic State. All this while the latter has resumed attacks in the country.[46]

The outbreak of the pandemic in Iraq, with 478,701 confirmed cases and 11,017 deaths between 3 January and 3 November 2020,[47] has been met with confinement measures, curfews and the closing of borders and airports. The pandemic has stressed the already weak health system in Iraq. Additionally, the pandemic also opened new spaces for non-state actors: while the Islamic State has called its militants to exploit the pandemic to increase their attacks,[48] the PMU has strengthened its social

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[46] D. O'Driscoll and F. Shivan (2020).

[47] Data available from the WHO website: https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq

[48] P. Van Ostaeyen, *The Islamic State and Coronavirus, Time for a Comeback?*, ISPI

role by initiating a number of campaigns to face it, including medical and volunteer support to the state, distributing food packages, disinfection, and building temporary and mobile hospitals.[49] The economic consequences of the lockdown together with the drastic fall of oil prices will be similarly difficult to handle.[50] They refuelled the controversy with the Iraqi Kurdista Region (KRI) over budget allocation while the introduction of austerity measures creates new tension among an already distressed population. Previous crises, notably the one sparked in 2014 by the expansion of the Islamic State coupled with a fall in oil prices, were saluted as potential windows for much-needed reforms in the country, but failed to spark any meaningful reforms, beyond superficial changes. Notoriously a costly intervention, SSR is likely to be affected by dwindling financial resources nationally and internationally.

Within this context, the prospects of SSR in Iraq remain uncertain. The PMU, and within them, the Iran-aligned groups have become part of the political (via the electoral alliance *al-Fatah*), economic (through their economic offices) and military fabric of the country. The Iraqi security sector "operates on the basis of a shared *modus vivendi* that various entities tolerate. However, the balance of power between these entities is skewed toward the *fasa'il*".[51] On the one hand, this makes any DDR efforts unfeasible and unrealistic in the near future, as authors such as Hayder al-Khafaji and Yezid Sayigh have recognised.[52] On the other hand, they remain outside of Western-led attempts

Commentary, ISPI, 15 May 2020.

[49] J. Watkins and M. Hasan, *Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A New Raison d'être?*, Middle East Centre (blog), 29 April 2020.

[50] A. Tabaqchali, *Will COVID-19 Mark the Endgame for Iraq's Muhasasa Ta'ifia?*, Arab Reform Initiative (blog), 24 April 2020.

[51] F. Haddad (2020), p. 44.

[52] H. Al-Khafaji, *Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces: The Possibilities for Disarmament, Demobilisation & Reintegration*, LSE Middle East Centre, London, November 2019; and Y. Sayigh, "Hybridizing Security: Armies, Militias and Constrained Sovereignty", in Y. Sayigh and E. Ardemagni (eds.), *Hybridizing Security: Armies and Militias in Fractured Arab States*, ISPI and Carnegie Middle East Centre, 2018.

at SSR in Iraq, thus reinforcing the divide between different security providers. As a tense geopolitical rivalry between the US and Iran is playing out in Iraq, SSR risks being perceived as serving once again key foreign actors' security objectives and undermining state-aligned security forces. At the same time, the current stabilisation approach risks being excessively skewed towards security objectives, neglecting important aspects of the overall governance of the country.

5. A Network Approach to Yemen's SSR: From Army-Centric to Community-Oriented

Eleonora Ardemagni

After a decade of army-centric Security Sector Reform (SSR), Yemen needs to refocus on local communities rather than military elites as part of a decentralised process of state rebuilding. A network approach to SSR (including police reform and perhaps the establishment of a Yemeni Federal Guard) would acknowledge differentiated security priorities among Yemen's governorates and support efforts to "civilianise" and "localise" security. This would produce a positive trade-off between local security and local development while also partnering with informal security providers in a highly hybridised context.

Yemen Has Changed; SSR Needs To Change Too

Five years of war have radically transformed Yemen in terms of power balances and security needs. State institutions have collapsed, fracturing into competing chiefdoms. Local communities fluctuate between bottom-up decentralisation and self-governance. The Houthi-led *de facto* authority and the areas nominally held by the internationally recognised government have developed different patterns of security governance, with a myriad of local security players vying for power on the ground. In such a framework, UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (April 2015) looks like a snapshot of

the past, unable to support today's conflict resolution efforts. Federalism "from below" has become a reality and has to be taken into account by decision-makers. Moreover, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on security governance has shown, in Yemen too, how much first responses to public emergencies must be effective at the local level. As part of post-conflict and state (re)building efforts, SSR must overcome the army-centric approach displayed so far; it needs to become community-oriented, thus promoting "localised security" within a unified state. In the decade 2010-2020, attempts at SSR focused on the armed forces, and especially on the army, while neglecting the role of the general police. It is true that Yemen's police forces chronically lack funding, equipment and specific training. However, according to recent surveys, Yemenis perceive the police as a trusted security player.[1] Especially outside the main urban centres, police forces could play an increased role in security governance and provision at community level: after all, over 60% of Yemenis live in rural areas with an erratic state presence. Although police forces reflect political allegiances too, the army is the most highly politicised player in Yemen's modern and contemporary history. The army is simultaneously a driver and mirror of elite competition and infighting. At the time of writing, Yemen's divided military has five main power factions: A) remnants of the army under the leadership of General Ali Mohsin Al Ahmar, based in Marib, Shabwa and Wadi Wadhramawt; B) Presidential Protection Brigades answering to President Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi, formerly based in Aden but relocated to Abyan and Shabwa; C) Security Belt Forces technically part of the Ministry of Interior since 2016 but affiliated to the Southern Transitional Council since 2019, mostly based in Aden; D) the "Republican Guard-Houthi hybrid"[2] based in Sanaa; E) the West Coast Forces led by Tareq

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[1] *Yemen Polling Center*, EU-funded Nationwide Survey (except Saada, Socotra and al-Mahra), 2019; Yemen Polling Center, EU-funded Nationwide Survey (except Saada and Socotra), 2017.

[2] L. Winter, "The Adaptative Transformation of Yemen's Republican Guard",

Saleh, based in the south of Tihama and the Bab el-Mandeb area. The rebuilding of Yemen's security sector therefore requires a change of perspective. Decision-makers, international partners and donors should invest resources and political energies not only in restructuring the army, but also in police reform, stressing distinct responsibilities, goals and training. The professionalisation of the coast guard should also be part of the overall restructuring effort, given the fragmentation of security loyalties in port cities and the low-intensity but constant threats to Yemen's coastline (Houthi sea mines, Water Borne Improvised Explosive Devices-WBIED, asymmetric maritime warfare, and apparent piracy in the Gulf of Aden). In an ideal SSR scenario, the army would deal primarily with the defence of external borders, while internal security forces would focus on the domestic level. Unfortunately, the boundaries between the military and the police are blurred, in Yemen as elsewhere in the region: the army also performs internal security tasks while the police, where it exists, is militarised. Despite the huge difficulties involved, Yemen should nevertheless seek to "civilianise" security provision and "localise" it as much as possible, bringing security agents closer to their operative territories. As the National Dialogue Conference (2013-14) agreed at federal state level[3], the establishment of a Yemeni Federal Guard (YFG), a gendarmerie-type force with regionally tailored tasks, could be considered to rebalance centre-periphery ties.[4] The YFG would complement, rather than counterbalance the army. Deployable by governors within their boundaries but technically under the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the YFG could be placed under the central command of the government in case of national

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Small Wars Journal, 7 March 2017.

[3] *National Dialogue Conference Outcomes Document*, 2014-2013.

[4] E. Ardemagni, *Localizing Security: A National Guard for Federal Yemen*, ISPI Policy Brief, ISPI, 13 December 2018. This chapter replaces the terminology "national guard", appeared in previous publications of the author, with "federal guard", to emphasize the role of the governorate-level in a context of unified but decentralised state.

emergencies. In this way, the YFG would contribute to the (re) building of state security and strong central institutions, but within a decentralised institutional architecture. A community-oriented approach to SSR would develop a *security governance network* able to build trust and coordination among formal security players (the police, the hypothetical YFG and the army) on a geographical basis: these forces would have specific duties and distinct chains of command. This approach to SSR would also facilitate coordination between formal and informal security providers (*shaykh*, plur. *shuyyukh*; *'aqil*; plur. *'uqqal*) since all would benefit from a trade-off arrangement between local security and development. The cooperation of "informal support structures"[5] is essential to re-establish periphery-centre ties and to reinforce loyalty within the military; in most cases, tribal chiefs are also military leaders. In the eyes of formal security players, such a perspective would also help to frame traditional security actors as partners, not rivals, given their knowledge of the social fabric and their legitimacy on the ground.[6] With the objective of combining analysis with inputs for policy-making, this chapter will 1) frame and analyse Yemen's security structures, military dynamics and patterns of governance; 2) shed light on SSR policies implemented in the 2010-2020 decade, identifying traditional obstacles and essential lessons learned; 3) provide a "work in progress" outline of how a network approach to SSR in Yemen could be practically designed, with particular regard to the possible establishment of a Yemeni Federal Guard.

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[5] N. Al-Dawsari, *Informal Actors, Community and the State. An assessment of informal support structures and the social contract in Western Yemen*, Oxfam, December 2014.

[6] M. Sedra, "Adapting Security Sector Reform to Ground-Level Realities. The Transition to a Second Generation- Model", *Journal of Intervention and State-Building*, vol 12, no. 1, 2018.

Framing Yemen's Security Landscape:
Crisis, Actors and Governance

In the decade 2010-20, Yemen's military experienced four main crises or turning-points. In 2011, General Ali Mohsin Al Ahmar and Al Ahmar's forces joined anti-government protesters, thus breaking a long-time neopatrimonial alliance with Ali Abdullah Saleh. In 2014-15, Saleh's power block and the Houthis forged an alliance of convenience, with the latter starting a gradual but decisive process of state capture and merging with segments of the previous regime. In late 2017, the break-up of the alliance between the Houthis and Saleh's block resulted into the killing of the former president and a new coalition of military forces coalescing around his nephew Tareq, a former commander of the Presidential Guard. In 2019, clashes erupted in Aden and other Southern regions between the pro-government Presidential Protection Brigades and the Security Belt Forces, who answer to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), though both are official security providers. All these crises reveal a dynamic of security hybridisation, varying degrees of "proxy-ness" and evolving patterns of security governance. Yemen's defence structure presents a phenomenon of "double hybridisation": hybridisation due to the overlapping of tribal and military roles and loyalties, and hybridisation caused by vague boundaries between formal and informal security actors.[7] To achieve sustainable SSR, this reality must be recognised as a permanent feature of the Yemeni system: it can be partially constrained through institutional mechanisms but not erased. "Hybrid security actors" make up a useful analytical category: their existence highlights the blurred distinction between the State and the non-state constellation and often reveals patterns of cooperation and/or competition with the regular security sector, or an undistinguishable merging. On the ground, the

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[7] E. Ardemagni, "Yemen's Defence Structure: Hybridity and Patronage after the State", *Journal of Arabian Studies*, exp. vol. 10, no. 2, 2020.

phenomenon of security hybridisation is extremely nuanced and hybrid actors can be highly differentiated internally. This is the case of the Houthis: the ideological and Saada-based wing, directly tied to the Al Houthi family and to the *sâda* class, coexists with the pragmatic and political wing which emerged in Sanaa since 2015, and with the group of former loyalists of the General People's Congress (GPC, mostly with tribal backgrounds) who joined the insurgents due to Saleh's alliance with them. Policy makers must be aware of such nuances and opt for case-by-case choices whether or not to invest in political outreach and the integration of combatants. This approach can also be applied to the question of proxy actors. At a transnational level, Yemen is characterised by different patron-client relations (e.g. Houthis and Iran, STC-affiliated militias and the UAE), though proxy confrontation is a consequence, not the cause, of the war. However, proxy-ness has to be imagined as a spectrum of varying degrees.[8] Local actors still maintain a certain amount of autonomy vis-à-vis their backers. Their agency must therefore be considered, and this should help support Yemeni-owned SSR efforts. In Yemen, local players have often proved to be opportunistic actors able to actively capitalise on their relations with competing external powers to strengthen domestic leverage. Hierarchy and proxy manipulation are therefore poor lenses for making sense of patron-client relations, which are rather based on "convergence of interests".[9] From the ruins of fractured state institutions, a number of "militiadoms" have emerged to play a key role in Yemen's local balances. "Militiadoms", a militarised variant of "chiefdoms" and "sheikhdoms", are geographically adjacent but disconnected micro-powers, often competing with one another. They have evolved from hybrid military structures and mirror the local power balances prevailing in their respective

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[8] T. Cambanis et al., *Hybrid Actors. Armed Groups and State Fragmentation in the Middle East*, The Century Foundation, The Century Foundation Press, 2019.

[9] E. Gaston and D. Ollivant, *U.S.-Iran Proxy Competition in Iraq*, New America Foundation Report, 10 February 2020.

territories (e.g. the Saada-Sanaa Houthi-held area, the pro-government Eastern Marib province, the pro-secessionist port city of Mukalla in Hadramawt, and the West Coast Forces-controlled territory in the Al-Mokha area). Yemen's security governance landscape has been transformed from one of hybrid security actors to one of multiple security actors. As testified by Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime, security governance needs a single state centre, albeit contested and with a limited monopoly on force, to generate "hybridity": in the present system of governance, there is both competition and cooperation between formal and informal security actors and, in cases of cooperation, the hybridisation of formal and informal security actors becomes the norm. But since 2015, competing factions, with militias at the centre of hybrid military structures, have emerged from the ashes of the collapsed regular army, most of them constituting rival militiadoms. Therefore, in the context of post-2015 competing "state" centres (the internationally recognised government, the Houthi *de facto* governing authority, and the self-proclaimed STC), multiplicity – a step beyond hybridity – is an even better definition for the Yemeni pattern of security governance without a single state centre.[10] Security governance differs a lot between Houthi-held areas and the territories formally controlled by the government. The management of the Covid-19 pandemic has further underlined the existence of two different patterns: centralised and monopolised (the Houthi *de facto* authority) vs. multiple and competitive (government-held areas). For the Houthis, security governance is highly centralised, given the monopolising role of the Houthi-appointed supervisors. Thanks to the alliance with Saleh, the Houthis began infiltrating formal institutions in late 2014, when supervisors (of Hashemite lineage and

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[10] On multiplicity and hybridity, E. Ardemagni, *Beyond Yemen's Militiadoms. Restarting from Local Agency*, EUISS-Conflict Series Brief, 8, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 21 April 2020; E Ardemagni and Y. Sayigh (eds.), *Hybridizing Security: Armies and Militias in Fractured Arab States*, Dossier, ISPI-Carnegie Middle East Center, 30 October 2018.

from Saada and Hajja governorates) were informally appointed to duplicate and control the local governance system, with particular regard to the security-military milieu. These answer only to the governorate-level supervisor and report directly to the leader of the Houthi movement, Abdel Malek Al Houthi. After the killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh (December 2017), security hybridisation reached its apex. In fact, the Houthis gradually merged supervisory and formal security positions: many Houthi loyalists became governors, deputy governors or ministers. This resulted not only in the marginalisation of GPC members, but also in profound changes to the traditional social fabric: *shuyyukh* were side-lined from local governance at district level and most of the *ʿuqqal* became Houthi law enforcers, abdicating the traditional role of intermediaries between villages and central institutions.[11] In this framework, monopolised governance allows the Houthis to conceal the real number of Covid-19 cases in their territory. Instead, security governance is competitive in the areas formally controlled by the government: many security providers (military and police officers, tribal chiefs) vie for control over security in the same territory. Some local powers, as in Mahra governorate, pursue self-governance despite the interference of external powers, thus perpetuating a longstanding tradition of autonomy. This multiplicity of security actors leads to uncoordinated, fluid and often competitive patterns of security enforcement and provision: this in turn undermines the response to Covid-19, since local authorities are called to play a decisive role in identifying cases and implementing emergency measures. Moreover, the multilevel architecture of Yemen's state, made up of central government, governors and local councils (Local Authority Law, LAL, 2001), lacks coordination in the absence of a shared political centre. These institutions now have competing

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[11] *The Houthi Supervisory System. The interplay of formal and informal political structures,* Thematic report, ACAPS Yemen Analysis Hub, 17 June 2020; M. Transfeld, M. Shuja al-Deen, and R. al-Hamdani, *Seizing the State. Ibb's Security Arrangement after Ansarallah's Takeover*, Policy Report, Yemen Polling Center, June 2020.

political allegiances and pursue different agendas, though their formal cooperation is theoretically regulated by law.

2010-2020: SSR and DDR Were Army-Centric Processes, Although Pro-Government Institutionalised Militias Were a Constant

Over the last decade, SSR in Yemen has focused on the restructuring of the armed forces and especially the army. This top-down and elite-centred approach has failed to address the main obstacle to SSR: the primacy of politicisation over professionalisation. A politicised military generates corruption (e.g. the "ghost soldiers" phenomenon) and nepotism (e.g. family or tribal clan-related promotions), and thus has a direct interest in reduced accountability and weak parliamentary oversight. Yemen's army is also overstaffed and has limited financial resources: persistent economy in the (top) military benefits from security hybridisation through the interlinking of formal and informal networks. As a matter of fact, both Saleh and Hadi, at different times, promoted security hybridisation mechanisms to strengthen the loyalist camp, with the creation of top-down paramilitary units as well as the institutionalisation of bottom-up militias. During the post-2011 institutional transition, president Hadi tightened his grip on the military with controversial results, disbanding the forces most closely associated with the previous regime and replacing officers still loyal to the Saleh-Mohsin military oligarchy. But doing so, Hadi reproduced the same dysfunctional system he was formally dismantling, establishing an institutional militia for his personal protection, appointing and/or promoting family members and Abyani soldiers and officers.[12] The key steps in SSR undertaken in the transitional phase were as follows. *December 2011*: Hadi

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[12] *Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?*, Middle East Report no. 139, International Crisis Group, April 2013; A. Al-Shargabi, "The Restructuring of the Yemeni Army", *Al-Muntaqa*, vol. 1, no.1, April 2018.

established and chaired the "Committee on Military Affairs for Achieving Security and Stability" (including 14 military officers associated with Saleh, Ali Mohsin and Hadi, mirroring the GPC-Joint Meeting Parties[13] power-sharing government), as prescribed by the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative for Yemen. *April 2012*: Hadi removed Saleh's relatives and loyalists (excluding Ahmed Ali Saleh, commander of the Republican Guard, removing Yahya Saleh from the Central Security Forces and Counter Terrorism Unit, and excluding Tareq Saleh, head of the Presidential Guard) and replaced them with interim president's loyalists. *August 2012*: Hadi established the Presidential Protection Brigades (PPB) answering directly to the presidency (this force symbolically includes three brigades of the Republican Guard and one from the First Armoured Division of the army). *November 2012*: the Committee on Military Affairs issued a recommendation for the reactivation of mandatory national defence service. *December 2012*: Hadi disbanded both the Republican Guard (Saleh's fiefdom) and the First Armoured Division (Ali Mohsin's stronghold), also splitting in two the powerful Northwestern regional command headed by Ali Mohsin as part of a broader reorganisation of Yemen's military regions (which increased from five to seven[14]); the armed forces were also reorganised into three main branches (land, navy and coastal defence, and air force) plus the Border Guard (which therefore fell under the armed forces) and the newly created "Strategic Reserve Forces" which reported directly to the presidency and included the PPB, the Special Forces and the CTU. *January 2013*: Hadi renamed the Central Security Forces the "Special Security Forces" and placed them under the Strategic Reserve Forces. *2013*: the "Workshop on Military and Security Affairs" of the National Dialogue Conference confirmed the 50:50 allotment principle (*muhasasa*) between Northern and Southern regions in the armed forces and the

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[13] Including the Islah party.
[14] Yemen's army is divided in seven military regions: Sayyun (1st); Mukalla (2nd); Mareb (3rd); Aden (4th); Hodeida (5th); Amran (6th); Dhamar (7th).

ban on military organisations. *2016*: Hadi institutionalised via decree the Security Belt Forces under the MoI; instead, the Hadhrami Elite Forces (HEF) and the Shabwani Elite Forces (SEF, fragmented at the time of writing) technically become part of the army.

Lessons Learned:
Imagining Another Approach to SSR

As part of a comprehensive political process, SSR requires a win-win political agreement among all parties: measures perceived as punitive by other parties can easily cause a backlash and generate new cycles of violence. (The Saleh-Huthi alliance of convenience was partly triggered by Hadi's decrees to restructure the security sector.) In terms of hierarchy of command, reform of the top positions is crucial, but the composition and renewal of mid-to-low-level personnel also matters. For instance, the bulk of the military has remained close to the former regime despite the removal of Saleh's loyalists by Hadi in 2012: this paved the way for the 2015 coup. In the past, security ministries (the MoI and MoD) competed with each other for primacy, tasks and resources. The risk of overlapping and rivalry is extremely high as long as the operative boundaries between the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Ministry of Defence (MoD), and between the police and the military, are not clearly defined. So far, the MoI and MoD have been monopolised respectively by Islah and the GPC, thus crafting two rival fiefdoms within Yemen's security structure. At the same time, reducing the role of (and international assistance to) top-down paramilitary forces answering directly to the presidency must be acknowledged as a lesson to learn. Yemen's partners and donors should be careful not to over-empower forces operating outside the MoD and MoI, as they are primarily tools of elite power politics and even less accountable than the army and the police (e.g. the Republican Guard and Central Security Forces as of 2011, the Presidential Protection Brigades and Special Security Forces

from 2012 onwards). This was what happened with post-9/11 SSR, when the United States' securitisation-first approach in Yemen focused on regime security rather than national security goals. Though they often rally local forces, paramilitary groups are not examples of community-oriented security devolution, nor can they be seen in counterinsurgency terms as part of a "by-with-through" (BWT[15]) strategy since they promote core regime interests. In the same way, top-down DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) (i.e. the institutionalisation of bottom-up militias) exacerbates hybridity, widening the grey area between formal and informal. In 2016, president Hadi institutionalised by decree the Security Belt Forces (SBF), which formally became part of the MoI. But these pro-secessionist forces, organised, trained and equipped by the United Arab Emirates since mid-2015, continued to answer to the Emiratis and to be paid by them as of June 2019.[16] In this way, the *UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2020* considers the SBF as a "non-state armed group" (along with the HEF and SEF)[17], despite its technically belonging to the state. In this blurred framework, the de-escalating potential of local security forces in time of conflict is overstated. In fact, local security forces (including the police and coast guard) have political allegiances and are not "neutral third parties" in the conflict. Again, political loyalty is the driving criterion of selection and recruitment, since local security forces are territorial pieces of larger patronage networks. Nevertheless, they are called upon by two agreements (the United Nations-brokered Stockholm Agreement, 2018 and the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement, 2019) to play a pivotal and non-biased role in the local implementation of transitional

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[15] Where "operations are led by our partners, state or nonstate, with enabling support from the United States or US-led coalitions and through US authorities and partner agreements". J.L. Votel and E.K. Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach", *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 89, 12 April 2018.

[16] *United Nations Security Council Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, S/2020/70, p. 13.

[17] Ibid., p. 12.

security arrangements (in Hodeida, Al-Salif and Ras Isa and in Aden, Abyan and Shabwa), as in the case of the withdrawal and redeployment of military forces.[18]

Exploring a Network Approach to SSR.
A Yemeni Federal Guard to Link Security and Development in a Decentralised Yemen

Establishing a Yemeni Federal Guard (YFG) as a complementary, regionally oriented and tailored force distinct from the army would diminish the power of the militiadoms, and allow Yemen's multiple security governance to be brought under the umbrella of a Yemeni-owned political process. The reconstruction of the army and police force should be pursued in parallel with the creation of a YFG to overcome rivalries over financial resources, key positions and external funding. A YFG would build on close ties and interaction with the population (something that cannot be achieved with the army's system of rotating units) and address broader security matters from a local and community-centred perspective. Technically part of the MoD and similar to a gendarmerie-type force, the YFG would be run instead at a governorate level (*muhafaza*; plur. *muhafazat*), although it could be placed under the command of the central government in national emergencies (e.g. armed insurgencies against central institutions, aggressive interventions by external powers, or natural disasters). Placing the YFG under the MoD would stress Yemen's unified political horizon although this appears practically challenging: mechanisms to build synergies between the MoD and the governors have yet to be identified. On the other hand, a potential ministry of the Federal Guard would easily become a hostage of power feuds, thus worsening rivalries. Regional commanders of the YFG would be appointed by

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[18] E. Ardemagni, A. Nagi, and M. Transfeld, *Shuyyukh, Policemen and Supervisors: Yemen's Competing Security Providers*, Analysis, ISPI-Carnegie Middle East Center-Yemen Polling Center, March 2020.

governors in consultation with local councils. (Since governors are appointed by central institutions, the appointment of commanders would have to be agreed with or at least not in conflict with the MoD). For each YFG division, training would focus on regionally-targeted issues: for instance, border security and anti-smuggling activities (Hajja, Saada, Mahra), counter-terrorism (Abyan, Al-Bayda, Hadramawt), protection of energy and/or logistic infrastructures (Marib, Shabwa, Hadramawt, Hodeida), and demining (Hodeida, Taiz). The European Union (EU) could play a role as training coordinator for the YFG as part of a multinational team of military experts. At the budgetary level, each governorate would partially contribute to its own security, co-financing its own division of the YFG through the reinvestment of a variable share of the regional budget (local taxes, fees and energy revenues). The largest share would be covered by external donors (especially for less wealthy regions) through central institutions and under international monitoring. This would help keep wealth in local hands and incentivise members of militias or state-sponsored armed groups to engage part-time in the regular security sector while also performing a civilian job. Governorates' budgets would co-finance the YFG in an endeavour to generate local security, thus creating an environment conducive to development. Reintegration of single combatants, rather than pre-existing armed groups, should facilitate loyalty and cohesion.[19]

Policy Recommendations for SSG/R

- •   (Re)build a decentralised state with an emphasis on localised security. Yemen is currently a contested and polycentric territorial entity. In a unified Yemen, SSR must be part of an inclusive, comprehensive, political

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[19] On this hypothesis see also E. Ardemagni, *Localizing Security: A National Guard for Federal Yemen*…, cit.; E. Ardemagni, *Beyond Yemen's Militiadoms. Restarting from Local Agency*…, cit.

agreement to decentralise institutional architecture. Before engaging in SSR, local stakeholders need to identify and agree on a single centre of political power to reduce "competitive violence". A more equitable distribution of oil/gas revenues would also weaken secessionist spirits and local insurgencies.[20] Yemeni parties have already agreed on a federal principle, as expressed in the Outcome Document of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference (2013-14).

- Recruitment and DDR: reintegrate single combatants, also as members of internal security forces. Complete units/militias cannot be integrated as a whole into the regular security sector since this would multiply the risk of insurgencies and/or defection. The disbandment of armed groups should therefore be followed by the integration of individual combatants, though the absorption of entire groups could be the only politically viable option in a transitional phase. In an ideal trajectory of SSR, disbandment would involve not just the military wing of the Houthis, but also bottom-up institutionalised militias (e.g. the SBF and HEF). All former fighters would have the possibility to apply to the army/YFG/police forces (including the coast guard), thus distributing their presence among different security bodies as a coup-proofing strategy. With regard to funding, the integration of former combatants would make available part of the finances of disbanded armed groups, which could be re-invested at a governorate level to support security localisation and pay security sector salaries, under the supervision of a central monitoring body involving international experts.

- Adopt a "network approach" and establish a regular consultation chain involving formal and informal security players in each governorate. The restructuring of army

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[20] For a broader and comparative picture, T. Eaton et al., *Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa*, Report, Chatham House, June 2019.

and police should occur through parallel processes in order to prevent rivalries for funds and top positions. The army should primarily deal with the defence of external borders, while the police forces and the YFG (if established) should focus on local security issues, thus designing a state-led but decentralised security network. This "network approach" to SSR should reinforce security at the level closest to the community in order to localise security provision. This in turn would foster interaction among local stakeholders and, potentially, coordination with traditional players (ex. *shuyukh*; *'uqqal*) who have extensive knowledge of local territories and social fabrics. A consultation chain among security players operating in the same governorate should be established and meet on a regular basis (e.g. three or four times a year) to pursue inclusive coordination. This would support information-sharing, confidence-building and community buy-in. The consultation chain should adopt a geographical criterion and should function like an early-warning system. The chain would start at village-level (*'uqqal*) and proceed to districts (*shuyyukh*), provinces (police chiefs), governorates (YFG division chiefs) and military regions (army commanders). In other words, *'uqqal* would regularly convene with the s*huyyukh* of their district, sharing their village perspectives. Both would report security issues/grievances/alerts to the provincial police chief, who would be charged to convene with the YFG division chief. Finally, the latter would meet with the army commander of the specific military region. Broader sessions at local council and/or governorate level could be held one or twice a year or as necessary. Such a network approach to security, however, could only work if the MoI and MoD have defined boundaries in terms of responsibilities and tasks (see paragraph 4).

- Strengthen police forces with professionalisation and community-building. Yemen needs to invest in the

professionalisation of its police forces, focusing on the general police (security, traffic) and the opening and/ or restoration of police stations as community venues, especially in rural areas. The common fight against Covid-19 could generate unexpected opportunities for outreach at a local level (e.g. supporting police forces in the supply/use of Personal Protective Equipment could facilitate future discussion on policing guidelines in case of emergencies and on how to interact with local communities).[21] Police forces are currently organised as A) general police, B) Najda (emergency police protecting governments buildings and embassies), C) firefighters, D) passport authority, E) Coast Guard, and F) the Criminal Investigative Department.[22] Pursuing the goal of reform, the country must first organise the police through selected recruitment and the provision of proper equipment. Police training should follow a community-policing approach to promote interaction with locals, especially in the areas held by the Houthis, where policemen have been side-lined or have become *de facto* Ansarullah agents. The Outcomes Document of the National Dialogue Conference emphasises the need to formulate "a new identity, culture and doctrine" for internal security forces and the military.

• Be wary of auxiliaries turning into peace spoilers. Preventing state-sponsored or state-institutionalised auxiliaries from becoming too powerful and unaccountable, or too autonomous of the MoI or MoD in the case of institutionalised forces[23], would support a stronger,

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[21] Thanks to A Heather Coyne for raising this point.

[22] J. Cook, *Women's Role in Yemen's Police Force*, Saferworld Gender Peace and Security, Workshop series, December 2014.

[23] C.V. Steinert, J.I. Steinert and S.C. Carey, "Spoilers of Peace: Pro-government militias as risk factors for conflict recurrence", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2019; A. Day, *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace. How militias and paramilitary groups shape post-conflict transitions*, United Nations University Center for Policy Research, 2020.

more community-oriented and accountable security sector. This is the case with the Presidential Protection Brigades, the only Yemeni forces allowed to remain in Aden after the warring parties withdrew under the 2019 Riyadh Agreement, and also the case of armed groups with informal but recurrent connections with the government that have been excluded from negotiations so far, such as the West Coast Forces commanded by Tareq Saleh (remnants of the Republican Guard, the Al Amaliqa "Giants" Brigade and the Tihama Resistance) and the controversial Abu Al Abbas Brigade in Taiz (a Salafi group close to the UAE, although it ran joint operations with the army and received a salary from the Yemeni government in 2019[24]).

- Transfer the Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU) from the Strategic Reserve Forces to the MoD. Doing so would transform this highly skilled force into an elite unit of the army, and not of the presidency, thus improving its accountability in terms of missions and budget. In the event of the formation of a YFG, some regional divisions (e.g. Abyan, Al Bayda, Shabwa, Hadhramawt) could also receive specific training in counterterrorism: this would build military expertise directly on the ground to better support the deployment of regional divisions of the YFG alongside the CTU when necessary.

- Rebuild Yemen's Coast Guard and Navy for Maritime Defence. Yemen needs to invest in its coast guard and navy (at MoI and MoD levels). Since 2016, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the United States have started to rebuild the Yemeni Coast Guard, with particular regard to the Arabian Sea district (Mukalla), but political fragmentation in key port cities has hamstrung national efforts at SSR on the maritime level too.[25] In a highly-compet-

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[24] *United Nations Security Council Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen…*, cit.

[25] See E. Ardemagni, *Rebuilding Yemen's Maritime Forces Hobbled by Internal and External Rivalries*, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 6 August 2020.

itive Aden subregion, maritime security is threatened by Yemen's instability and other issues (e.g. Somalia). Post-conflict Yemen could contribute to secure maritime waterways, for instance, as a member of the "Red Sea Alliance" (the Council of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden), although the exclusion of the UAE from this Saudi-led framework could become problematic for Yemeni government-STC political balance in the long-term. Investments in maritime defence would strengthen national security (coastline, port security, demining, energy and trade security, counter-smuggling activities, anti-piracy and illegal migration). This would also promote Yemeni development and economic relations with the Red Sea-Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa triangle.

- The role of external stakeholders: bet on multinational initiatives/teams. Yemen must find a way to involve external stakeholders who, in some cases, have allies and/or proxies in the country, while firmly keeping ownership of the SSR process. Multinational teams of Middle Eastern powers coordinated by the UN and/or EU forces themselves can offer a tentative way to: A) assist the MoI and MoD in internal reform and in the "demarcation" of operative responsibilities; B) train the armed forces, the police forces (and the YFG if established) in new Yemeni military academies; C) help Yemenis outline a national security strategy. In this context, Track 2 (non-governmental) initiatives can help to kick-off discussions on the technical aspects of SSR given the enduring rivalry among Middle Eastern powers with conflicting interests in Yemen (Saudi Arabia vs. Iran and UAE vs. Qatar). Jordan, a low-profile actor in the Saudi-led Coalition, could be involved in the training process due to its high level of military professionalisation, as it was in the 2000s with the formation of the Republican Guard.

Towards a Network Approach to Security: Financial Constraints and the Trajectory Issue

At the time of writing, the Yemeni state is unable to pay public salaries, including those of the security sector, on a regular basis. Moreover, the global financial constraints triggered by the Covid-19 crisis are likely to worsen the financial outlook for Yemen, impacting on international assistance, funding and SSR. This context represents the perfect environment for the further rise of non-state militias. Thanks partly to external backing, militias can provide a salary, thus boosting recruitment, informal economic networks and fighters' sense of belonging. Money constraints by domestic and international actors play against large-scale, extensive SSR with classical DDR (based on the integration of units). Conversely, a network approach to SSR would be much more incremental than an army-centric one. Following a transitional security arrangement governed by a comprehensive, inclusive political agreement (to be implemented by a national military-security body), SSR could adopt a community-centred perspective. The "sequencing issue" (i.e. reforming the army first, then the police) would be practically overcome by an open integration process. A large part of existing security-military manpower would be allowed to join reorganised (army, police and coast guard) and new (YFG) security-military forces. Former combatants would be redistributed according to a geographical and governorate-level criterion acknowledging the role of governorates and local councils in SSR (especially for the hypothetical YFG), in cooperation with the central government. Such a bold process needs shared and strong institutions: strong, consensus-based institutions are essential to the transition to federalism,[26] just as SSR is first and foremost about politics and the possibility and willingness to find new and mutually convenient reasons to stay together.

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[26] O. Al-Rawhani, *A Strong Central State: A Prerequisite for Effective Local Governance in Yemen*, Arab Reform Initiative, Bawader, October 2019.

Conclusions and
Policy Recommendations

Andrea Cellino, Annalisa Perteghella

Since the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic on 11 March 2020, there have been more than 50 million confirmed cases of Covid-19, including over 1.2 million deaths.[1] While no country has been spared, the hardest-hit areas at the moment are the Americas and Europe, closely followed by South-East Asia. Yet the impact of the pandemic is not limited to the health dimension: the economic and security dimensions have been equally impacted, leading the international community to advocate for a rethinking of security as a much broader concept, encompassing both "hard" and "soft" dimensions.

The current crisis has also brought about a global acknowledgement of the need to reckon with the disruptive potential of global, often intangible, threats such as viruses or environmental or climate-related disasters, and to look for opportunities to correct the course. In other words, the current crisis can be turned into an opportunity to "build back better", as widely stated in international organisations' pledges for the post-Covid world.

The need to build back better is most keenly felt in vulnerable environments: much like the coronavirus most affects patients with preconditions and chronic illnesses, the impact of the pandemic is destined to be greater in those countries with

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[1] WHO Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Dashboard, as of 10 November 2020

pre-existing conditions of vulnerability such as conflict or chronic insecurity.

The pandemic has indeed been found to potentially impact conflict-affected countries in different ways, above all by exacerbating inequalities and further burdening vulnerable groups, and by creating the circumstances for conflict parties to capitalise on the opportunities arising from policy responses to the pandemic.[2] The UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire on 23 March reflected this line of thinking, but it fell on deaf ears, as shown by the fact that global conflicts and insecurity have actually risen since then.

Indeed, in conflict areas, the power vacuum created by the need for states to reallocate resources to the fight against the pandemic has opened the door for armed actors to make headways in their struggle against central authorities, either by presenting themselves as alternatives to the state in managing the pandemic, or by simply ramping up their activities as the pandemic monopolises global attention. This was the case with the Islamic State, which has been ramping up its activities in both Iraq and Syria, but also in Europe.

In other contexts, rising insecurity has paradoxically resulted from the involvement of the security sector in the management of the pandemic. While this has helped guarantee public compliance with lockdown measures in countries with fragile institutions there is the risk of overreach: the risk of the military not giving back the additional powers obtained during the pandemic, thus maintaining a role in the governance of the country and creating permanent "states of exception".[3]

The Covid-19 pandemic clearly represents a watershed for the security sector. In this sense, building back better would mean building a response to the pandemic that puts people's health and safety first, as two interrelated and complementary

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[2] K. Mustasilta, *From Bad to Worse? The Impact(s) of Covid-19 on Conflict Dynamics*, Brief/13, EUISS, June 2020.

[3] G. Agamben, *State of Exception*, Chicago, ILL, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

dimensions of human security. This calls into question the potential for Security Sector Reform (SSR).

Since 2011, SSR efforts across the region have been sorely tested. The disruption of the political and institutional configurations of the region as a result of the Arab uprisings at the beginning of the last decade has heightened the fragility of many states and exacerbated sectarian conflicts across the region. Such developments and other country-specific circumstances have made traditionally state-centred SSR programs ultimately more challenging to implement, despite the hopes and opportunities fuelled by the uprisings and partially fulfilled in Tunisia.

With few exceptions, state institutions "have become severely weakened" to the point that, as highlighted by Ranj Alaaldin in his opening chapter, "it is now questionable if statehood can ever be rehabilitated as sub-national identities based around ethnicity and religion continue to thrive in uncontested and ungoverned spaces". Consequently, the already limited capacity of states to deliver services, including security, to the population has been further undermined.

Such disruptions at the state level have been accompanied and intensified by the rise and consolidation of an array of non-state armed groups and hybrid security providers.

The latter, in particular, are increasingly important because of their engagement not only in security, but, more broadly, in governance. As argued by Jérôme Drevon, "the concept of governance is more encompassing that security", as governance "generally refers to the organisation of civilian life in some territories, including through the provision of social services and local political institutions".

While non-state armed groups and hybrid security providers have thrived in conflicts and in spaces disputed by the weakening or collapse of state institutions, regional and international actors have increasingly used or come to terms with such groups in their efforts to solve crises or gain influence. The increased reliance of external powers on both non-state

and hybrid security providers appears to be the consequence of a reduced dependency on conventional forces, which has led them to opt instead for a combination of hybrid warfare and indigenous local forces.

As the chapters on to the conflicts in Libya, Iraq and Yemen argue, traditional approaches to implementing comprehensive SSR strategies to address capacity-building needs in the security sector, governmental and independent oversight of security institutions, and transparency and accountability mechanism, have proved ineffective in establishing sustainable reform processes in conflict areas across the region. Specific circumstances in each of these three countries have hampered the implementation of SSR programs. In Libya, an extremely fragmented security sector landscape, dominated by non-state and hybrid armed groups controlling the political economy – in addition to foreign interference – has prevented a political deal opening opportunities for effective reforms. In Iraq, the top-down US-led SSR efforts, initially limited to training and equipment, have proven ill-suited to encourage local leadership in a political environment dominated by sectarian divisions. In Yemen, army-centric SSR efforts did not focus sufficiently on local communities as part of a decentralised process of state rebuilding, thus failing to adapt to increasingly localised and fragmented conflict dynamics.

A key challenge for traditional SSR programs in conflict-affected countries is that they have to operate in utterly unstable contexts, lacking the security balance that is traditionally considered necessary to stabilise the security environment before the implementation of proper SSR, whether at the national or local level.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has added another element to an already troubling picture for stabilisation and reform efforts across the MENA region. In particular, as highlighted above, the combination of conflict conditions and seriously weakened state effectiveness, including in the health sector, has resulted in a response to the pandemic dominated

by security-driven measures, often generating abuse by either state or hybrid security actors, and further undermining human security.

This study confirms that SSR programs and interventions in fragile and conflict-afflicted contexts can and should be implemented, as these interventions are necessary to complement and reinforce genuine peace-making efforts. However, to be effective, SSR programs must be adapt to the developments and challenges that arouse throughout the region after 2011, particularly those resulting from the increasing reliance on hybrid security actors. These challenges have been greatly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. On this basis, as well as the findings of the authors, we can draw some general conclusions to frame new perspectives on Security Sector Reform in the MENA Region:

- The current situation across the MENA region is one of systematically – and at times, purposefully - weakened state institutions. Even in the case of relatively resilient state structures, there persists a dominance of fragility and instability, which is prone to relapse into pre-existing conflicts, or to be influenced by current regional ones.

- The success of non-state or hybrid security groups has filled a short-term security vacuum and represents a direct response to states' failure.

- The cases of Libya, Iraq and Yemen confirm the limits of traditional DDR and SSR approaches in the region. Hence, international development support needs to re-evaluate how to "view and address complex, inter-connected issues: the future of sovereignty, the role, responsibilities and accountability of the state; and the role, responsibilities and accountability of non-state actors" (R. Alaaldin).

- More specifically and practically, SSR efforts need to be reconsidered in terms of:

    — How to harness the involvement of hybrid actors

and incorporate them into effective SSR programs. This may involve complementing macro-level institutional SSR programs with local-level community engagement that acknowledges the hybrid nature of security governance.

— How to make hybrid actors accountable: as these groups cannot always be demobilised or integrated into security services, their involvement in governance should not be limited to security only, as additional possibilities for transformation exist.

— How to involve a broader range of security sector stakeholders: local administrations, the justice sector, civil society, media, other influence groups. The economic and social embeddedness of hybrid actors in the local communities needs to be considered to ultimately safeguard the communities' well-being and human security.

— How to effectively address international patronage and support for non-state and hybrid security actors. Although this cannot be addressed by development programs, key international donors should step up and coordinate their efforts in this area.

— How to distinguish between different hybrid actors and classify them according to their willingness to reform and integrate into governance frameworks, and their potential capacity to contribute to stabilisation efforts and SSR (see J. Harchaoui's five ratings).

— How to address and implement security arrangements at the local level without abandoning the need for state-level approaches and institution-building. Community-oriented approaches need to be based on "localised security" in a unified state. This may involve coupling SSR with political reforms such as the transformation of state authority and its possible decentralisation.

- How to expand SSR support from simple and ultimately unproductive capacity building towards encompassing mechanisms conducive to more accountability, transparency and effectiveness. This should involve oversight mechanisms, either by local administrations, parliaments (if present and effective) or existing internal oversight institutions, in particular those that can internally address corruption and illegal revenue generation schemes.
- Because of the pandemic, we now face a sense of urgency in bringing human security back at the core of our SSR strategies across the region. The human security/social crisis related to the pandemic, as well as the crippling economic crisis, are going to have a multifaceted impact across the region:
  - As we are already seeing in the three case studies, Covid-19 is affecting fragile states and contexts more severely, potentially expanding and intensifying existing crises.
  - Falling oil prices are a specific additional challenge for countries like Iraq and Libya.
  - Multilateral support for development aid, including SSR support, is likely to be weakened because of the pandemic-induced global economic crisis.

As the states that dealt successfully with the pandemic have shown, state coordination in overseeing and distributing resources is essential, and needs to be effective at the local level as well. Hence, while SSR programs need to increasingly incorporate local actors both within and outside the security sector, broader state institutional reforms remain indispensable.

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