05.

Sharing Authority, Legitimacy, Capacity: Informal Security Providers

United Nations

Why We Do This

Fragility, conflict and violence massively disrupt development. But in response, too often we focus on the urgent, not the important. One essential building block for stability is to foster functioning, accountable national security sector institutions that are sustainably financed. The United Nations, in partnership with the World Bank, has commissioned a cadre of experts and research institutions to develop nine policy briefs on the role of security sector reform and governance (SSR&G) in preventing conflict and sustaining peace. Together, these Briefs offer a timely analysis of the risks of weakened, dysfunctional security institutions, of the exorbitant cost of predatory behaviour by security providers, and of poor public financial management of security expenditures. They explore new SSR&G solutions in which the United Nations and the World Bank may cooperate to help countries build more affordable, accountable, and inclusive institutions that support them to transition out of fragility and create safer environments conducive to sustainable development and well-being.

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List of Policy Briefs

01. We Must Think and Work Politically

02. World Bank / United Nations: Towards Shared Understandings of Power Dynamics

03. Governing Security, Preventing Violence

04. Inclusion of Women Builds Trust and Legitimacy

05. Sharing Authority, Legitimacy, Capacity: Informal Security Providers

06. 'Rightsizing' Security Institutions

07. Reliable Financing Needs Countering Corruption

08. Bringing Revenue Volatility Down: Sustainable National Financing

09. International Funding in Fragile Contexts

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The United Nations supports nationally led security sector reform.
Our goal is to help states and societies develop effective, inclusive,
and accountable security institutions that contribute to national and
international security and sustainable development.

Integrity. Accountability. *Genuine* security.

United Nations action on security sector reform & governance

Executive Summary

This policy brief explores the complex ways that informality in the security sector interacts with formal institutions, particularly in the context of security sector reform (SSR). By drawing on literature reviews and case studies, it examines the influence of informal networks, actors and processes on decision-making and policy implementation within the sector. Furthermore, it discusses how interventions by key stakeholders such as the United Nations and the World Bank can shape hybrid security systems, taking into account their agendas, norms and standards, as well as associated risks.

Analysis of the networks and processes that bridge formality and informality is critical to enhancing our understanding of how decisions are made and power is distributed within security sectors. It is therefore important to clarify the roles of non-state, informal and customary security institutions, and to map their interplay with formal State security entities. This calls for a nuanced approach, as hybrid security is characterised by multiple non-state providers and authority-sharing among a variety of actors, networks and institutions. Adopting a lens of social inclusion is paramount to distinguish functional public authority from arrangements that merely reinforce elite bargains within hybrid security orders.

It is imperative that thorough analysis of informal security arrangements is systematically incorporated into assessment missions and political economy analyses of the security sector. Identifying hybrid processes that foster inclusion and accountability, while recognising those that reinforce exclusion and violence, is essential to promoting democratic security governance. It is also crucial that oversight mechanisms are well understood in contexts where informal networks have an influence on resource allocation and security provision. Programme design, particularly for SSR with a legal focus, should consider these hybrid security arrangements. This means reevaluating public expenditure reviews to account for the financing of non-state security mechanisms, and the design of oversight and control mechanisms to ensure that non-state actors respect human rights. Integrating informal actors, norms, and networks into monitoring and evaluation processes can also provide valuable insights. On top of this, building the capacity of non-state actors to support, rather than hinder, security sector governance is essential. Lastly, it should be a priority to strengthen SSR expertise in Southern countries by supporting local capacities grounded in the social, political, and security environments that are targeted for reform.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Prevailing approaches to peacebuilding and security sector reform (SSR) – and the associated policy literature – tend to emphasize Westphalian and Weberian notions of the State, characterised by a monopoly on legitimate violence and the derivation of public authority from legal-rational norms. SSR processes have therefore been focused on reforming structural and formal arrangements of the State and its security and justice institutions, and on meeting tangible policy goals, including: training and professionalizing armed forces, strengthening mechanisms of civilian control, improving management of security budgets, reforming police and courts, introducing mechanisms of parliamentary accountability, and ensuring ex-combatants can successfully engage in alternative livelihoods upon their reintegration into the civilian world. However, in practice, it has proved challenging to implement even modest reforms, let alone significant transformations in security governance.

This failure to fully realize reforms is due in part to a failure of SSR programming to appropriately respond to the reality of many countries in the Global South – where political and social transactions tend to occur amid informal norms and within informal systems that operate alongside nominally formal political institutions. When SSR is aimed at State institutions, legal frameworks and codified standards, reform efforts remain grounded in assumptions that do not capture the full scope of local needs. While it is essential that the State dimension of security is controlled, the informal security governance mechanisms that frequently mark local contexts must also be well-understood to enable successful SSR.

Importantly, toolkits for SSR and "State-building" increasingly acknowledge the informal security and justice sector. Yet, these resources still rest on insufficient empirical conceptions of how the sector functions in many countries, and how the complex interplay between formal and informal institutions impacts lives and communities.

The core hypothesis of this policy brief is that these formal and informal systems overlap and interrelate, and hence that State and informal networks are closely intertwined.

Thus, it is crucial to identify the informal networks, actors and processes that influence decision-making and policy implementation in the security sector. To that end, the model of "hybridity" can be helpful. It illuminates intersections of formality and informality and offers a more nuanced view of decision-making processes and power distribution in the sector, recognising that a variety of security actors draw on a variety of sources of authority and legitimacy.

1.1 Context

Recent policy literature on stabilization and security reform, though ample, is typically couched in the short-term language of statecraft and is not based on analysis of the way security institutions sustain power relations in "fragile" – or, indeed, "stabilized" – States. The policy literature on SSR, and on its place in stabilization and State-building processes, is largely prescriptive. If political obstacles to reform are acknowledged, they tend to be attributed to an absence of political will or a lack of "local ownership".[1] Still, there has been some recognition of the shortcomings of international engagement, as well as the fact that interventions by well-resourced international actors are mediated through their reliance on local (often, corrupt and unreliable) elites and armed groups. This can divert these efforts from declared mandates and harm the security and welfare of the local people and communities they are meant to protect.[2] All too often, international peacebuilders and humanitarian actors are accountable only to their own institutions and governments, and not to the people impacted by their interventions.

The UN policy framework on SSR[3] – which led to the emergence of UN Security Council resolution 2151 (2014)[4] – provides insight into what has shaped the global SSR agenda. The policy describes SSR as a process that would enhance an effective and accountable security sector that serves States and their people without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law. This framework for SSR has been complemented by new modes of analysis that are increasingly influential in policy circles. For instance, the

International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has called for research directed at better understanding hybrid political orders (HPOs).

The World Bank's 2011 World Development Report (WDR) was an important step in that direction. It served as the basis for a conceptual shift in security by insisting that legitimate and capable institutions are indeed the policy solution to citizen insecurity, while at the same time acknowledging that building these institutions is a long-term exercise and one that need not follow a Western model. As the premier multilateral development institution, it was significant that the World Bank made this argument; however, the research and analysis presented in the 2011 WDR failed to demonstrate the possible ways forward.

The African Union (AU), which adopted its SSR policy framework in 2013, has conceived of the process as one in which countries can formulate anew or reorient the policies, structures and capabilities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector – including "informal, traditional and customary authorities" – to make them more effective and efficient and more responsive to democratic control and to the security and justice needs of the people.[5] ECOWAS also developed a *Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance,* adopted in 2017, to assist its Member States in implementing efficient, effective, accountable and transparent security sector structures and processes, inclusive of "non-statutory bodies".[6] This regional leadership is critical to achieving a common approach to SSR across Africa.[7]

Issue-specific security research, such as recent work by the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) on countering violent extremism (CVE), has also highlighted the need to move away from military approaches by government actors and instead make investments in strengthening (informal) social and communal resilience.[8] The importance of including customary institutions in SSR processes is increasingly referenced in policy documents, senior policy level debates and guidance notes as well. But there is little indication that this has had any meaningful influence on programme or donor funding priorities. Only a handful of donors have provided substantive support to informal institutions, and even then, this has represented very little of the total SSR funding provided at the country level.[9]

It could not be clearer that the considerable ambiguity surrounding this issue in international policy discourse must be resolved. Both the AU and ECOWAS have endorsed a hybrid model rather explicitly (though there is little evidence it has been meaningfully implemented), but the position of the broader international community and development agencies is less straightforward. Despite assertions such as that of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its 2011 policy paper on the role of governance in peacebuilding, that "strengthening informal institutions and networks" is a key to fostering "resilient societies" and strengthening local governance, along with promises to "broaden participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups, and to provide flexible support to state and non-state institutions alike",[10] this has not come to fruition on the ground. Similar statements have appeared in major multilateral and donor policy documents, yet the reality is, "in peacebuilding, international agencies have shown ambivalence toward customary structures, sometimes seeing them as socially regressive and sometimes as valid helpmeets for peace."[11]

Approaches to SSR have only begun to touch on the deeper politics of reform or to draw in any systematic way on critical literature on the State, HPOs, and security. The global SSR and "State-building" toolkit continues to refer to the informal security and justice sector in ways that reveal a lack of understanding of this sector and of the complex intersections that occur between formal institutions and informal actors, much less the implications for reform efforts seeking to build Weberian institutions. In truth, security governance in many countries is administered through an amalgam of statutory and non-statutory actors and institutions operating within context-specific systems of power sharing.

1.2 Objective

The main objective of this policy brief is to describe the dynamics underlying interactions between formal and informal security providers around the world, and to identify challenges and opportunities in this area, particularly for the United Nations and the World Bank. To meet these objectives, five research questions were formulated:

1   **How is informality embedded in formal institutions, how does it influence the way they function, and what are the implications for reform?**

In other words, to what extent do State security institutions combine both formal (legal) and informal (non-codified) norms and networks to function and govern? And, how thoroughly have informal logics and solidarities penetrated (nominally) formal structures and decision-making processes? This question demands an exploration of the informal within the formal, and the formal within the informal. Actors in formal (codified) systems are not necessarily (or not exclusively) motivated by rational-bureaucratic logic, but by norms and codes still rooted in customs and traditions or by new emerging norms and practices. Indigenous, generational and informal solidarities embedded in state structures can thus lead to power struggles between competing social groups. This often explains the politics (and failure) of SSR. Moreover, gender comes into play in these processes, especially in the ways equality for women in the armed forces is undermined by traditional and religious practices.

2   **How do non-State security actors interact with and seek to influence State security institutions?**
This question is aimed at understanding the nature and implications of interactions between the security institutions of the State and traditional and customary structures, which are often local. These include clans, tribes, village elders, religious leaders and healers, among others, as well as "newer" non-state actors such as self-defence groups established by local populations, militias and vigilante groups. These informal structures and systems simultaneously complement and contest the formal organs of the State. Though they provide the State with some resiliency and may even supplement and subsidize the functioning of its institutions, they also challenge its rational-legal norms and its formal systems of accountability.

3   **How do political and other elites instrumentalize security institutions to consolidate their grip on power, and how do they negotiate the political terrain between formality and informality?**
And, when and how do local institutions become co-opted by powerful and non-accountable interests? What is the role of political elites in developing formal and informal security policies, and what influence do they have over the exercise of policing, power and representation? In Africa, formal and informal institutions alike are often considered functional by politico-administrative elites, who therefore mobilize both to legitimize their power and authority. This can lead to dual hierarchies in which modern and traditional elites are each invested, but which are typically regulated by norms emanating from beyond the rational-legal sphere.

4   **How does hybridity impact the security and entitlements of citizens in African States, and in particular, populations facing vulnerability, social exclusion and inequity?**
Who benefits, or conversely, who suffers, from hybrid security arrangements to what degree, and in what contexts and/or arenas? The subjective beliefs and practical experiences of social actors affected by these security arrangements should be scrutinized, to better capture and understand how security and insecurity are perceived and experienced. This means examining how citizens navigate, and even legitimize, these complementary and contradictory spheres in their daily lives. Frequently, it is informal relationships that determine the ways citizens perceive, experience and respond to State and local security institutions in hybrid systems. This can be both negative and positive; for, informal relationships may reinforce patronage, corruption, exclusion and disempowerment at the national and local levels, but may also enable and encourage citizen buy-in for more effective security and justice delivery and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

5   **How can viable and accountable institutions be built in the context of hybridity and informality?**
It is important to understand how oversight mechanisms operate in situations where parallel channels of political influence and resource distribution exist, in the context of informal networks and traditional relationships. Is the concept of hybridity sensitive to legitimate and accountable authority, or does it undermine this as a long-term goal? And how, if at all, can oversight mechanisms be reinforced through informal means?

As this brief explains, different forms of checks and balances, rooted in both traditional and modern sources of legitimacy, constitute **"hybrid security governance mechanisms"** that can reinforce democratic oversight and accountability and help guarantee State and human security. This brief describes the link between theoretical and practical concepts of hybrid security governance and notions of accountability and legitimacy. The five questions that guided this analysis were designed to identify ways in which the United Nations and the World Bank, with their own agendas, norms and standards, can tap into and influence hybrid security systems as well as

how their interventions can affect the balance of power in both the formal and informal spheres, while mitigating the risks of engaging in security governance.

1.3 Contribution to the research

By applying a neo-institutional theoretical framework and incorporating sociological and anthropological perspectives on the day-to-day functioning of State bureaucracies, this policy brief provides new insight into relevant networks and alliances as well as the competition, tensions and conflicts at play within defence and security sectors. This may shed some light on why certain SSR processes have failed, or at least the difficulties that arose in implementing them, and may help explain how hybrid security systems are experienced at the grassroots level by their intended beneficiaries. This brief is meant to capture how these systems affect the lives of vulnerable groups and how they shape citizen expectations of security and security entitlements.

Through these different strands of analysis, the hope is that this brief can offer more accurate assessments of precisely how and why hybrid security arrangements work, and for whom. This has important policy implications for security governance around the world. But ultimately, the intent is to explore how the concept of hybridity can inform a new approach to security and security governance that results in more effective systems and more durable peace-building processes.

1.4 Categories of analysis and key concepts

Neo-institutional theory defines institutions as the formal and informal rules, norms and standards that shape decisions on the distribution of power and the organization of a given society. Within this framework, **formal institutions** are the structures grounded in the organizational and bureaucratic order that is derived from any constitutional and legal architecture (as established after independence in many Southern countries), including constitutions, laws, decrees and corresponding administrative structures such as legislatures, ministries, rule of law bodies, political parties and so on. Formal institutions are promoted and enforced by actors operating under official mandates.

By contrast, **informal institutions** are defined by a set of implicit precepts. In these institutions: (1) actors share a common set of expectations and (2) rely on simple forms of reciprocity; (3) the parameters are understood by each actor but are not codified; (4) exchanges are temporally non-specific and (5) are implemented through unofficial channels with no particular attention paid to objectives or methods; and (6) perceived breaches are enforced by informal actors themselves. Often, informal institutions reflect both sociocultural norms and the dynamics that exist among socioeconomic classes (such as caste systems) and communities (such as different ethnic groups). Their decision-making tends to be influenced by prevailing power relations and the social networks in which they are embedded, and by alternative norms and codes of behaviour that may be framed in the language of "custom", "tradition" or "religion", or situated in various forms of patronage.

In other words, "formal" refers to codified institutions and "informal" to non-codified institutions. However, the value of a historical and sociological perspective lies in its recognition that this does not represent an inherent duality. In fact, a wide variety of institutions, many of them informal, operate alongside or within formal political institutions and play a role in their decision-making processes.

Recently, scholars have proposed the concept of hybridity as a lens through which political orders in the Global South may be analysed. Intended to capture the realities of social interpenetration and the interaction between formal State apparatuses and informal institutions, the concept offers an alternative to the notion of "fragile states".[12] It also presents options beyond the legal-rational approach that underlies most public policy and is promoted by international donors and policymakers, particularly in peacebuilding.

The fact that hybridity can mean different things in different contexts poses a challenge.[13] Similarly, informal actors and institutions – like their formal counterparts – may dispense security in some contexts for some populations, while delivering insecurity in other contexts to other populations. Informal actors may also shift their alliances over time, preying on communities they once protected, as they can potentially be mobilized by both political and criminal actors. This makes it difficult to predict the character and outcomes of hybrid systems, particularly in the absence of meaningful regulation or accountability mechanisms.

2. What have we learned?

2.1 From the literature

Research on how security bodies and structures interact with the power and patronage structures of hybrid political orders, either locally or nationally, is scant. Thus, too little is known about the ways formal security arrangements interconnect with parallel powers, as well as the ways ethnic and religious identities are manipulated as instruments of security policy.[14] Detailed micro-analysis of security institutions and practices, in both State and non-state security contexts, is lacking.

Meanwhile, terms like "hybrid political orders" (HPOs) and "hybrid governance" have entered common use in an attempt to depict "the contested nature of governance and security arrangements in fragile and post-conflict states".[15] Specifically, the argument has been made that the failure of a State to provide public goods does not necessarily lead to disorder, because actors, organizations and institutions generally observe hybrid norms that merge formal, informal, and universal conventions. Security is then negotiated and enforced through overlapping and interwoven processes, both formal and informal. This stream of literature maintains that SSR implies shifts in the balance of power within governments and security establishments.

The literature surveyed here includes studies of local-level security, policing and justice arrangements. Many of these studies have aimed to provide good-practice examples of how such arrangements can serve as alternatives to failing State security. Analyses of governance contexts also seek to explain the interaction of traditional, customary or clientelist logics with modern, imported notions of rationality.[16] However, this literature does not conceptualize hybridity as a "grafting together of two separate entities to produce a third entity."[17] Instead, it refers to "a continual process of (re)negotiation and transformation" of political orders.[18]

It is in HPOs that we can see the tensions between the declared functions of security actors and institutions and their undeclared motives. For example, Mallet has explored the security and authority roles of local chiefs in Northern Mozambique through associations with state officials and international donors;[19] and Goodhand and Mansfield have argued that Afghanistan's warlords exploit control over illicit economies, using a patrimonial "joint extraction regime" to build political legitimacy by providing security and social services.[20] Similarly, Menkhaus introduced the concept of the "mediated state" in part to describe the reality in Somalia – where "informal systems of adaptation, security, and governance" arose "in response to the prolonged absence of a central government" and forced the government to partner, co-opt or sub-contract State security functions to local "coalitions of business groups, traditional authorities, and civic groups" in order to secure trading markets and establish local courts.[21]

What is especially important here is to understand how State authorities can best "manage, exploit, and coexist with" HPOs to provide human and national security.[22] Indeed, in countries dominated by corrupt or abusive institutions, it is often those formally responsible for delivering security and justice who perpetrate insecurity.[23] At the same time, actors alleged to be sources of insecurity, such as warlords in Afghanistan, may offer very real, if alternative, forms of protection.[24] These examples, from hybrid political spaces in which international and national actors are collaborating and competing, hardly represent the "neutral, uncontested and self-contained spaces described in the mainstream security literature".[25] Moreover, there is a tendency in policy analyses to entirely sidestep the political interests and calculations of key actors in this context, including international actors. Hence, one of the most important contributions to the literature has been analysis that situates these actors as objects of study, instead of taking their stated policy goals as a starting point for inquiry.[26] As for the way African states relate to hybridity, Scheye contends that "[b]ecause of the political sensitivity of justice and security, not to mention its oft-times tenuous legitimacy, the post-colonial fragile state may be reluctant and/or averse to permit or recognise other actors' participation in its distribution of delivery, whether it be 'contracted out' or provided by a non-state actor."[27] In these States, opaque arrangements

are often preferred, and exist somewhere between formality and informality. But the risk for unaccountable use of these structures by a variety of political interests broadens the considerations that must be weighed in these contexts, beyond those identified by Scheye. To that end, the **"mosaic security" concept** – introduced in a report published with UN support in January 2018 – is similar to that of hybridity and "acknowledges the hybrid security contexts we are currently witnessing" but seeks to address these "more candidly – both in political and institutional terms".[28] As this literature review shows, HPOs are difficult to investigate and categorize empirically. Analysis of how power is contested and negotiated within HPOs "must be carefully separated from assertions about their political or normative desirability as governance arrangements".[29] Informal structures also raise important questions, including to whom they are accountable, how the public interest is protected against patronage and profit motives, and whether they legitimize the inclusion of spoilers within government. In 2009, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) launched the "Global Uncertainties: Security in an Africa of Networked, Multilevel governance" project to learn more about how communities and States understand security (and insecurity), to answer some of these questions. The programme was built on the observation that all governance (especially in Africa) is multilevel and focused not only on how key conflict-management institutions evolve but how operations within the networks in which they are embedded change as a result.[30]

The literature also reflects an interest in the subjective beliefs and lived experiences of social actors affected by security arrangements. Bagayoko, Hutchful and Luckham have argued, for instance, that formal State security chains of command and accountability have been supplemented or superseded by informal patronage. In their view, understanding hybrid security orders in Africa therefore requires a thorough knowledge of the "social hierarchies… which penetrate security institutions and shape their interactions with elites", informing leadership, recruitment and promotion in the security sector.[31] They offer examples of the informal solidarities that may be relevant in various contexts, including:

- the *sinankunya* or *rakiré* systems (known in English as "joking relationships"), in West Africa
- caste systems and the social obligations deriving from them (as reflected in the division of labour)

- secret societies with initiation rituals
- regional networks and alliances (including those that overlap geographical boundaries)
- kinship networks
- patriarchies that reject women based on cultural stereotypes of their role in society

Despite their complexities, it is crucial that our knowledge of hybrid security decision-making processes is expanded, as demonstrated by the coups in Mali in August 2020 and May 2021, and in Guinea in September 2021 – both countries that have been conducting so-called "holistic" SSR processes for roughly a decade, partly with United Nations support (through MINUSMA in Mali and the UNDP in Guinea). What this makes clear is that, beyond the formal security architecture, the importance of any number of other factors cannot be discounted, such as informal recruitment and promotion processes, parallel chains of command (extending from the negotiation of internal hierarchies among informal actors), intergenerational relationships (for example between elders and youth in armed forces), alternative norms and codes of behaviour, the political economy of militaries, and the ways power is structured around resources within military and security apparatuses themselves.

Ultimately, the concept of hybridity fundamentally presents the possibility of a transformation, or even inversion, of the missions of defence and security forces in the contemporary security context. The difficulties that have arisen in implementing SSR processes demand some reflection on the current nature of the security-defence continuum. Indeed, according to the Westphalian conception of security – which has governed the format not only of Western armies but also of post-colonial forces – the military has been seen almost exclusively as an instrument of intervention outside national borders, whether driven by a defensive or offensive logic, except when called to manage domestic disturbances to public order. This model reaches back to the 18th century, when Hippolyte de Guibert strictly distinguished between "the public force from outside" and "the public force from within".[32]

Yet today, addressing insecurity in Saharo-Sahelian Africa relies on cooperation between and among different categories of armed forces, against both internal threats and shared transnational threats. The security and conflict

context is also such that intervention by armed forces within national borders is not uncommon and can be the locus of the gravest threats to the security of a State and its population. Moreover, the missions of security forces traditionally confined to the national sphere (police, gendarmerie and national guards) increasingly incorporate external dimensions, due to the transregional nature of the threats posed by criminal actors who challenge the authority of the State.

It is important to note, too, that analysis of informal security providers can help to better capture gender inequalities produced by the patriarchal culture that has long permeated formal security mechanisms. In some contexts, this is reinforced by law, religion and wider cultural norms, which can place the accommodation of cultural norms and values at odds with imperatives to advance women's rights. For instance, in Somalia, indirect suffrage has affirmed the historic clan system but curtailed the ability of women to impact the vote.[33] This gendered dynamic is also a feature of some customary judicial systems, which may be more accessible and enjoy more public confidence but may also be biased against women. Similar tensions and barriers can result from daily regulation of the social norms and security of vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as persons living with disabilities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) population. Biases and exclusion may be reinforced by religious institutions and legitimized by traditional authorities, with enforcement sometimes carried out by informal security or policing structures under their control.[34]

In 2014, research undertaken by the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) on the implications of hybrid security for State-building sought to achieve five objectives that continue to serve as valuable guides for ongoing and future analysis.[35] From this research and the literature reviewed here, some important lessons can be drawn:

First, it is necessary to identify and deepen our understanding of the networks and processes that span the divide between formality and informality, to develop a more realistic view of how decisions are made, and power is distributed within the African security sector.

Second, it is important to clarify the role of non-state/informal/customary security institutions and the ways they interact and interface with formal State security institutions. Hybrid security orders are characterised

by the existence of multiple non-state providers, as the State shares its authority, legitimacy and capacity with other actors, networks and institutions. Analysts and policymakers alike must be better equipped to ground their analysis in empirical knowledge about how these arrangements operate in practical terms.

Third, we must gain a better grasp of the "real economy" of security provisioning in hybrid systems, as well as the patterns of inclusion and exclusion associated with these systems. In fact, the lens of social inclusion should be used to distinguish HPOs that "provide for workable public authority from HPOs that merely reinforce 'elite bargains', 'coalitions' or 'pacts', or only seek the capacity to contain violence and to secure the property, economic interests, and opportunities of pact members.

Fourth, the hybridity approach must not idealize or romanticize the informal domain. The stakeholders, standards and networks influencing the informal institutions of any country should be systematically assessed, not only to determine their operational efficiency but also their role vis-à-vis the protection of human rights and the satisfaction of security and development needs. Many hybrid security orders are inclusive in some respects but maintain "limited access orders" in service of the patriarchy, thereby generating inequalities and human rights abuses.

Fifth, the concept of hybridity must become more than an analytical tool used to explain the functions and dysfunctions of security systems. It can and should be a guide to action. For, in its broadest sense, hybridity is a strategy, capable of delivering more effective security by mobilizing overlapping networks and values in a system of checks and balances that informs and reinforces more equitable security governance.

2.2 From in-country experience

Between 2014 and 2017, ASSN conducted a multi-country study on hybrid security governance in Africa, focused on Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somaliland and South Africa.[36] For example, in **Sierra Leone**, informal security structures materialized both during and after a decade-long rebel war, fought from 1991 to 2002. Human rights abuses committed by some members of the armed

forces, known as *"sobels"*, fomented mistrust between civilians and the military; so, in a bid to assume responsibility for their own security, ordinary citizens established Civil Defence Forces (CDFs) out of local hunting groups. Comparable cases include the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Borno State of Nigeria and the "Arrow Boys" of Central Africa and South Sudan.

Informality remained woven into the post-war security apparatus of Sierra Leone through a deliberate effort to integrate customary institutions into the State's security and justice architecture, under the guise of decentralization. Chiefdom security committees were established and aligned with provincial and district level security committees, integrating traditional chiefs into the national security and intelligence structure. The country's justice system is also hybrid, in that its constitution recognises traditional institutions and their sphere of influence.

In northern **Côte d'Ivoire**, the *Dozo* are members not of an ethnic group but of a brotherhood of traditional West African hunters, organized in associations known as *donzo ton*. In the 1990s, their influence grew when President Félix Houphouët-Boigny called on citizens to assist the police in controlling crime. The Dozo did so quite successfully, gaining them fame and political influence, and a prominent role in the civil war – when they were hired by locals on both sides of the conflict to serve as combatants, escorts, traffic controllers and guards. This fed into the growth of *Benkadi* groups (networked donzo ton) throughout Côte d'Ivoire, as the civil war and a fragile peace drove demand for local security. In Abidjan and Bouaké, leaders of donzo ton opened security offices, and unemployed men from around the country sought to be initiated as Dozo, to access work as well-paid security guards. But there were well-documented problems associated with the Dozo during the war, including human rights abuses and extortion; a fact that was highlighted by media after the war, when the new government appeared ambivalent about containing these actors and continued to rely on them to keep any insurgency at bay.

The experiences of both Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire suggest that security lies at the very core of the peacebuilding process. Decisions about how to respond to and interact with the various layers of forces that exist in post-conflict contexts can clearly be critical to the success of efforts to achieve security, particularly given the State security and rule of law vacuum that tends to develop during conflict. In this respect, the perspectives of end users on the ground may differ from the top-down perspectives of State security sector actors, political elites and the international community, but it is the latter which are likely to inform State-building processes. This is why it is not enough to dismantle irregular and customary force structures that emerge to perform security and policing functions during conflict without addressing the dynamics that generated them. Demands from below for local security and order, and from above for the security needs of the State, must both shape decision-making about these structures and their functions, as a crucial means of ensuring the evolution of State-sanctioned security.

In **Liberia,** informal security and policing mechanisms have also been integrated into the formal security structure. For instance, fourteen years into civil war, Liberia established a system of Peace Huts to provide conflict resolution and mediation services to citizens at the community level. The Peace huts are modelled on the century-old *Palava Hut* system, traditionally run by men and used to address disputes. But Liberian women have now adapted this system to suit their needs, to engage in gender-sensitive transitional justice and security sector reform activities. That said, there is some ambivalence in Liberia about the benefit of this kind of hybridity, as expressed in a public expenditure review (PER) of the country's security sector, which acknowledged the positive role that traditional and customary institutions have played in delivering security but castigated them for their cultural shortcomings.[37]

In **Nigeria**, the security landscape has transformed with the rise of grassroots security actors such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and vigilante and neighbourhood watch groups, which play key roles either as standalone entities or in concert with State security actors. In the northeastern part of the country, the CJTF is on the frontlines of the battle against insurgency and is officially recognised and supported by the State as a complement to the work of the armed forces and police. On top of this, in response to a recent wave of insecurity, a new State-level security structure has been formed as well as two regional forces, all with informal actors. These regional forces are funded directly by the governments of the regions they serve, with the federal government otherwise maintaining an exclusive mandate for security. And at the State level, Operation Rainbow functions as a

multilevel security agency, as it is funded by the Plateau State Government (in central Nigeria), staffed by personnel from organizations under the control of the federal government, and engages neighbourhood watch groups to provide local intelligence.[38]

It is **Somalia** that provides the classic example of hybridization, however. The Somali tradition of the *abbaan* typifies a customary system of governance that ensures the provision of security, in this case for outsiders moving through clan territory. This tradition dates to the precolonial era but was revived after the collapse of the Somali State, when there was a proliferation of international aid workers requiring safe passage.[39] Abbaan have a place in the security landscape because "communities that have been cut off from effective state authority—whether out of governmental indifference to marginal frontier territories, or because of protracted warfare, or because of vested local and external interests in perpetuating conditions of state failure—consistently seek to devise arrangements to provide for themselves the core functions that the missing state is supposed to assume, especially basic security."[40]

The Police-Darwish concept used in Somalia also exemplifies this kind of security hybridization.[41] The model, outlined in the country's 2017 National Security Architecture, has been endorsed by the international community. It takes progressive steps to co-opt trusted traditional clan-based security providers within their sub-federal home territories, as a form of police with some paramilitary capabilities. This programme is still in its relatively early stages and has not been without challenges, with questions still outstanding regarding appropriate vetting and training, as well as standard concerns over misconduct.[42] However, even critics of the co-optation of clan militias acknowledge their potential value in terms of community policing and counterterrorism, as well as the benefit of bringing these militias under the chain of government control and accountability.[43]

In Somaliland, where tribal practices and institutions were integrated into the peacebuilding process, traditional elites from their respective clans were elected to the federal government in 2012. And though it is controversial, for now, Somalia also continues to employ a model in which clan elders elect parliamentarians, who in turn elect the President. This follows the legacy of the "4.5 formula" that was introduced in 2000 during peace and

reconciliation talks in Arta, Djibouti – which divided ethnic Somali communities into five groups along clan lines, four of five formed from the "major clans" and one(half) from all the remaining (minority) clans, for the purposes of power sharing.[44]

Hybridity has been successful in other African countries as well. Take **Rwanda**, which can claim the remarkable achievement of preserving peace and order through neighbourhood militias acting as Local Defence Forces that work closely with police. And in **Ethiopia,** traditional leaders have been incorporated into a consultative council of regional governments.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), informal actors have also responded to the failure of States to provide security or services in ways that have sometimes been decisive in shaping regional power struggles, as was the case in **Libya**.[45] Informal actors may in fact represent the single greatest impediment to the reconstitution of state authority in the MENA region, having established themselves in some places as a fixed feature of the political landscape. The deep contrasts between the various manifestations and roles of informal security actors in the region may make hybridity a tougher sell in MENA than in sub-Saharan Africa, which may not be immaterial to multilateral institutions like the United Nations when trying to develop common guidance for Member States.

3. Why is this important?

This paper reflects an analytical shift from State-centric security perspectives to those which consider the perceptions and experiences of the people at the receiving end of security arrangements. Its underlying assumption is that Weberian legal-rational legitimacy has been over-emphasized in Southern countries and that the failure or limited impact of SSR processes suggests a need to explore the significance of different types and sources of legitimacy.

Like most social transactions, much political activity (at least on several continents) takes place in the context of informal norms and systems. Decision-making is not vested exclusively in formal institutions but incorporates or is influenced by both traditional and newly emerging sociocultural institutions, norms and standards. These informal influences are often much less visible than formal institutions, particularly in terms of the way they shape public conduct. But contrary to the assumptions put forth in the bulk of the literature on State-building, the State and these informal networks are not mutually exclusive. Studying hybrid security governance therefore demands an exploration of how informalization and the instrumentalization of legally established security structures occur in a given context, and further how these structures cohabit with both traditional and new structures at the central and local levels, particularly in countries emerging from conflict.

It is unavoidable that security actors can affect the security agenda, whether as creators of security or agents of insecurity. What is crucial in the development of security arrangements, however, is that they not only address the policy concerns of official decision-makers but also tap into the experiences, perceptions and needs of end users. Yet, SSR interventions are rarely grounded in consultation with those whom they are intended to benefit. Moreover, policymakers sometimes bemoan the fact that social research does not neatly address their most pressing policy concerns, while researchers complain that policymakers disregard their findings in pursuit of quick policy fixes to complex social problems. Meanwhile, the truth is, neither researchers nor policymakers tend to appreciate the day-to-day lives and security concerns of poor and vulnerable people in a firsthand way.

It is these end users who must cope most immediately with the risks and insecurities that extend from global dislocations. They may interact with a range of international actors, including researchers, but those researchers answer to the actors and organizations that mandate, fund and organize their activities, and not to the people they study. This makes it nearly impossible for the intended beneficiaries of interventions and services to hold policymakers or researchers to account, or to gain a better empirical understanding of how and by whom their security is determined.

That said, it is fair to scrutinize the notion of "security from below" given that local and informal actors are as liable to dispense insecurity as security, and often towards sectarian or criminal objectives. They frequently operate within limited structures of accountability or outside such structures altogether, with little regard for due process and human rights. They also tend to incorporate hierarchies of power and networks that do not serve the collective interest. Indeed, hybrid security systems commonly result from deliberate efforts by States and political elites to use subaltern structures (and their own political and coercive resources) for self-interested purposes. In other words, these elites tap into or outsource violence as a way of consolidating their own power. Informal actors, norms and networks can thus become as exclusive and oppressive as formal security providers.

This makes it vital to understand how the forces of hybridity generated from below intersect with those generated from above. Equally, autonomous enforcement mechanisms with their own distinct agendas may develop at this intersection, acquiring resources and legitimacy from above as well as from below. This poses unique challenges to their control. Hence, it must be stated: **It is not enough that hybrid security arrangements be rooted in local custom and new informal practices. They should also demonstrably benefit those whose rights and safety they are intended to protect.**

4. Key conclusions: Entry points for United Nations and World Bank engagement

This policy brief explored **how the concept of hybridity can help build more effective security and security governance systems**, and how it can inform the agendas of national and international partners. The value of this concept goes well beyond academic interest, as it can contribute to concrete changes on the ground. This brief also offers a frame for strong linkages between research on security arrangements and the SSR agendas of the United Nations and the World Bank, by:

- Outlining how hybrid security orders (and the "mosaic security" model) can be converted on the ground into syncretic security governance that is based in good practices from both informal and formal systems.
- Providing insights that can shape conceptual debates and SSR priorities, particularly in national decision-making circles and the donor community.
- Describing how national governments, as well as the United Nations and international partners, should engage with non-state security actors in hybrid security arrangements.

The concept of hybridity has not only strengthened the research and evidence base for SSR but has **important policy implications for how the United Nations and World Bank approach security governance**. The challenge is to support SSR that moves a State towards local and inclusive systems of public authority and security governance, without incorporating or reinforcing the anti-democratic tendencies of some informal structures. If, in actuality, the typical security sector is already hybridised, this should impact reform and governance of the sector in significant and concrete ways. In particular, SSR should involve:

1   **A thorough analysis of informal security arrangements in any assessment mission.** This should constitute a major part of any political economy analysis of the security sector. In addition to mapping legal and State actors and institutions, all assessments and mapping exercises for SSR should incorporate a thorough analysis of the informal actors, norms and networks that make up a given country's security system.

2   **An empirical identification of the hybrid processes that encourage inclusion and accountability and those which reinforce exclusion and violence and impede the emergence of democratic security governance.** This is a crucial exercise, and it should be used to clearly define a universal benchmark for evaluating any kind of hybrid security arrangement: the degree to which human rights are respected, and human dignity is protected.

3   **The development of relations with legitimate informal security actors.** This engagement, based on a legitimacy determined by the criteria noted above (of respecting human rights and dignity), can help build more effective, accountable security sector governance by enhancing our understanding of how and for whom oversight mechanisms work, in contexts where parallel channels of influence and informal networks determine the allocation of resources and security provision. Large surveys and focus groups are also useful where populations benefit or suffer from hybrid security governance, to capture how hybrid security systems are experienced at the grassroots level. In remote or marginalized areas, the decentralization of SSR processes is also helpful, as this moves the focus away from executive, legislative and judiciary institutions in capitals or major cities.

4   **The inclusion of hybrid security arrangements in programme design.** This is especially important in reforming security sector frameworks that take into account informal norms, standards and customary arrangements in security governance. The objective of this programming should be to develop empirically grounded policies that can address the impact of hybrid security arrangements on the security and entitlements of citizens, especially vulnerable and excluded communities.

5   **An introduction of new perspectives on public expenditure reviews.** This will require investigating how non-state security mechanisms are financed and how this might reflect on classical security-related budgeting processes, particularly when local actors (formal and informal) seek to exploit international/multilateral resources to consolidate their own power and local control.

6   **The inclusion of informal actors (who show respect for human rights) in the design of oversight and control mechanisms of the security sector.** These actors may be engaged, for instance, in the democratic oversight functions of parliaments and independent institutions such as human rights commissions, auditors, or ombuds institutions.

7   **The integration of informal actors, norms and networks into monitoring and evaluation processes.** This would mean defining new benchmarks, more qualitative than quantitative, that consider informal practices in the monitoring and evaluation of human resources (recruitment, promotion and retirement, etc.) and budgetary procedures (such as chains of payment).

8   **Capacity building of informal actors to orient their activities in the security and justice sector and their interface with formal security institutions of the State.** This would ensure these actors support, rather than impede, SSR.

9   **Capacity building of local institutions.** This will strengthen the generally weak expertise, research and evidence base for SSR in Southern countries by developing knowledge that is grounded in the social, political and security environments SSR programmes aspire to reform. Local expertise of this kind must then be comprehensively incorporated into the assessment, planning, programming, implementation and monitoring of SSR processes, and local experts must be able to engage meaningfully in security sector reform and governance in their respective countries.

By bringing these elements into SSR, practitioners and planners will be more likely to identify obstacles (including embedded cultural and political resistance) that can undermine the success and legitimacy of reform. This can improve the outcomes of SSR efforts by the United Nations and the World Bank and may also shed light on opportunities to enhance their impact further. This approach recognises that hybridity is a reality of security sectors around the world and seeks to embrace that reality as a means of improving reform and expanding conceptions of security.

Endnotes

1 Robin Luckham and Tom Kirk, *Security in Hybrid Political Contexts: An End-user Approach*, JSRP Paper 2 (London, Justice and Security Research Program, 2012).

2 See Mariana dos Santos Parra, "Unpacking Peacebuilding – Assessing Political Legitimacy Amidst International Intervention in Haiti in Comparative Perspective" (PhD dissertation, Università degli Studi di Milano, 2019).

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4 United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, "Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2151 (2014), Security Council Underscores Need for National Ownership of Security-Sector Reform" (SC/11369), 28 April 2014. Available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11369.doc.htm (accessed on 27 August 2024).

5 African Union Commission, *African Union Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform* (Addis Ababa, 2013).

6 ECOWAS, *ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance* (Dakar, 2016).

7 Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Ursula C. Schroeder, Fairlie Chappuis and Deniz Kocak, "Security Sector Reform and the Emergence of Hybrid Security Governance", *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 21, No. 2 (2014).

8 Giovanni Faleg and Katariina Mustasilta, "Salafi-jihadism in Africa: A winning strategy", Brief No. 12, EUISS, June 2021.

9 *ISSAT Annual Report 2016* (Geneva, DCAF-ISSAT, 2017), p. 12. Significantly, security sector public expenditure reviews (SSPERS) – an increasingly crucial tool in Security and Justice programming – are silent on the role and contribution of traditional and customary institutions, even in contexts like Liberia, where these are acknowledged as important providers (presumably because they cannot be monetized).

10 United Nations Development Programme, *Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract* (United Nations publication, 2012), p. 12; Jamil Chade, "Governance for Peace: Strengthening Legitimate Politics, Securing the Social Contract", Brief No. 3, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, 2012, p. 3.

11 United Nations Development Programme, *Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility,* Concept Note, NOREF and UNDP, April 2016, p.12.

12 It is important to note, however, that accounts of hybridity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region suggest a different language and perception of hybridity; one that is seen more as a cause of fragility that can severely undermine the State.

13 The diffuse nature of the concept is potentially quite problematic. Indeed, it is hard to say that analysts of hybridity in MENA are referring to the same thing as scholars like Bruce Baker, who views hybridity in a considerably more positive light. This complicates attempts to develop common understandings across contexts.

14 See Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (University of Georgia Press, 1980).

15 Luckham and Tom Kirk, *Security in Hybrid Political Contexts,* p. 4.

16 Volker Boege, M. Anne Brown and Kevin P. Clements, "Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States", Peace Review, vol. 21, No. 2 (2009); Oliver P. Richmond, "Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism: Liberal-Local Hybridity via the Everyday as a Response to the Paradoxes of Liberal Peacebuilding", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 3, No. 3 (2009); Richard Mallet, "Beyond Failed States and Ungoverned Spaces: Hybrid Political Orders in the Post-Conflict Landscape", eSharp, No. 15 (Summer 2010); Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*.

17 Mac Ginty, International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance, p. 8.

18 Mallet, "Beyond Failed States and Ungoverned Spaces", p. 67.

19 Ibid.

20 Jonathan Goodhand and David Mansfield, "Drugs and (Dis)Order: A Study of the Opium Trade, Political Settlements and State-Making in Afghanistan", Crisis States Research Center Working Paper No. 83 (series 2), November 2010.

21 Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping", International Security, vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/2007).

22 Anne L. Clunan and Harold A. Trinkunas, eds., *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

23 Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, eds., *Mexico's Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence* (New York, Routledge, 2011); Bruce Baker, "Linking State and Non-State Security and Justice", Development Policy Review, vol. 28, No. 5 (September 2010).

24 Goodhand and David Mansfield, "Drugs and (Dis)Order".

25 Luckham and Tom Kirk, Security in Hybrid Political Contexts, p. 15.

26 David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-Building* (Pluto Press, 2006); Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper and Mandy Turner, eds., *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Oliver P. Richmond and Jason Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (Routledge, 2011); David Keen, *Endless War? Hidden Functions of the "War on Terror"* (Pluto Press, 2006).

27 Eric Scheye, "State-Provided Service, Contracting Out, and Non-State Networks: Justice and Security as Public and Private Goods and Services", discussion paper, OECD, 2009, p. 4.

28 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Global Reflection Group, *Providing Security in Times of Uncertainty: Opting for a Mosaic Security System* (Berlin, FES, 2017).

29 Luckham and Tom Kirk, *Security in Hybrid Political Contexts,* p. 14.

30 Niagalè Bagayoko, "Introduction: Hybrid Security Governance in Africa", *IDS Bulletin,* vol. 43, No. 4 (July 2012); David K. Leonard, "Social Contracts, Networks and Security in Tropical Africa Conflict States: An Overview", *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2013).

31 Niagalè Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful and Robin Luckham, "Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority", *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 16, No. 1 (2016), p. 10.

32 Joseph Vitalis, "La réforme du secteur de sécurité en Afrique : Contrôle démocratique de la force publique et adaptation aux réalités du continent", *Afrique contemporaine*, No. 209 (Spring 2004).

33 In August 2024, Somalia's cabinet approved a universal suffrage bill which, if confirmed by parliament, would end indirect suffrage and offer a direct vote for the first time in over five decades. See "Somalia's cabinet approves bill for universal suffrage", Reuters, 8 August 2024. Available at https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalias-cabinet-approves-bill-universal-suffrage-2024-08-08/ (accessed on 28 August 2024).

34 Bagayoko, Hutchful and Luckham, "Hybrid security governance in Africa", p. 17.

35 See African Security Sector Network, "Hybrid Security Governance Project". Available at https://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/hybrid-security-governance-project/ (accessed on 28 August 2024).

36 African Security Sector Network, "Hybrid Security Governance Project".

37 The World Bank and United Nation Mission in Liberia, *Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note: Meeting the Challenges of the UNMIL Security Transition*, Report No. 71009-LR (2013).

38 Jibrin Ubale Yahaya and Musa Mohammed Bello, "An Analysis of the Constitutional Implications of South-West Regional Security Initiative: Amotekun", *African Scholar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, No. 6 (March 2020).

39 Ken Menkhaus, "Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Somalia", CSG Papers, Centre for Security Governance, 1 April 2016.

40 Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia", p. 75.

41 The term Darwish is used in variable ways, with some scholars applying it as an umbrella term that includes all Federal Member States (FMS) forces, while others limit its use narrowly to only units of local or federal gendarmes. Here, it is meant to refer specifically to "units of the Somali Police [which] are traditionally well accepted security providers and are foreseen in the setup of security organizations at a Federal and State level, as mapped out in the National Security Architecture and Somalia's new Policing Model". See UNSOM "Somali Police Darwish Concept" (2019).

42 Adam Day, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Fanar Haddad, Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: *How militias and paramilitary groups shape post-conflict transitions* (New York, United Nations University, 2020). See "Case Study 3: The Problem with Militias in Somalia".

43 Ibid.; Colin Robinson, "State-Level Military Forces Can Potentially Turn Tide in War Against al-Shabaab", *IPI Global Observatory*, 7 November 2019. Available at https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/11/state-level-military-forces-potentially-turn-tide-war-al-shabaab/ (accessed on 28 August 2024).

44 Daniel G. Kebede, "The Hybridization of State Security Governance for Peace-Building and State-Building in Somalia", The Southern Voices Network: Research Paper No. 2, The Wilson Center, August 2014.

45 For example, see Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak, "Security Sector Reform and the Emergence of Hybrid Security Governance"; Thanassis Cambanis, Dina Esfandiary and Renad Mansour, *Hybrid Actors: Armed Groups and State Fragmentation in the Middle East* (Century Foundation, 2019).

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