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(Un)Building a Balance between 'Local' and 'National': On Libya's Failed Security Sector Reform (2011–2014)

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This study argues that local ownership of Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts may not be enough to bring stability to post-conflict countries, especially where the state is collapsed due to armed conflict. Based on the vertical integration approach, the study makes a conceptual distinction between local and national security providers/initiatives and highlights the importance of the balance-building role that international actors should play between them to achieve security and stability during post-conflict reconstruction. The research focuses on the Libyan experience between 2011 and 2014 as a single case study and relies mainly on United Nations (UN) documents and fieldwork-based reports.

Keywords: security sector reform, Libya, local ownership, vertical integration, post-conflict reconstruction

Introduction

The idea of Security Sector Reform has taken root within the post-Cold War development community, which questioned the effects of Cold War-style security institutions and assistance on the development of post-colonial and former Eastern Bloc countries, and which adopted a human-centred approach to both development and security (Sedra 2017, 52-8). Throughout the 2000s, post-conflict SSR became deeply embedded in the liberal peacebuilding agenda, and these programmes are generally planned and implemented with the involvement of international actors. Thus, one of the main challenges in the SSR theory and practice is determining the roles and responsibilities of international versus domestic actors in the planning and implementation phases. This challenge directly relates to the simple question: Who owns the reforms? The response of the mainstream SSR circles to this challenge has generally been promoting the principle of 'local ownership'. Though there is no agreed definition, it denotes a general understanding that 'international support to peace is only

viable if it relies on a certain degree of local capacity and participation' (Ejdus 2018, 28). Despite the ongoing salience and centrality of this principle in SSR visions of major donor countries and international organizations (UNSC 2014c, 3; European Commission 2016, 7-8; UK Stabilization Unit 2019, 36, 80; German Federal Government 2019, 9), SSR interventions remained primarily donor-centric/driven businesses so much so that the majority of SSR programmes in post-conflict contexts end up imposing (liberal) norms and institutions of the donors to the recipients in a technical manner, which makes the SSR unsustainable due to its irrelevance to the local needs and context (Ansorg 2017; Detzner 2017).

It is essential to underline that there are also cases of 'locally owned' SSRs, basically home-grown security reconstruction efforts that are designed and implemented by domestic agents with limited international engagement, as opposed to donor domination. As Ansorg (2017, 136-7) highlights, although international actors are overall very active in post-conflict SSR programmes throughout Africa, their roles were minimal in some specific cases, either because local actors felt a responsibility to take matters at hand (as in the cases of Rwanda and Angola) or international actors found SSR engagement too risky and costly (as in the case of Central African Republic). Moreover, the expensive and disastrous experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan during the 2000s also caused the international community to retract from substantive involvement in post-conflict state-building projects (Donais 2021, 556; Sedra 2017, 298; Bargués-Pedreny 2016, 230-1). Libya represents a perfect example of this new tendency. Despite the critical military role of international actors led by NATO for a regime change during the 2011 uprising, their role in the country's post-conflict reconstruction remained surprisingly minimal. Most of the plans for SSR were authored and implemented by interim Libyan authorities, while the international actors played facilitating and

supporting roles with limited engagement. Yet, in the absence of solid coordinating institutions and regulations at the national level, short-sighted and temporary reform policies adopted by inexperienced authorities ended in complete failure, eventually dragging the country into a second civil war in 2014 (Sayigh 2015; Wehrey 2014). In addition to dividing the country into two rival political bodies, the second civil war further deepened fragmentation and decentralization trends in Libya's security sector, making the SSR an even more challenging task today than in the initial post-uprising period.

From an SSR and peacebuilding perspective, the Libyan case brings some crucial questions into mind, which also represent the main research questions of this paper: What are the challenges and trade-offs of home-grown SSR efforts in extremely weak or collapsed states? Is limited international engagement a challenge or an opportunity to achieve security and stability in post-conflict states? How should international donors situate themselves while contributing to post-conflict SSR efforts? Focusing on Libya as a single case study and benefiting from the vertical integration model as a theoretical guide to exploring the potential contribution of international actors in facilitating home-grown SSRs, this paper highlights the importance of the balance-building role that international actors are supposed to play between the national and the local in post-conflict reconstruction. It is important to note at this point that although the local ownership principle is generally used to encompass both dimensions, this paper is based on a conceptual distinction between 'local', which denotes unofficial bottom-up security providers and initiatives at the sub-national level that are embedded in society, and 'national', which means official top-down security providers and initiatives at the national level. Within this context, the paper argues that international engagement can only be meaningful if the international actors act as balance-builders

between the national and the local in post-conflict environments. Thus, without meaningful international engagement, home-grown SSR programs, despite being 'locally owned', risk complete failure, especially in cases where official security structures are collapsed due to conflict and intervention and the balance of power within the country shifted toward socially embedded and locally organized armed groups. As the Libyan case shows, under these circumstances, home-grown SSR efforts with limited international engagement may further empower armed groups on which interim authorities rely to maintain security and stability. Thus, this process will result in further instability and security fragmentation.

The first section of the paper briefly reviews the literature on the roles of domestic and international actors in peacebuilding and SSR interventions by focusing on the principle of local ownership. The second section explains how international actors can contribute to home-grown SSR efforts by referencing the vertical integration model and underlines the importance of building a balance of power between state security forces and the armed groups within this context. The third section sets out the methodology by explaining why the case of Libya was chosen and how it will be analysed. The last section scrutinizes Libya's SSR experience between 2011 and 2014 as a single case study under the theoretical guidance of the vertical integration model.

The Issue of Ownership in Security Sector Reform

The development and peacebuilding communities have used the concept of local ownership since the 1990s. The primary rationale behind promoting this concept as a principle by the UN was to strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives (von Billerbeck 2015, 299). Since the liberal peacebuilding agenda has often been criticized as a form of neo-colonialism because of its disposition to impose

Western-rooted norms and institutions, the principle of local ownership has also served as a defensive tool against its possible neo-colonialist connotations (Chesterman 2007, 9). The mainstream SSR literature, rooted in development policy and embedded in the liberal peace agenda (Sedra 2017, 20, 52), followed suit by promoting local ownership during the 2000s. In the SSR context, the concept was first elaborated in a policy note of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD, which acknowledged local ownership as a critical principle that differs SSR from Cold War-style military assistance, as the latter was mainly based on the models, strategies and doctrines of the West (Hendrickson et al. 2000, 10). But DAC devised local ownership instead as a mechanism to buy in the locals to the reforms designed by the donors because the main aim of the principle was to avoid potential resistance to reform initiatives from local actors. In this sense, local ownership is understood as the internalization of the reform in the political and institutional discourses of the host country (Hendrickson et al. 2000, 20, 6).

A few years after introducing the principle, the policy community started to abandon the 'buy-in' approach of DAC and envision local ownership as a form of building on the local. Chanaa (2002, 64-73) presented concrete policy recommendations to ensure local ownership of the reforms, such as paying more attention to home-grown reform efforts, building on existing institutions, strengthening ties between social and government security initiatives, and improving public dialogue and information sharing on the security issue. DAC also abandoned the buy-in approach in its later publications by stating that in fostering a locally owned SSR agenda, it is essential to ensure that solutions to problems are developed locally, donors are building on local initiatives, and host governments and other local actors should take primary responsibility for the reform process (OECD 2005, 34; 2007, 64). Thanks to DAC's publications, the

principle of local ownership was mainstreamed in the SSR community from the mid-2000s and was understood as something more than buying in the local population to the donors' reform efforts. Nathan's (2007, 4) elaboration of the principle went so far as claiming that 'the reform of security policies, institutions and activities in a given country must be designed, managed and implemented by domestic actors rather than external actors' and that the main role of donors should be limited to supporting the programmes and projects initiated by locals. Meanwhile, the consecutive UN decisions on SSR also devised the local/national ownership as a fundamental principle on which SSR should be based (UN 2005; UNGA and UNSC 2008).

Despite the policy community's universal adoption of the concept, several ambiguities remained about its true meaning and operationalization (Mobekk 2010, 240; Eickhoff 2020, 38-53; Donais 2021). Nearly all studies in the field underline the gap between policy and implementation of the principle of local ownership in SSR programs (Eickhoff 2021, 388, 98; Ansorg and Gordon 2019, 13; Donais 2018, 33-8; Gordon 2014a; Oosterveld and Galand 2012, 194-5; Bendix and Stanley 2008; von Billerbeck 2015; Donais 2009). Despite the consensual adoption of the principle in policy documents and statements, donors still can/do not genuinely enact it in their SSR practice and tend to buy in like-minded local elites to their norms and interests. Thus, many writers keep criticizing the practice of involving only a limited set of locals in SSR at the expense of the broader public in many cases and calling for more genuine involvement of civil society in SSR processes, positive engagement in state-society relations, and better consideration of local needs, everyday life, and local-international interaction (Gordon 2014b; Sedra 2017, 107-9; 11-14; Detzner 2017, 120-1; Ansorg 2017, 138-40; Jackson 2018, 4-5). The ultimate failure to enact genuine local ownership on the ground led many critical authors to remain highly sceptical of the principle as it

is used and operationalized by international organizations and Western donors. According to them, the term local (ownership) can be considered as a discursive tool of legitimation (Wilén 2009; Richmond 2012), a tool of indirect colonial rule (Ejdus 2018), a social construct (Mac Ginty 2015), and as a form of romanticisation (Richmond 2009).

Building a Balance between 'Local' and 'National' through Vertical Integration

The vertical integration model, which was originally developed by Jean-Paul Lederach over previous decades (Lederach 2005, 1997) and reconceptualized by various scholars during recent years (McCandless, Abitbol, and Donais 2015, 1), offers a middle-ground solution to ownership debates in the literature, and, a helpful guide on how international actors can contribute to home-grown SSR without dominating the process. It refers to 'the need for greater coherence and coordination up and down the chain of relationships that link international, national, and local-level actors in peace-building contexts' (Donais 2015, 240; 2018, 41). At this point, it is important to distinguish between 'national' and 'local'. As opposed to the general tendency in the literature to use the concept to encompass the ownership of both state and civil society, Donais (2018, 32) suggests that local ownership refers to the ownership of reform efforts by civil society and ordinary people, while national ownership means the ownership of the process by power elites and state institutions controlled by them. This study adopts a similar distinction between local and national (which can alternatively be read as society and state) while acknowledging that they are mutually interacting categories (Debiel and Rinck 2015). According to this conceptual distinction, local refers to unofficial bottom-up security providers and initiatives at the sub-national level that are embedded in

society, while national refers to top-down official security providers and initiatives at the national level.

The notion of vertical integration proposes a trilingual model of interactions between three main agents of peacebuilding: the state, society, and the international community (Lawrence 2014, 2-3; Donais 2014). In this trilingual model, the international actors are expected to play a facilitating role in strengthening state-society relations and reconciling the tensions between national and local agents, while SSR initiatives are initiated and controlled by domestic agents. Thus, international actors are conceived as mere facilitators of the home-grown SSR processes rather than architects or engineers of SSR projects that are expected to yield specific outcomes (Donais 2018). Promoters of the vertical integration strategy argue that to achieve sustainable peace, the international community should act as a facilitator to strengthen state-society relations by actively engaging with actors at both levels (Gordon 2014b, 2014a; McCandless, Abitbol, and Donais 2015; Donais 2018; Lawrence 2012).

Vertical integration can also be interpreted as bridging bottom-up security initiatives at the local and community level with top-down national reform strategies (Donais and Knorr 2013; Donais 2014; Donais and Burt 2015). But this bridging function is accompanied by a balance-building role when considering the emphasis that is made in the recalibration of the 'balance of power between state and society' (Donais 2018, 40), the empowerment of civil society initiatives as a 'counterbalance to state politics' (Lawrence 2014, 3), and, intentional rebalancing of power 'by strategically leveraging and/or limiting the powers of higher-level actors' (McCandless, Abitbol, and Donais 2015, 5). Balance-building means strategic empowerment or disempowerment of the state (at the national level) and society (at the local level) by international actors until a balance of power is reached between each other regarding resources, skills, and

capacity. An essential dimension of the projected balance between the national and local is the balance of power between state security institutions and armed groups. The balance-building function of international actors is as important as others, such as bridge building and facilitation, because SSR is a political bargaining process between agents with coercive capacities at different levels, and dialogue and compromise are always more feasible and probable when there is a balance of power between them. DAC had already highlighted this aspect of SSR when it called for a balanced approach to state and non-state security providers (OECD 2007, 11, 7).

Armed groups are abundant in many post-conflict contexts, and they can be indistinguishable from the society in which they are embedded, especially where formal state and security institutions either totally collapsed or were significantly weakened due to conflict. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program data show that since the 2010s, the amount of non-state violence (which takes between non-state actors) has exceeded state-based violence. Moreover, most state-based violence cases are still (internationalized) intra-state conflicts, including at least one non-state party (Pettersson et al. 2021, 812-3). Though their structure, strength, and level of legitimacy may vary from case to case, armed groups tend to 'dominate the environment during and after armed conflict' and 'bear the potential to disturb, undermine, or completely truncate processes of peace- and state-building' thanks to their rising numbers and use-of-force capacity (Schneckener 2010, 230). Thus, non-state armed groups are critical actors that should be seriously considered during SSR design and implementation by both states and international donors (Donais 2018, 38-40; Detzner 2017, 126-7; Hofmann and Schneckener 2011; Baker 2010; DCAF 2009, 2-3).

Reaching a balance of power between the state security institutions and armed groups is especially important in the aftermath of conflicts that largely destroyed the

state security institutions with external intervention and caused the emergence and empowerment of armed groups in different localities. These situations are also in stark contrast to the general assumption in vertical integration literature that the state-level actors generally enjoy bureaucratic and coercive advantages over the local ones (McCandless, Abitbol, and Donais 2015, 5). In the absence of national security institutions that are strong enough to provide security and defend the state's autonomy during the post-conflict reconstruction process, hijacking of the home-grown SSR initiatives by armed groups that enjoy strong social support at the local level and are eager to take advantage of state resources and mandate for their localized and particularistic interests is a significant risk. At this point, a detailed examination of failed SSR efforts in Libya may allow us to explore the main challenges a home-grown SSR faces after state collapse and problematize the merits of limited international involvement in post-intervention SSR efforts.

Case Selection and Methodology

The central unit of analysis of the study is Libya. More specifically, this study focuses on Libya's SSR experience between 2011 and 2014 as the main case of analysis. Case studies can be best defined as 'an intensive study of a single unit for understanding a larger class of (similar) units' (Gerring 2004, 342). The fact that cases are always a case of a wider theoretically defined population implies a comparative dimension in the case study method (Levy 2002, 133-4; Klotz 2008, 43). As such, case studies inherently have a double function of describing what is particular to the unit and what is general about it, which also means that ontologically they hold a middle ground between idiographic and nomothetic approaches (Gerring 2004, 345, 52). Though single case studies have limitations in disconfirming theories and generalizability to other cases (Halperin and

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Heath 2017, 216-7), they may still allow researchers to reach some inferences that can be useful to explain certain aspects of other similar cases and contribute to the refinement or development of theories and models.

The primary rationale behind choosing the Libyan case is that it represents an unusual case of post-conflict SSR experience. Domestic agents led the reform efforts, and the role of international actors was minimal, even though the regime was toppled because of international intervention. In stark contrast to similar cases in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libya seemed an exception to the rule of donor-centrism in post-intervention situations. Thus, the Libyan authorities initiated and controlled all significant plans for post-conflict reconstruction, while the international community played a supporting role under the coordination role of a tiny United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). At the outset, this setting perfectly matched the local ownership principle defined by Nathan Alan (2007) and had great potential to accommodate a vertically integrated SSR. However, Libyan SSR initiatives eventually failed, and the country entered a second civil war in 2014. Libya is often cited as a typical example that hints at a shift from the ambitious liberal peace and state-building agenda by the international community (Donais 2021, 556; Sedra 2017, 298; Chivvis et al. 2012, 2). If this tendency will continue, findings from Libya's experience can surely provide insights into analysing future SSR attempts in extremely weak or collapsed state contexts with limited international engagement.

The time scope of the study is between 2011 and 2014 because this is the only period when the country has experienced SSR efforts under a single national government. The post-2014 period is excluded because by then, the country was split into two rival governments, parliaments and armed coalitions, and the general situation shifted from post-conflict reconstruction to a regional proxy war which still goes on

(Harchaoui and Lazib 2019). Limiting the time scope is also helpful for clarifying the data to be collected and the agents to be observed. The empirical material of the research primarily relies on documents, legislation, and announcements of the UN agencies on Libya between 2011 and 2014, complemented by fieldwork-based reports published by NGOs and think tanks, and academic sources, all of which were gathered through internet-based research. The reliability issue regarding these complementary sources is overcome by referencing multiple confirming materials where possible. Collected data is classified and interpreted by the author in line with the trilingual model (local-national-international) of the vertical integration approach to find out whether there was an imbalance of power, and what role the international actors played.

Analysing SSR Efforts in Libya (2011-2014)

Setting the stage: (Un)Balance of power after the Uprising

During his long rule between 1969 and 2011 in Libya, Gaddafi created a strong duality between formal institutions and informal centres of power. As a method of coup-proofing and regime security, he created a two-tiered security system (DeVore and Stähli 2020), which was composed of weak formal security institutions at the periphery and informal elite forces based on communal ties at the core, a policy that can also be dubbed as 'informal militarism' (Raineri 2019, 586-7). As such, in terms of training, equipment and cohesion, the regular armed forces were always kept substantially weak and disorganized compared to the informal regime security institutions such as Revolutionary Committees, Revolutionary Guards, Intelligence Bureau of the Leader, which were mainly staffed by loyal tribes and communities (Vandewalle 2012, 146-8; Gaub 2019, 185-9; 2014, 104-5). The 2011 uprising fractured the already weakened formal security institutions. While the Gaddafi regime mostly relied on informal security structures and elite forces to quell the protests and defeat the rebels (Badi 2020,

11), the regular army could not give a unified response. Those that joined the rebels named themselves the National Army (NA) and were affiliated with the Benghazi-based National Transition Council (NTC). But emerging armed groups fighting against Gaddafi throughout the country were generally suspicious of both the NTC and the NA due to their past links with the Gaddafi regime, secular/liberal tendencies, and the dominance of East Libyan figures in them. Therefore, neither NTC nor NA could control the rising number of new fighters. Neither were they able to support the highly localized rebellions in western Libya, where the Gaddafi forces were more prevalent and sieged the rebel hold territories such as Misurata and Nafusa mountains (Lacher 2020, 21-2; Joffé 2019; ICG 2011, 1-2, 7-15).

As the NTC declared victory over the regime in October 2011, it lacked the support of a strong security apparatus to restore peace and stability in the country. In contrast, armed groups that emerged in the Uprising entered the post-Gaddafi era much more powerful than the official units in terms of arms and cohesion. They acquired many arms by looting army depots and forging ties with foreign patrons (Badi 2020, 11). Armed groups were generally organized through local and military councils and performed civilian and security functions without central state authority. Official bodies could not perform security functions even in the capital Tripoli, which rival Tripolitan, Zintani, and Misratan armed groups controlled. NA and police forces affiliated with NTC proved feeble and ineffective compared to these groups (ICG 2011, 15-23; Jeursen and van der Borgh 2014, 180-2). Most influential armed groups in the post-uprising period (those from the Western cities of Zintan and Misrata) were very closely embedded in their local communities, which made it very difficult to distinguish them from society, but simultaneously, equipped them with a high level of legitimacy (Lacher 2020, 103-41; Badi 2020, 43-69). Though social embeddedness was not very strong in

all armed groups (Lacher 2020, 141-3), most of them still asserted 'revolutionary legitimacy' in opposition to the 'legal authority' that was sought to be established by the NTC (Lacher and Cole 2014, 14-6). Localism and fragmentation symbolized the development of armed groups during and after the conflict, and there was a striking imbalance between local and national agents regarding capacity and legitimacy. As a result, NTC could not impose its decisions on the armed groups. Even the formation of the General National Congress (GNC) to replace the NTC as an elected body after the July 2012 general elections was not enough to improve the central authority vis-à-vis the armed groups. Instead, armed groups became highly politicized owing to their ties with certain politicians and political parties (Wehrey 2014, 13-5; Sayigh 2015, 7-8). They were highly influential during the GNC's adoption of the controversial Political Isolation Law (PIL) in May 2013, which effectively polarized the country between two camps on the road to the second civil war in 2014. Most remarkably, Tripolitan and Misratan armed groups (in coalition with the Islamist Justice and Construction Party) vigorously supported PIL and even used force to push GNC to endorse it (Fraihat 2016, 149-52; Lacher 2020, 30-4).

Following the UN Security Council Resolution No 1973 (2011), international actors were heavily involved in the Libyan conflict, which substantially changed the balance of power to the rebels' favour and eventually made them victorious against the regime. Besides airstrikes, international actors bilaterally supplied the insurgents with arms and military equipment. Due to the NTC and NA's inability to control and represent all fighters on the ground, arms shipments were made directly to armed groups in different localities (Wehrey 2020, 13-4; Lacher 2020, 23; Prashad 2012, 222-3). Unlike previous operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, there was neither a demand nor a supply for international peacekeeping/stabilization forces to be stationed

in Libya after the conflict (Molnár, Szászi, and Takács 2021, 21-2; Chivvis and Martini 2014, 3-6). The international community did not even devise a post-conflict plan for Libya's reconstruction. The statements of the Libya Contact Group stressed that Libya's reconstruction must be owned and led by Libyan authorities, while the international community should be in a supportive role under the coordination of the UN (Libya Contact Group 2011b, 2011a). This state of affairs was also the main principle adopted in the establishment of the UNSMIL, which aimed to 'assist Libyan national efforts to restore public security, promote the rule of law, foster inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, and embark on constitution-making and electoral processes' (UN 2011). Considering the significant imbalance between armed groups and official security institutions in post-conflict Libya, the disposition of international actors (under the coordination of the UN) did not allow a balance-building role from a vertical integration perspective, as the following sections will demonstrate.

Mapping out the 'national: Top-down security reconstruction initiatives

The Libyan authorities have made many top-down efforts to reform the security sector since 2011. These efforts can be classified as Disarmament-Demobilization-Reintegration (DDR), police reform and defence reform. NTC's major DDR attempt in the post-conflict period was the formation of the Warriors' Affairs Commission for Rehabilitation and Development (WACRD) in October 2012 (McDonough 2014). WACRD was an inter-ministerial body aiming to register all mobilized fighters, (re) integrate them into the security or civilian sector under the auspices of the interior, defence and labour ministries and provide training for those preferring civilian jobs. But one major problem was dealing with the high number of registrations. WACRD received nearly 250.000 applications through local and military councils between January and July 2012, as the scheme attracted the attention of many unemployed

young men who had not fought during the 2011 uprising (ICG 2012, 11-2). Although more than one-third of applicants were vetted, the total number was still too high (around 160.000), mainly because NTC initially planned (re)integrate only 25.000 fighters into each of the abovementioned ministries (Martin 2015, 140; UNSC 2014a, 10).

WARCD could not function effectively due to several difficulties. Firstly, WACRD and the relevant ministries lacked coordination and cooperation due to institutional incapacity and personal rivalries (Martin 2015, 142-3; ICG 2012, 12). Secondly, WACRD had neither mandate, nor capacity, nor funds to disarm the rebels (Zaptia 2020; Joffé 2016, 294). As the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of the Interior (MoI) continued relying on armed groups through their parallel registration and recruitment programs made DDR of former fighters practically impossible. As of 2015, only 60.000 people received an elementary awareness course, 5.000 received scholarships to receive training abroad, and another 5.000 were appointed to work on the government security boards (Zaptia 2020). The international community's contribution under the coordination of UNSMIL to the DDR efforts of WACDR was minimal. Generally, UNSMIL played a strategical and technical advisory role while offering some technical assistance in the fighter registration process, providing psychological counselling training and services to WARC staff and fighters (through WHO), planning vocational training assistance programmes (through UNESCO and ILO), and, organizing many forum meetings between the representatives of WARC and international community (UNSC 2012d, 8-9, 13; 2012e, 10; UNSMIL 2013, 2; UNSC 2013, 10).

As for police reform, NTC adopted a two-track policy of co-opting the armed groups to maintain order in the short run (due to the inadequacy of regular police forces

in quantity and quality) and rebuilding the MoI and the police force with international support in the middle run. The co-option of armed groups started in October 2011 with the formation of the Supreme Security Committee (SSC) as an umbrella body that initially mandated armed groups affiliated with 17 military councils to secure Tripoli in the aftermath of the uprising. In December 2011, SSC was reorganized under the nominal oversight of MoI, equipped with formal authority for arrests and investigations, and quickly expanded nationwide, reaching over 50 regional branches and 162.000 registered fighters as of December 2012, though only 60% of them were serving (Wehrey 2014, 10-1; Lacher and Cole 2014, 30-1, 6). The two critical factors that appealed to the armed group members to join SSC were gaining an official status and a satisfactory salary that was 50% higher than that of a regular police officer (Jeursen and van der Borgh 2014, 185) Yet, fighters joined SSC as units rather than individuals, and received their salaries through their commanders, which entrenched the autonomy of armed groups, weakened the ministry's oversight over them, and, caused ill-disciplined, selfish, and unruly behaviours among the units (ICG 2012, 12-3; Gaub 2014, 107-8). They even stormed government offices and assaulted officials on several occasions between 2012 and 2013 due to issues related to armaments, payments, and politics (Chivvis et al. 2012, 4; Wehrey and Cole 2013; Lacher and Cole 2014, 36). From December 2012, GNC made serious efforts to disband the SSC and integrate their fighters into the regular police force but met strong resistance, especially from Tripolitan units, which were eager to preserve their autonomy and economic interests and remained distrustful of regular troops. Throughout 2013, 20.000 SSC members were reportedly vetted for integration and have undergone the necessary training, but in practice, the majority of SSC units remained their existence with different names and

organizational structures and played an important role during the 2014 civil war (UNSC 2013, 12-3; Wehrey 2014, 12-3; Lacher and Cole 2014, 35-9).

Libyan officials were very receptive to international assistance in their police reform efforts. UNSMIL played an intermediary role in international support in addition to its technical and advisory functions. Although UNSMIL included police advisers from the beginning, they had difficulties dealing with Libyan authorities due to the poor organizational capacity of MoI (Martin 2015, 142). As of February 2012, UNSMIL embedded only three advisers with the ministry to support the issues of police training, logistics, communications and media upon the requests of Libyan officials (UNSC 2012a, 4). UNSMIL helped the government's efforts to integrate SSC members into the police, mainly through preparing their training curricula. Jordan and Turkey provided part of this police training. In 2012 they trained 1.600 and 800 fighters, respectively (UNSC 2012e, 7-8). But 'results were mixed at best', as expressed by UNSMIL head Ian Martin (2015, 142). Several disturbances occurred among fighters during training abroad (Mattes 2014, 93; Milliyet 2012), and the ministry proved incapable of ruling over the graduates and employing them effectively. Additionally, UNSMIL worked actively in election security before the 2012 GNC elections by helping develop the election security handbook and training curriculum, organizing workshops with relevant ministries and conducting a training-of-trainers programme for 700 Libyan officials (UNSC 2012e, 7-8). Lastly, UNSMIL provided advice on comprehensive reform and restructuring of the ministry, provided the training to build the operational and administrative capacity of the police, implemented a pilot programme on community policing in Tripoli and conducted workshops on gender mainstreaming. Yet these efforts were not enough to alleviate the deteriorating security situation in the country,

which eventually hampered their full operationalization in turn (UNSC 2013, 12-3; 2014a, 12-3; 2014b, 13).

Top-down initiatives on defence reform were even more tricky than police reform, mainly due to the inexistence of the MoD during the Gadhafi era and the extreme weakening of the already fractured armed forces due to the uprising. The initial policy of MoD was registering all fighters around the country through military councils and distributing a one-time payment of 1.200 LD for single fighters and 4.000 LD to those with families as compensation, which caused disturbances among those who were excluded. As a result, the programme was cancelled in April 2012 (ICG 2012, 13-5). Army commanders were reluctant to integrate fighters into the army due to the unprofessional nature of the latter and for fear of being absorbed by them. So, the total number of integrations did not exceed 6.000 until 2014, although MoD had initially planned to integrate at least 25.000 (Gaub 2014, 111; UNSC 2012b, 5; Mattes 2014, 91-2). The MoD also sought to take control of Libya's vast borders and numerous petroleum facilities by forming a special agency, but to no avail. What happened in practice was the recognition of local armed groups who were controlling the border crossings and petroleum facilities as border guards and petroleum facility guards, respectively, under the government payroll and nominal oversight of the MoD (Lacher 2020, 26; Lacher and Cole 2014, 53-5; Herbert 2021, 51).

During Libya's defence reconstruction period, the international community's primary focus was border management due to European concerns over drugs and arms smuggling and irregular immigration in its neighbourhood. UNSMIL began organizing coordination meetings and workshops on border management with relevant ministries and member states as early as December 2011 (UNSC 2011, 2-3). Along with UNSMIL, the European Union soon became the leading organization in border

management assistance to Libya. It had prepared an integrated border management needs assessment by May 2012 and deployed a civilian Border Assistance Mission in May 2013 to help the Libyan authorities develop an integrated border management system. However, the lack of government engagement and deteriorating security situation hampered the development of this system, and the government could not claim direct control over borders before 2014 (UNSC 2012c, 3-4; 2014b, 12; European Council 2013). UNSMIL also contributed to developing a comprehensive defence policy for Libyan authorities by presenting 'Towards a Defence White Paper' in April 2013, which presented specific recommendations and priorities to prepare a Libyan defence strategy. Meanwhile, UNSMIL experts continued advising MoD on personnel reform, training development, military law and procurement (UNSMIL 2022). UNSMIL also facilitated the coordination of international assistance to Libya's security reconstruction through senior officials' meeting in London in December 2012, followed by two ministerial conferences in Paris (February 2013) and Rome (March 2014), during which the Libyan government committed action plans in security, justice, and the rule of law. However, none of these efforts and commitments could be fully operationalized due to ongoing coordination issues between official bodies and mounting political crises in the country on the road to the Second Civil War (UNSC 2014a, 9-10; 2014b, 13-4, 6; UNSMIL 2013, 5).

Perhaps the most ambitious top-down initiative by the government on defence reform was the multinational training scheme for the General Purpose Force. Libyan PM Ali Zeidan first proposed it during a visit to the US in March 2013. His proposal was discussed and adopted at the G-8 summit in June 2013. According to the plan, US, UK, Italy and Turkey would train 20.000 Libyan troops in 8 years, which would help the Libyan government exercise its authority by protecting politicians and public

institutions and disarming armed groups (Ryan 2015; al-Shadeedi, Veen, and Harchaoui 2020, 21-2). However, the outcome of the training was not very encouraging. The US intended to train 6.000 to 8.000 recruits, but it could not start the training because of financial and bureaucratic issues with the Libyan authorities. The UK received 300 recruits in 2014, but they were sent back home before the training ended because some cadets committed sexual assaults in nearby towns. Only Italy and Turkey completed the training of around 300 recruits each (Paton 2014; Çetinkaya 2014; Ryan 2015). Yet, due to a lack of political consensus and poor administrative planning, they did not find units to join when they returned to Libya and eventually joined one of the warring sides during the 2014 civil war (Wehrey 2021, 25-6).

Mapping out the 'local': Bottom-up security provision initiatives

The two major bottom-up initiatives for security provision and reconstruction in post-conflict Libya were forming military councils and the Libya Shield Forces (LSF). As already indicated, the bulk of the rebels (especially those in West Libya) who fought against the regime were organized locally through the formation of military councils, which coordinated military operations, facilitated external help, and performed governance-like functions in towns or neighbourhoods (Badi 2020, 9-10; ICG 2011, 18-9). To manage the post-conflict security vacuum after the fall of Tripoli in August 2011, NTC called all remaining towns to form their military councils if they had not already done so (ICG 2012, 2-3). Military councils were not uniform entities in terms of size and functioning. Some were formed at the neighbourhood level, such as the Suq al Juma Military council in Tripoli; some were at large city levels, such as Misrata Military Council, while others came together to form larger umbrella organizations, such as the Western Military Council (ICG 2011, 20-2). Among post-uprising military councils, some were aimed to protect loyalist communities against retribution attacks (such as

Bani Walid), others were used by certain communities to exert influence over other towns and regions (such as Awlad Suleyman tribe in Sebha Military Council), and some were infiltrated by criminal groups (ICG 2012, 9). Some played more important roles than others. For instance, unlike the relatively tiny roles of military councils in Fezzan, the Misrata Military Council functioned as a deployment/mobilization instrument and an oversight body for local armed groups (Badi 2020, 80-1). Similarly, Zintan Military Council also oversaw the embodiment of socially embedded forces under a collective leadership (Lacher 2020, 81, 123-4, 64). As a bottom-up initiative, military councils were the basic bodies in the local organization of violence, coordination, and mobilization. The fact that most of the mentioned top-down initiatives on DDR relied on military councils to reach individual fighters proves this argument.

Another bottom-up initiative in the security sector with grave consequences for the future of Libya was the Libyan Shield Force (LSF). What triggered the formation of LSF was the rising cases of communal violence in borderland regions such as Kufra, Sabha and Zuwara in early 2012 and NTC's call to armed groups to intervene in these conflicts on the government's behalf due to the incapacity of NA. In response to these demands, Benghazi-based armed groups were deployed to Kufra in March 2012, followed by Misratan forces deployed to Sebha in April 2012. Within this context, leaders of the armed groups from different regions attempted to institutionalize and systematize their crisis response missions through a series of conferences across the country, which resulted in the officialization of LSF in mid-2012 as an auxiliary national army, which works based on one-year contracts with MoD (ICG 2012, 18-9). In one year, the number of LSF branches nationwide quickly rose to 13, consisting of around 67.000 fighters who enjoyed both official status and high salaries compared to army officials. Like SSC, LSF branches were officially under the command of CoS, but
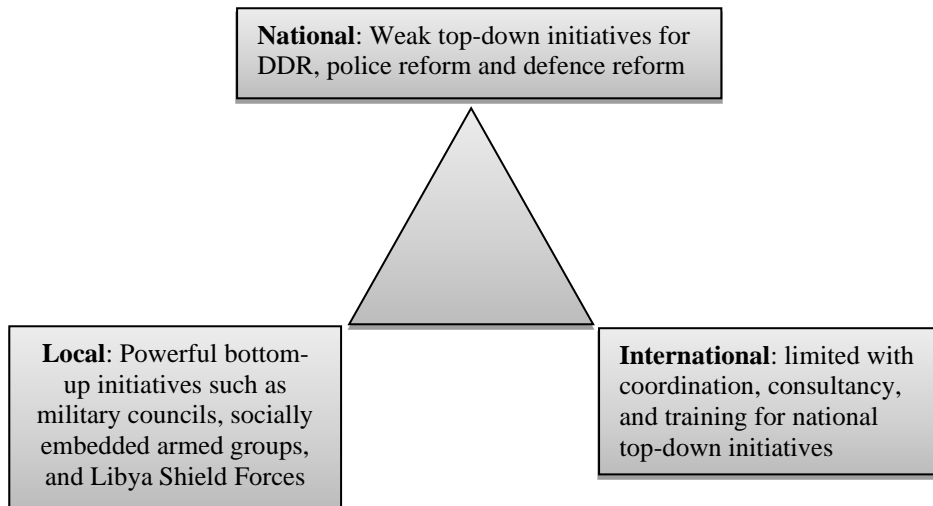
22

they were acting autonomously with no government oversight in practice (Wehrey 2014, 8-9; Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 12-3). In contrast, their formation can be viewed as part of a larger political effort by the armed groups' leaders to protect the Revolution by overseeing the NTC and official security bodies, which they distrust (ICG 2012, 19-20). In addition to Kufra, Sabha and Zuwara missions, LSF units were sent to the Nafusa mountains, Zawiya, Ajdabiya and Sirte between 2012 and 2014 to restore order, but their impartiality and professionalism on the ground were always questionable (ICG 2012, 21-3; Wehrey 2014, 10; Martin 2015, 140). Moreover, specific LSF units were overly politicized on the road to the second civil war, which eventually intensified the political crisis in the country. LSF units from Misrata and Zawiya were heavily involved in the controversial operation against the loyalist town of Bani Walid in October 2012. LSF units from Benghazi, Misrata, Zawiya and Nafusa mountains vigorously supported the passage of the PIL and were involved in forming the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room, which briefly abducted PM Zeidan in October 2013. During the second civil war in 2014, former LSF units from Benghazi and LSF units from Misrata and Zawiya constituted most of the forces that fought against Khalifa Haftar-led Operation Dignity and its allies in East and West Libya, respectively (Lacher and Cole 2014, 47-52). Overall, as a bottom-up initiative legalized by transition Libyan authorities, LSF contributed to the empowerment of armed groups and flared up political tensions in the post-conflict transition process.

After the formation of the LSF, there were some international attempts to regularize it under a central authority. First of these efforts was a plan by Colonel Salem Joha, a respected Misratan army officer. He proposed in mid-2012 to create a national reserve force into which LSF units would join as individuals rather than whole units and would be deployed to their hometowns following a short training. It failed mainly due to

the strong resistance of the Misratan fighters, who were anxious about losing their autonomy (al-Shadeedi, Veen, and Harchaoui 2020, 22-3; Lacher 2020, 26, 114). UNSMIL brainstormed a similar plan in October 2012 to form a Libyan Territorial Army composed of armed group members and would transform into a reserve force in the medium term (Wehrey 2021, 20). Likewise, to tame LSF and SSC, PM Zeidan prepared a fresh plan with UNSMIL's backing to establish National Guards (NG) in April 2013. Comprising around 35.000 LSF and SSC fighters, NG would execute countryside security functions nationwide for two years (until regular forces were established) under the command of the GNC president. Then, it would transform into a reserve force (Wehrey 2014, 17). Zeidan also asked for NATO's help in the creation of NG. In response, NATO decided to dispatch a fact-finding delegation to Libya to assess its needs and the potential contribution of the organization (Molnár, Szászi, and Takács 2021, 24). However, the plan eventually failed in July 2013 due to opposition from all sides of the Libyan political spectrum for different reasons (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 13). As a result, armed groups organized in a bottom-up fashion remained untamed and unbalanced until the outbreak of the second civil war in 2014.

Analysis of these top-down and bottom-up initiatives shows that the power asymmetries between armed groups and central authority eclipsed the development of a robust relationship. Meanwhile, the international community's contribution to the top-down SSR efforts of central authorities was limited to coordination, consultancy, and training activities. Thus, they were far from leveraging the state's power and diminishing the power of the armed groups, as suggested by the vertical integration strategy (see **Figure-1**). The weak organizational capacity of the Libyan state, coupled with regional and ideological cleavages within the power elites, further hindered the full absorption of

the assistance offered by the international community. What happened, in consequence, was the growing dependence of the state on locally organized and socially embedded armed groups for the provision of security and stability. But this dependency limited the state's autonomy in favour of more localized and particularistic interests of armed groups, which were uneasy about consolidating central authority.

National: Weak top-down initiatives for DDR, police reform and defence reform

Local: Powerful bottom-up initiatives such as military councils, socially embedded armed groups, and Libya Shield Forces

International: limited with coordination, consultancy, and training for national top-down initiatives

Figure-1: Trilingual Model of Libyan Security Reconstruction Efforts (2011-2014)

From a vertical integration perspective, building a balance of power between the national and local needs more resources and commitment from international donors. For leveraging the power of the 'national', a UN peacekeeping force to secure at least the official institutions (such as the parliament and ministries) in Tripoli was essential. To diminish the relative power of the 'local', an active international engagement in DDR process with a clear mandate and capacity to force disarmament was needed. These moves could have established a balance of power between the local and the national by providing relative autonomy for statutory forces and curbing the power of the armed groups throughout the country. A balance of power could have enabled dialogue and

compromise, the most effective method to prevent security fragmentation, instability, and further armed conflict.

Conclusion

Comprehensive SSR efforts in Libya ended altogether following the eruption of the second civil war in mid-2014, which divided the country into two rival parliaments, governments, and armed coalitions: Tripoli-based GNC and Libyan Dawn forces (including Tripolitan, Misratan and Islamist armed groups) versus Tobruk-based House of Representatives and Libyan Dignity forces (including some Zintani armed groups and Haftar's Libyan National Army). The third civil war that started after Haftar's latest offensive against Tripoli in April 2019 further complicated the security landscape due to Turkey's direct military intervention and mercenaries' recruitment by both sides. Although the Berlin Process in 2020 achieved limited success in achieving a ceasefire and unifying political institutions, further progress is barred mainly due to the still fragmented structure of the security sector.

By focusing closely on security reconstruction efforts in Libya between 2011 and 2014, this study shows that the limited involvement of international actors in Libyan reconstruction and ownership of reform efforts by Libyan transitionary authorities did not result in sustainable security institutions. Worse, this situation further fragmented the already fractured security landscape in the country. The Libyan experience demonstrates the need to build a balance of power between local and national in post-conflict reconstruction. Without credible national security institutions, most of the top-down reconstruction efforts by interim Libyan authorities relied on locally organized armed groups by officialising their status without any tangible oversight and further empowering their autonomy vis-a-vis the central administration.

International actors under the coordination of UNSMIL played a supporting and advisory role with occasional training activities. Still, their involvement was far from bringing a balance of power to the relationship between local armed groups and central security institutions, in other words, between local and national.

The Libyan case clearly shows how vital the role of international actors is in achieving a balance of power between local and national initiatives for security and peacebuilding from a vertical integration perspective. Although a light footprint approach by international actors seems plausible to prevent donor domination, it risks further fragmentation and even conflict resumption in the absence of sound national institutions and norms. This finding indeed has repercussions beyond the Middle East and North Africa. Although it is well proven in the SSR literature that donor domination in post-conflict reconstruction processes does not achieve sustainable peace, ownership of reform efforts by domestic agents may not be the sole panacea, especially in collapsed state contexts. This should not be interpreted as a call for international domination of SSR programs and imposition of Western norms on post-conflict societies, but just a call for attention to the fact that balance of power between bottom-up initiatives at the local level and top-down initiatives at the national level is very critical in post-conflict reconstruction, and international actors are the most fit agents for such a balance-building role due to their potential capacity, resources, and expertise. Despite all its merits in enabling 'local ownership', a limited international involvement based on supporting/facilitating a locally owned SSR does not go hand in hand with a balance-building role, which requires more resources and commitment than mere facilitation.

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