



Insecurity through Security Sector Reform

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Abstract

This article contributes to the critical discourse on Security Sector Reform (SSR) by explicitly acknowledging its political dimension and implications. It considers the role of SSR in international processes of state-building, highlighting the paradox implicit in this model and its implementation on the ground using the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) as a case study, as the state-building project there has become synonymous with SSR. The limited success of SSR has largely been related to problems in the operationalisation of its holistic ambition of providing human security with dignity to target populations, and less related to the exercise of control over target populations through mobilising and monopolising the potential for violence thereby enabling the implementation of the international template for how a society should be administered and populations “protected” and “cared” for. Contrary to the way it is commonly portrayed, SSR is not a politically benign model. It is highly intrusive, and has increasingly become the dominant framework for the Great Power regulation of and intervention in non-western societies.

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1. Introduction

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has assumed increased importance in recent years as Western donor states view it as critical for mediating the effective transition from war to peace in post-conflict states and thus a key part of state-building processes. The rationale of SSR is to motivate donors to go beyond mere capacity building of security forces and entrench principles of democratic governance and the rule of law. However, its operational success has been limited and thus far analysis has largely focused on the discrepancy between concept and implementation, to improve the operational capability of SSR programmes. Although current discourse on SSR acknowledges its political dimension, it has ignored its implications. This paper aims to address this issue.

The occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) provide an apt case study, as the state-building project there has become synonymous with SSR. This paper will scrutinise current SSR discourse and the conceptual apparatus from which it draws much of its substance and legitimacy. It will then examine the conceptual and theoretical parameters of SSR in the oPt, looking at its implementation and the inherent socio-political paradox that has been created on the ground, which diverges substantially from conventional understandings of security and statehood.

2. Critiquing the Dominant Security Orthodoxy: Established SSR Discourse

The term SSR refers to the provision of state and human security within a framework of democratic governance. It institutionalises and securitises a wide range of actors within a sovereign state, granting them responsibility for managing order. It is a highly intrusive operation that aims to reconfigure power in a society through restructuring a state's security sector. However, this uneven power dynamic inherent in the paradigm has largely been shielded from academic scrutiny. This is largely due to the normative conceptualisation of SSR, which serves to depoliticise it by presenting it as both moralistic and imperative. This is reflected in the existing literature on SSR and its application in conflict and post-conflict settings.

The transformed security environment after the Cold War rendered the traditional security framework that took the state as its central ontology "static, and anachronistic" (Buzan, 1991). New threats, such as non-state transnational actors that transcend state borders weakened Hobbesian assumptions about the relationship between state and society and have brought to the fore critical and emancipatory security perspectives. The common thread that tied these latter discourses together was the emphasis on shifting the referent from the state to the individual; it attempted to couple security with concerns of international humanitarianism and human development.

However rather than discarding the state, the new human security framework tied state sovereignty to that of the individual and reinforced the link between state security and human development. The implicit assumption is that the state's first priority is the

protection of its society. “Without political order, social and individual values are meaningless; they cannot be realised nor protected from assault, violence and chaos.” (Ben-Dor quoted in Ayoob 1997, 132) Simultaneously, state security agents are recognised as potential sources of insecurity and conflict in themselves. Consequently, the imperative of the security sectors in recipient states during the transition from war to peace has situated SSR within the recent phenomenon of peace-building/state-building operations.

Despite SSR’s rising popularity with various international agencies, its operational success has been limited. The SSR model has been unable to translate its ambitious principles into practical reform programmes. As a result, the current literature has thus far largely focused on explaining the discrepancy between concept and practice. Moreover, much of the literature tends to be written by or for current practitioners (Nikolaisen 2001, 145).

Established SSR discourse views the issue in terms of imposing the hegemony of a state and its order on a society, but this view is deeply flawed as it ignores the ways in which external stakeholders can influence the implementation of an SSR project and structure it to suit their interests. Analysts have argued the model has failed to actualise its holistic people-centred aims, and have sought to improve its operational capability, even advocating its reconceptualisation to make it more conducive to the requirements of peace and stability. However, this view omits a fundamental element in the exercise of power, in that it is the very promotion of the idea of good governance which carries with it moralistic and depoliticised connotations which frames the SSR paradigm and allows for such a depoliticised technocratic approach. Consequently, the inherent dynamic of unequal power relations embedded in the SSR model has been largely shielded from academic scrutiny.

Contrary to the way it is commonly perceived, it is argued here that SSR is not a politically benign model. I aim to move away from a policy-based approach by scrutinising SSR not as a problem of a conceptual/contextual divide, but instead as a Foucauldian discourse. This places it within the broader structure of systems of meanings that justify the use of power in international relations.

3. Deconstructing the SSR Discourse: SSR, Civil Order and Neo-Colonialism

Using Michel Foucault’s ideas of bio-power and the current liberal problematic of security, critics have attempted to scrutinise the current international problematisation of security. These programmes have been reconceptualised into a macro-structure dubbed “bio-political imperialism”, a programme of liberal rule and war whose ultimate purpose is the pacification of recalcitrant populations and their integration into the network of liberal governance (Kienscherf 2011, 521; Jabri 2010, 237).

A range of dispersed practices have been deployed to defend against threats to the liberal peace. They are used for triage, to distinguish between lives that need to be promoted and lives that need to be destroyed, within spaces and populations that have already been

designated as dangerous by liberal governance. These divisions are based on the distinction between good liberal cosmopolitans and their evil illiberal others, and can be easily colonised by more racialised discourses (Newman 2010, 319).

The triage of targeted populations is thus conducted on the basis of orientalist modes of knowledge. These programmes are implemented through oppressive population-security measures that are derived from methods of imperial policing. When war is deemed to be fought in the name of humanity, it comes to be perceived as limitless in time and space but also constitutively reliant upon divisions of populations in terms of racialised or cultural profiles, even as the discourses of legitimisation surrounding them suggest a more general applicability. Boundaries do not disappear, but are perpetually re-inscribed upon the corporality of those constructed as “other”, as enemies and as existential threats. This securitisation of the international, particularly in the post-9/11 climate, has reinforced political closure in the international arena and an ethos of xenophobia “seeking legitimation” in a “clash of civilisations” (Kamal Pasha 2006, 66).

Foucault’s analytics of power suggests that governance takes place from a distance as the power to influence others. Governmentality is therefore defined as a liberal form of power engaged with but distinct from more centralised, territorialised and coercive forms of power. This does not mean a rejection of sovereign or state power but instead a new way of thinking about state and sovereign power alongside a range of other institutions and practices. Liberal discourse presents this realm as based on the rational conduct of individuals free from state interference; however this freedom and liberty is actually constructed through a particular set of social practices and normative discourse. This liberalism defines problem space for government and appropriate forms of regulation. It is in this sense that the liberal peace seeks to governmentalise post-colonial societies.

The human security framework serves to reinforce hierarchy in the international system through the distinction between those who can provide human security and those that cannot. Chandler (2008, 31) argues that rather than human security posing a challenge to state sovereignty, state sovereignty is given substance by its ability to provide for human security; the failure to do so places it within the category of weak or failed states and provides justification for international intervention. This legitimises intervention into the affairs of other states. Importantly, the human security discourse allows for a depoliticised technocratic approach, which can be used to blame local practices and actors if things go wrong. The consequence, according to Chandler, is to integrate states into networks of external regulation while also denying ultimate responsibility for the relationship and obfuscating imperialist power by making the exercise of that power appear as empowering rather than domineering.

Duffield (2002, 1009) argues security-mediated development has been used to advance security agendas. These development programmes are not so much aimed at global peace and stability as they are tools aimed at spatially and temporally indeterminate pacification, as the forms of social order of the global centre are reproduced by their direct

intervention in the periphery. However, while the form is maintained, the substance is qualitatively different. Joseph (2009, 247) argues the dynamics of the international society in imposing neoliberal forms of governmentality are often quite different: hierarchical, coercive and directly disciplinary. In contexts where the social conditions for this governmentality are not present it is difficult to imagine governance taking place from a distance through the exercise of freedom. Interventions that appear to be based on governmentality may revert to more coercive forms of power in regulating populations.

It is worth considering the relationship between coercive power, which SSR projects aim to marshal and control, and the civil order it enables by enforcing compliance to that order through the actual employment of state violence or merely through the implied threat of its employment. This civil order is embodied in the legal/bureaucratic channels of the state – the regulations and laws that define a certain social order and economic dispensation; the forms and purposes of association and political activity that are legitimate and those that are not; the punishments for transgressing these prescribed limits; and on an abstract level, values and a certain conception of the social order.

Neep's problematisation of the binary opposition of coercion and consent reinforces this argument. According to Neep, force does not need to be actually employed to coerce. The real or implied threat of force is enough to get people to consent, but this does not make their participation in any political project "consensual" in the sense of "free and uncoerced". The binary distinction between coercion and consent is not an objective "truth", it is a construction, moreover a construction that leads to a way of imagining the social order that excludes the very existence of the coercive power that constitutes it and guarantees it (Neep 2012, 108).

Similarly, all SSR projects aim to establish a certain form of political order that appears to be consensual but is in fact based on coercion; but in the context of a neo-colonial state-building project, the political disposition it secures will likely reflect the interests, perceptions and values of the foreign powers that impose/support/fund/organise it rather than be aligned to any domestic constellation.

So if SSR is the organisation of the potential for state violence to ensure the hegemony of a certain social order, the obvious question is, what sort of order? What internal and external interests have formulated or influenced the particular order that SSR enables? What conditionality, explicit or implicit, is there in the funding and material/technical assistance for SSR? What are the bureaucratic channels that have been empowered to create this social order? What forms of social order/political activity are enabled, and which are repressed/criminalised and by what mechanisms (economic, security, bureaucratic) is this achieved? Who are the state elite that the state building project and SSR has empowered, what are their interests and privileges and in what ways do they align or differ from those of the international community? What segment of the local population do they represent and how do they relate to the rest of the population?

However, the key point here is that this order is imposed in such a way that it does not appear to be imposed at all; the coercive agency necessary to achieve this disposition is disguised, possibly even from the agents themselves, because of the ideal of “consensual” politics they have bought into and the way the coercive power guaranteeing it is hidden behind it. Power is more persuasive and pervasive when its action and function is disguised as something other than what it is. Foucault argues power is successful only in proportion to its ability to hide its own mechanism. Therein lies the hegemonic power of the international community: the forms of social order in the states of the global centre are reproduced by their direct intervention in the periphery in such a way that while the form is maintained, the substance is qualitatively different.

4. The Case of the oPt

In contrast to more conventional cases where sovereignty clouds the power dynamics behind intervention, the oPt is an exceptional and rather extreme example of SSR. However, it is precisely because the oPt is such an extreme and atypical example of SSR that it lays bare the underlying discourse of power, on both the micro-level of Israeli colonialism and on the wider macro-level of the interaction between centre and periphery.

SSR quickly became the cornerstone of the state-building project in Palestine following on from the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995. These interim peace agreements, following the first intifada between 1987-1991, codified the security-first narrative, in which the most urgent factor in the transition period and upon which the further resumption of negotiations would depend, was posited as addressing Israeli security concerns (Mustafa 2015, 10).

The literature on SSR in the oPt focused on whether the environment there was conducive to reform. Rampant corruption and the nepotistic, unaccountable and repressive personalised style of politics favoured by the leadership has no doubt significantly hindered the SSR project as well as the broader process of state-building. The most thorough characterisation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is what Henry and Springborg (2001, 19) describe as “a bully praetorian republic”. It is a system of governance in which the power of ruling elites rests almost exclusively on the operations of the military/security/party apparatus. These elites are not drawn from a particular identifiable societal group but instead are separated from the general population through the exclusivity of their access to and dependence on the institutions of the regime. These regimes rely heavily on coercion particularly in times of crisis, but are also dependent on co-optation and rent-seeking arrangements. These two factors have played out in both polities in the West Bank and Gaza and have resulted in a significant contraction of the political sphere.

In 2007, the PNA lost control over Gaza following Fatah’s electoral defeat against Hamas in 2006 and a subsequent failed coup. This led to an effective fracturing of the two geographic locales into separate political spaces, and as the PNA was determined to

maintain its monopoly over politics in the West Bank the rule of law deteriorated. Israel, the US and the EU provided funding and training for the PNA's repressive security apparatus. President Mahmoud Abbas was provided with the means to clamp down on opponents to undermine the democratically elected government of Hamas, which controlled Gaza. The Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) employed myriad tactics and practices that violated existing laws and internationally recognised human rights standards. They have also enforced a number of executive orders, which curtail freedom of expression in public spaces and crack down on protests against Israel. The security sector has effectively become the mediator between the population and the regime and has been pivotal in creating a widespread culture of fear with regard to political activity.

The Palestinian–Israeli Declaration of Principles (DOP), 1993, led to the formation of a number of Palestinian state-like institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the largest and most resource-intensive of these being the Palestinian security establishment. These security institutions and the subsequent implementation of SSR formed part of what Gordon (2008, 169) terms Israel's "outsourcing of the occupation to a subcontractor". The PNA is a transitory regime designed to meet the needs of Israeli security. The Israeli goal when entering into the Oslo Accords was to transform the Palestine Liberation Organisation into a set of institutional arrangements that would function as Israel's proxy in policing the Palestinians, guaranteeing Israeli security. This outsourcing is akin to a technique employed by power to conceal its own mechanisms in an attempt to sustain itself. It is not motivated by power's decision to retreat but on the contrary by its unwavering effort to endure and remain in control. It was a response to the first intifada and the need to find more resource- and cost-effective mechanisms of colonial control. Oslo was another era in the evolving structure of Israeli occupation, bringing about structural change and the reorganisation of Israeli power. The Oslo Accords reinforced and strengthened the structural relationship between the occupier and occupied and the "gross asymmetries in power that attended it" (Gordon 2008, 174). The Oslo agreement reflected this asymmetry, putting Israel's security concerns first and the Palestinians' ambitions for social and political emancipation second.

While Yasser Arafat was opposed to reform of the security sector, Abbas, was a vocal supporter of SSR. However, there were few differences in their style of rule and security reform under both periods made little headway. For Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza the dominant political reality is the occupation, which continues to perpetuate their material suffering. Continued Israeli incursions, settlement activity, and mobility restrictions, including those on Palestinian political and security personnel, compounds the PNA's difficulty in carrying out its security obligation to the Israelis and its own constituents. Fiscal retrenchment, assassinations, raids and demolitions have aggravated the situation and significantly undermined the institutional capacity and legitimacy of the PNA. PNA security organisations are also forced to co-operate with the Israeli security establishments and this has significantly undermined its legitimacy amongst Palestinians.

Moreover, Israel's politico-military doctrine has traditionally been grounded in the *realpolitik* of pre-emptive action and determined Israeli foreign policy from its inception. Israel has reserved the right to act against a threat even if it is nascent. Threats can range from the micro-level, at the level of individual violence, to the macro, massing armies on Israel's borders.

Unilateral action is another element of Israel's strategic thinking, and this explains Israel's reluctance to join security frameworks and agreements or abide by them once it has joined. Simply put, Israel likes to be the master of its own fate. It is indicative of the continuing processes of domination stemming from the creation of Israel, not in place of Palestine, but on top of Palestinians in all territories previously governed by the British Mandate. This makes the establishment of viable and stable governing institutions by the PNA difficult, and this has compounded the difficulty of implementing SSR, when security personnel lack even the basic requirements for effective policing like freedom of movement.

Importantly, the effective monopoly of violence was never devolved but remained with the occupier. The PASF failed to quell anti-colonial resistance in its early years and soon incurred the full force of colonial military power, which moved decisively to devastate the PNA during the second intifada, from 2000-2005. Another demonstration of colonial might came in 2008, when Gaza was collectively punished after the electoral victory of Hamas, an organisation that prioritised anti-colonial resistance.

These issues were never addressed, and SSR donors sought technocratic means to work around political problems so as to protect their strategic relations with the various parties to the conflict. As such, instead of addressing the underlying political and security concerns of each party, resolution to issues was sought through increased capacity building to security apparatus. This was reinforced by the lack of international pressure over Israeli non-compliance and co-operation. SSR arguably served to depoliticise the most pressing issue of the conflict, the politics of security, reducing it to the level of a technicality. It also privileged the security needs of the more powerful state. Israel has and continues to set the agenda and determines the rules of the game. Le More (2008, 47) states the agenda of SSR was and remains the preserve of the Americans and Israelis, with other donors footing the bill. The close diplomatic and military relationship the Americans and Israelis share has ensured the latter has the backing of the global hegemon.

Lieutenant-General Dayton's speech at the Washington institute in 2009 confirms that SSR is both a tool to reinforce the paradigm of Israeli occupation and the macro-structure of neo-colonial global governance (Stein 2009). Dayton, who was head of the office of US Security Coordinator (USSC) which was created to assist Palestinians in reforming their security services, heralds the success of the training and equipping of what he terms "new Palestinians" that now turn their guns not against Israelis (the occupying force) but on the real enemies from within Palestinian society (Stein 2009). In particular, he hailed the ability

of this new and improved force to restrain mass protest and mass uprisings, pointing to the performance of the West Bank PASF and their success in clamping down on demonstrations during Israel's incursions into Gaza in 2007.

The West Bank PASF has received donor-funded training worth \$60 million annually since 2007 (International Crisis Group 2010, 167). The two main organisations responsible for training and supplying equipment are the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) and European Police Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support (EUPOLCOPPS). Intelligence training and assistance has been left to the CIA. Increased US investment in training and supplying the PASF coincided with the rise of Hamas and Western counter-terrorism efforts aimed at weakening Hamas' grip on power, and quelling any resistance in the West Bank by clamping down on groups considered suspect. The normative elements of SSR, with its focus on establishing the structures of good governance, have been pushed to the margins. However, while the US employs the rhetoric of good governance, it is clear that "[t]he US does not do SSR" and limits its assistance to the operational component of the term (Ryan 2011, 148). The moral elements have been refigured to match foreign rather than local perceptions of threats: those organisations that threaten or challenge the established international order.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that SSR is effectively a system of control based on violence, though this is largely hidden from scrutiny by virtue of its de-politicisation. SSR under the PA has served to reinforce bio-political initiatives on both the micro-level of Israeli colonialism and at the wider macro-level in the international realm as the latest iteration of Great Power regulation of and intervention in non-western societies.

The application of an SSR program in the oPt has created a socio-political paradox on the ground that diverges substantially from conventional understandings of security and statehood. SSR in the oPt has produced a conflicted version of the Mukhabarat model of governance in the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, entrenching rather than challenging or tempering the paradigm of Israeli occupation (Mustafa 2015, 16).

Scrutinising SSR as a discourse places it within the broader structure of systems of meaning that justify the use of power in contemporary international relations and are used to prevent resistance to the current political dispensation. Thus, far from being timeless and neutral, as with many critical conceptual building blocks of IR discourse SSR is situated within a specific historical context and as such, we must be alert to the purposes and interests it serves, the specific groups it dispossesses and empowers, and the acts of epistemic and physical violence it sets in motion (Jones 2006, 33).

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