

From Hybrid Security Arrangements to Good Enough SSR in Yemen

by Ahmed A. Al-Khameri

Introduction: From Reform to Management in SSR

Over the past decades, international approaches to stabilization and security sector reform (SSR) have largely been built upon assumptions that conflict-affected states could gradually consolidate authority, rebuild unified national institutions, and restore centralized governance through externally supported reform processes. In practice, however, many protracted conflicts have evolved in the opposite direction. Rather than transitioning toward coherent state structures, conflict environments across

Executive Summary

International approaches to stabilization and security sector governance are increasingly shaped by concerns over transnational threats, including terrorism, maritime insecurity, organized crime, irregular migration, and conflict spillovers. At the same time, policymakers increasingly recognize that fragmented conflict environments are unlikely to transition quickly toward unified state authority. Instead, international actors are adapting to hybrid and negotiated forms of security governance.

Using Yemen as a case study, this CARPO Brief demonstrates that security governance in protracted conflicts is shifting from ambitious reform agendas toward the management of fragmented security orders through ‘hybrid security arrangements.’ These arrangements involve negotiated coordination among domestic and external actors that jointly manage security functions without immediately resolving underlying political fragmentation.

Focusing on three examples (the Supreme Military Committee, the Yemen Maritime Security Partnership, and emerging counterterrorism coordination structures), this analysis shows how international and regional actors increasingly prioritize coordination, coexistence, and violence management over comprehensive institutional transformation.

The Brief argues that effective stabilization requires balancing short-term management of fragmentation with the long-term goal of strengthening legitimate state institutions. Hybrid security arrangements can serve as transitional mechanisms that preserve stability, reduce violence, and gradually rebuild state authority where comprehensive reform is unrealistic.

the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and parts of the Sahel have become increasingly fragmented, internationalized, and characterized by overlapping systems of authority.

These realities are also reflected in relevant literature: Mark Sedra,¹ for example, distinguishes three schools of thought on SSR. These are not descriptive categories of how security governance actually operates in conflict affected states; they are competing beliefs about what SSR should ultimately seek to achieve. The first, the ‘monopoly school’, represents the orthodox position: The end goal of SSR is, and must remain, the restoration of the state’s monopoly over the legitimate use of force through centralized, professional, and civilian-controlled institutions built to a broadly Weberian template. The second, the ‘good enough school’, shares the monopoly school’s state-centric destination but abandons its maximalist expectations about sequencing, speed, and institutional form. It holds that SSR in fragile environments should pursue politically feasible incremental improvements in security provision, governance, and accountability, accepting interim arrangements and second-best outcomes as legitimate waypoints on a longer institutional journey rather than as failures of the model. The third, the ‘hybrid school’, breaks with state-centrism itself. Drawing on scholarship on hybrid political orders, it argues that non-state, customary, and informal security providers can constitute legitimate and potentially durable components of security governance in their own right, and that international engagement should treat

hybridity not as transitional deviation to be corrected but as a possible end state to be worked with.

This CARPO Brief is situated squarely within the ‘good enough’ school of SSR. It accepts the hybrid school’s empirical observation that fragmentation, plural authority, and non-state security provision are enduring characteristics of many contemporary conflicts. It departs, however, from the hybrid school’s normative conclusion that these arrangements should be accepted as an end state. Instead, it argues that stabilization policy should engage hybrid realities pragmatically while ensuring that such arrangements progressively strengthen – not substitute – the state’s capacity to coordinate, regulate, and oversee the security sector. The objective is therefore neither rapid institutional unification nor permanent hybridity, but incremental state-building through adaptive security governance.

A distinction between analytical description and normative prescription is important here: The term ‘hybrid security arrangements’ is used descriptively to characterize the empirical reality of negotiated security coordination among state institutions, non-state actors, and external partners in fragmented conflict environments. Its use should not be understood as endorsing hybridity as a desirable end state of security sector governance. Rather, this CARPO Brief argues that hybrid arrangements are justified only insofar as they contribute to strengthening the state’s ability to regulate, coordinate, and oversee the

¹ Mark Sedra (2017): *Security Sector Reform in Conflict-affected Countries. The Evolution of a Model*, Abingdon.

wider security landscape. In contexts such as Yemen, where security provision has historically been plural and locally embedded, hybridity is likely to remain a durable feature of governance. However, plural security provision does not diminish the need for a legitimate public authority capable of defining mandates, allocating responsibilities, resolving disputes, ensuring accountability, and maintaining the rule of law. The long-term objective of security sector support therefore remains the gradual strengthening of these state functions rather than the permanent institutionalization of fragmented authority.

If the SSR literature explains why stabilization practice has drifted from reform toward management, shifts in the threat perceptions of the major international actors explain why that drift has accelerated. Recent international security assessments by the United States, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations increasingly frame fragile and conflict-affected environments through the lens of transnational threats, including terrorism, maritime insecurity, organized crime, irregular migration, illicit financial flows, and regional destabilization. The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy² reflects growing concern regarding the convergence of terrorism, transnational criminal networks, disruptions to maritime trade routes, and threats to critical supply chains and international commerce. Similarly, recent UK policy thinking, including the 2026 refresh of the

Government's Stabilization Guidance³, emphasizes adaptive stabilization approaches capable of responding to overlapping political, economic, and security risks in fragile environments. The United Nations reporting on Yemen and the Horn of Africa, particularly since 2024, has similarly highlighted the convergence between conflict economies, organized crime, illicit maritime activity, and armed non-state actors as mutually reinforcing drivers of instability.⁴

Yemen clearly illustrates this transition from reform to management – that is, from stabilization practice designed around the rapid consolidation of unified national institutions toward stabilization practice organized around managing a durably fragmented security order. More than a decade of conflict has produced a fragmented political and security landscape characterized by competing military formations, regional sponsorship networks, hybrid governance arrangements, and overlapping systems of local authority. Yet despite fragmentation, security governance has not collapsed entirely. Instead, domestic and external actors have gradually developed mechanisms of coordination, coexistence, and negotiated security management.

Such developments are not unique to Yemen. Comparable patterns are visible across Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, and parts of the Sahel. In many of these contexts, international

² The White House (2025): *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf> (27.06.2026).

³ DFID (n.d.): *DFID Stabilisation Unit Guide – Executive Summary and Chapter 1: The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation*. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784002/Chapter_1_The_UK_Government_s_Approach_to_Stabilization__incl_exec_sum_.pdf (27.06.2026).

⁴ United Nations Security Council (2024): *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*. Available at <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2117585/n2425953.pdf> (27.06.2026).

actors have increasingly shifted from attempting rapid institutional consolidation toward managing coexistence among fragmented security actors. Hybrid security arrangements tend to emerge under a recognizable combination of conditions: central state authority that is weak, contested, or geographically uneven; local security actors who have legitimacy and territorial control cannot easily be displaced; external partners who prioritize stability and violence reduction over transformational intervention as resources and political appetite decline; transnational threats which demand operational cooperation across fragmented political environments; and competing regional sponsors who seek deconfliction and coexistence rather than decisive victory. Under these conditions, such arrangements are not transitional anomalies; in many protracted conflicts they have become the dominant operational reality of stabilization policy.

This CARPO Brief argues that the arrangements analyzed for the case of Yemen represent an emerging model of security governance in protracted conflicts. Rather than focusing exclusively on comprehensive reform and rapid institutional unification, international actors engage in the management of fragmentation through what this paper describes as ‘hybrid security arrangements.’ These arrangements involve negotiated systems of security coordination among state, non-state, and external actors that jointly manage violence and security provision without fully resolving underlying political fragmentation in the immediate term.

However, meaningful security sector support in protracted conflicts requires balancing the immediate need to manage fragmented

security orders with the long-term objective of rebuilding legitimate and capable state institutions. The challenge is no longer whether international actors should prioritize reform or management, but how they can pursue both simultaneously under conditions of political fragmentation and protracted conflict.

The paper explores this argument through three examples in Yemen: the Supreme Military Committee, the Yemen Maritime Security Partnership and evolving counterterrorism coordination structures. Together, these cases demonstrate how international and regional actors increasingly prioritize negotiated coordination, operational coexistence, and functional stabilization over ambitious institutional transformation – at the risk, this Brief argues, of doing so at the expense of incremental state-building.

Fragmented Security Orders and the Securitization of Stabilization in Yemen

In Yemen, competing military formations, regional patronage systems, tribal dynamics, local governance structures, and transnational security concerns have combined to produce a fragmented security order that is managed through hybrid forms of security governance and operationalized through hybrid security arrangements. Multiple armed actors simultaneously operate with varying levels of legitimacy, local acceptance, external backing, and institutional affiliation.

This evolution of Yemen’s security architecture cannot be separated from the broader internationalization of the conflict. Regional and international actors increasingly view

Yemen not simply as a domestic political crisis awaiting settlement, but as a focal point within wider transnational security systems encompassing terrorism, maritime insecurity, illicit trafficking, organized crime, and regional instability. As discussed in the introduction, recent strategic assessments by the United States, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations reflect a growing convergence around this perspective. For the purposes of this CARPO Brief, the significance of this shift lies less in the specific policy documents than in its practical implications: Yemen is increasingly approached as a source of interconnected regional security risks that require ongoing management alongside, rather than after, efforts to resolve the conflict.

This changing threat perception has, in turn, reshaped international approaches to stabilization. Security governance is no longer viewed primarily as a long-term institution-building exercise but increasingly as a means of containing regional instability and mitigating transnational spillover risks. As a result, external actors have become more willing to support hybrid security arrangements capable of sustaining operational coordination in the absence of a comprehensive political settlement. In Yemen, this is reflected in growing investment in maritime security, counterterrorism cooperation, and mechanisms that support stability in the Red Sea, illustrating how the management of fragmentation has become intertwined with broader regional security priorities.

The Supreme Military Committee: Institutionalizing Shared Command

The Supreme Military Committee (SMC) represents one of the clearest examples of

emerging hybrid security arrangements in Yemen. More significantly, it may represent one of the first formally decreed hybrid command arrangements in the region, integrating sovereign national institutions and external security actors within a single institutional coordination mechanism.

Established by Presidential Decree and supported by Saudi Arabia, the SMC constitutes the first meaningful attempt to institutionalize joint command and coordination across multiple anti-Houthi military formations operating under competing political affiliations, regional sponsorship structures, and local legitimacy arrangements. It brings together representatives from across the Presidential Leadership Council coalition, including the Giants Brigades, National Resistance Forces, National Shield formations, military actors associated with Marib and Ta'iz, and southern security actors operating under differing political and regional affiliations.

Rather than seeking immediate military unification, the committee attempts to create an institutional framework through which fragmented actors can coordinate operations, manage disputes, and gradually develop common operating procedures while preserving their existing organizational identities. This distinction is important. Historically, military coordination among anti-Houthi forces relied heavily upon informal relationships, ad hoc arrangements, and parallel chains of command shaped by regional patronage systems and local political dynamics. The SMC therefore represents a significant departure from previous approaches by seeking to formalize coexistence and coordination within an institutional structure recognized by both the Government of Yemen and its principal regional backer.

Therefore, the SMC is a significant Saudi-led effort to rationalize and stabilize the Government of Yemen security architecture.⁵ Importantly, Saudi policy increasingly appears focused not on imposing immediate institutional unification, but on managing fragmentation through coordination mechanisms capable of reducing internal conflict while preserving operational effectiveness. This reflects a broader shift from reform toward management.

The SMC thus exemplifies a hybrid security arrangement in practice. Rather than attempting to impose a centralized command structure on a fragmented environment, the committee seeks to institutionalize cooperation among actors that retain independent sources of authority and legitimacy.

The committee nevertheless faces substantial challenges, including overlapping chains of command, ambiguous mandates, regional sponsorship dynamics, informal authority networks, competing operational priorities, uneven local legitimacy, and persistent tensions between centralized coordination and local autonomy. For example, controversies were reported between security actors who fall under the Ministry of Interior and SMC members surrounding appointments and force deployments in areas such as Abyan in February 2026.⁶ These disputes illustrate the limits of centralized restructuring in

fragmented security environments as they reflect deeper concerns over local legitimacy, regional representation, and fears of using appointments as a tool to reinforce domination by rival military networks.

Importantly, however, these tensions do not necessarily indicate failure. Rather, they illustrate the inherent challenges of negotiated security governance in fragmented conflict settings and constitute a foreseeable consequence of bringing competing armed formations within a single institutional framework rather than excluding them from it.

For the time being, the SMC is thus a necessary and useful instrument: It reduces intra-coalition competition, creates a recognized venue for dispute management, and begins to habituate rival formations to common procedures. But its value depends on whether it is used to incrementally strengthen the authority of the Yemeni state, its ministries, its chains of command, and its legal mandates – or whether it hardens into a permanent substitute for them. Supported with the objective of incremental state-building in mind, the committee can serve as scaffolding for a future unified command: Its procedures can migrate into the Ministry of Defense, its dispute-resolution practice into formal military justice, and its coordination habits into an integrated force structure. Supported carelessly, it risks institutionalizing the very fragmentation it was

⁵ Accordingly, Dr. Rashad al-Alimi, President of the Presidential Leadership Council, “announced the formation of a Supreme Military Committee under the leadership of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy. The committee will be tasked with preparing, equipping, and commanding all military forces and formations, and supporting them in readiness for the next phase should the militias reject peaceful solutions.” (<https://presidentialalimi.net/en/news1529.html> (26.06.2026)).

⁶ This assessment draws on the author’s primary reporting and interviews conducted during the period. Several commentators interpreted the appointments as politically motivated, arguing that they strengthened the influence of the Giants Brigades and National Shield Forces within local security structures rather than reflecting a clearly articulated security sector reform objective.

created to manage. The task for the Government of Yemen and its partners is to hold the committee to the first trajectory.

Maritime Security and the Yemen Maritime Security Partnership (YMSP): SSR Beyond National Sovereignty

The maritime domain provides a second important example of hybrid security arrangements in Yemen. Indeed, maritime governance may represent the clearest example of hybrid security governance because the coast guards sit naturally at the intersection of sovereignty, international cooperation, civilian administration, and local governance.

Growing international concern regarding Red Sea security, weapons smuggling, trafficking networks, and threats to international shipping has elevated Yemen's coastline into a major arena of international security engagement. Maritime insecurity at Bab al-Mandab now intersects directly with broader regional concerns involving Iran, the Houthis, AQAP, transnational smuggling networks, and instability across the Horn of Africa. Within this context, the YMSP and broader international support to the Yemen Coast Guard (YCG) reflect an increasingly pragmatic approach to maritime stabilization.

The YMSP is an international partnership established in 2025 under the joint leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, working in close partnership with the Government of Yemen to strengthen Yemen's maritime security architecture and rebuild the institutional and operational capacity of the YCG. The partnership was

formally launched at the High-Level Yemen Maritime Security Conference in Riyadh on 16 September 2025, which brought together representatives from more than thirty-five countries and international organizations, alongside the Government of Yemen. The founding Steering Committee includes the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The YMSP serves as the principal coordination platform for international maritime assistance, aligning donor investments, mobilizing technical and financial support, and overseeing a long-term program to regenerate the Yemen Coast Guard through institutional reform, training, infrastructure rehabilitation, operational capability development, maritime domain awareness, governance, and international coordination. Its broader objective is to enhance the Government of Yemen's ability to secure its territorial waters, combat smuggling, piracy, trafficking, and other maritime threats, protect critical international shipping lanes in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea, and contribute to regional stability and economic recovery. The partnership also functions as a mechanism for coordinating international pledges, monitoring implementation, generating operational learning, and ensuring that support from international partners is sequenced and aligned against a shared long-term strategy.⁷ This initiative reflects growing international recognition that maritime stabilization cannot rely solely upon centralized state reconstruction, particularly within fragmented conflict environments.

Instead, maritime security depends upon negotiated coordination among local coast

⁷ Saudi Press Agency (16.09.2025): 'Saudi Arabia, UK Launch International Partnership to Strengthen Yemen's Maritime Security.' Available at <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2398929> (18.07.2026).

guard actors, regional security partners, international maritime initiatives, donor-supported institutions, and hybrid local-national command systems operating across overlapping jurisdictions and chains of command. In practice, effective maritime governance relies on mechanisms that facilitate communication, deconfliction, and operational cooperation among actors that retain distinct mandates, authorities, and sources of legitimacy. The YMSP therefore reflects a broader evolution in stabilization policy.

But the maritime domain also illustrates the increasing regionalization of security governance. Initiatives such as the European Union's maritime operations in the Red Sea, Combined Maritime Forces activities, and broader international efforts to secure shipping lanes demonstrate that contemporary maritime security increasingly operates through layered governance arrangements that combine national institutions, regional partnerships, and international security mechanisms. The YMSP should therefore be understood not simply as a technical capacity-building initiative but as part of an emerging regional security architecture spanning the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.

Importantly, enhanced coast guarding provides one of the clearest examples of how practical security cooperation can continue despite unresolved political fragmentation. At the same time, the effectiveness of maritime security arrangements remains heavily dependent upon broader political and institutional dynamics inside Yemen. Fragmentation among competing security actors, overlapping jurisdictions, inconsistent chains of command, and competing regional interests continue to constrain maritime governance.

As a result, technical capacity building for the YCG in the framework of the YMSP alone is insufficient. The success of hybrid maritime security arrangements ultimately depends upon the ability to manage fragmentation among multiple security actors while gradually strengthening coordination, interoperability, and institutional legitimacy. The maritime domain therefore demonstrates both the possibilities and limits of contemporary stabilization policy in fragmented environments.

Strengthening coordination mechanisms, communication systems, and interoperability therefore are important interventions, particularly where they reinforce the authority and capabilities of national institutions such as the Yemen Coast Guard. In practice, this means channeling support through the Yemen Coast Guard's national command structure rather than around it, tying capacity building to civilian administration – port authorities, customs, fisheries management, and the legal mandates that connect maritime policing to the justice system – and treating every parallel coordination mechanism as provisional, with an explicit pathway for its functions to transfer to national institutions as their capability grows. The measure of the YMSP's success, in other words, is not the volume of coordination it sustains but the degree of state capacity and authority it leaves behind.

Counterterrorism Governance and Hybrid Operational Coordination

Counterterrorism (CT) governance in Yemen provides a third important illustration of hybrid security arrangements. AQAP and, to a lesser extent, the 'Islamic State' in Yemen

continue to pose persistent security threats. At the same time, the evolving regional security environment, including Red Sea instability, Houthi regional activity, Iranian networks, and links with armed groups in the Horn of Africa, has reinforced international concern regarding Yemen's role within broader transnational threat systems.

The withdrawal and repositioning of UAE-backed structures has created new pressures on Yemen's CT landscape. While AQAP remains significantly degraded compared to its territorial peak, there are growing concerns regarding its ability to regenerate through localized security gaps, smuggling networks, and fragmented governance environments.

Yet, Yemen's CT architecture remains highly fragmented. Multiple national and subnational actors operate simultaneously with overlapping mandates, competing sponsorship networks, and inconsistent legal authorities. CT operations therefore rely on informal coordination between military formations, intelligence actors, local authorities, and external partners.

This fragmentation reflects broader structural dynamics within Yemen's security order. National-level institutions such as the Ministry of Interior, the General Directorate of Counterterrorism, and the Central State Security Apparatus coexist alongside locally embedded security formations and regionally sponsored forces that are yet to be integrated. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia appears focused on strengthening selected national CT structures while simultaneously managing broader political fragmentation. The result is

not the emergence of a unified national CT architecture, but rather a negotiated system of hybrid operational coordination.

In practice, counterterrorism coordination in Yemen increasingly depends on intelligence sharing, negotiated coexistence among multiple security actors, operational deconfliction, external support arrangements, and localized security partnerships embedded within fragmented governance environments. These developments illustrate how counterterrorism is currently being pursued in practice, rather than how it is necessarily designed in policy. They reflect an observable shift in operational approaches away from centralized models of counterterrorism and toward hybrid forms of security governance, in which multiple domestic and international actors contribute to threat management despite the absence of unified command structures or comprehensive political settlements.

This again reflects the observed shift from reform toward management. Importantly, the CT landscape also illustrates the risks associated with fragmented security governance. The absence of clear legal mandates, overlapping institutional authorities, and weak accountability mechanisms has, in some instances, contributed to allegations of arbitrary detention, politicized targeting, human rights abuses, parallel detention systems, and operational opacity. These dynamics highlight the tension at the heart of contemporary stabilization policy: While fragmented environments increasingly require pragmatic coordination among multiple security actors, sustainable security outcomes ultimately depend upon strengthening legal authorities, civilian oversight,

judicial accountability, and legitimate public institutions capable of exercising enduring responsibility for security provision.

The described risks and failures thus reinforce the importance of integrating legal governance, accountability mechanisms, and civilian protection principles into any future CT support architecture. At the same time, the broader regional environment increases the urgency of maintaining effective CT coordination. Reports indicating growing operational and logistical linkages among AQAP, the Houthis, smuggling networks, and armed groups operating across the Horn of Africa demonstrate how Yemen's fragmented security environment intersects with wider transnational threat systems.⁸

Recent analysis by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) supports this analysis, identifying growing patterns of coordination, operational adaptation, and indirect collaboration among militant and criminal actors operating across the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region.⁹ ACLED's findings suggest that armed groups increasingly exploit overlapping smuggling routes, maritime insecurity, weak border governance, and conflict economies that connect Yemen, Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, and wider Red Sea networks. These dynamics are particularly important because they demonstrate that militant activity in Yemen can no longer be understood solely through a domestic counterterrorism lens. Instead, AQAP, al-Shabab,

Houthi-linked networks, trafficking actors, and regional armed groups increasingly operate within interconnected transnational security ecosystems.

The implications for stabilization policy are significant. Fragmented security environments allow armed actors to leverage informal maritime logistics, illicit trade, and cross-border movement to sustain operational resilience despite localized military pressure. As a result, security governance in Yemen increasingly intersects with broader regional efforts focused on maritime stabilization, counter-smuggling operations, intelligence coordination, and Red Sea security management. There is therefore a strong operational case for hybrid counterterrorism coordination: transnational threat systems that span the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa cannot be answered by territorially bounded, state-centric models alone, and coordination across fragmented jurisdictions is a practical necessity. But operational necessity is not a strategy, and coordination alone does not leave the Yemeni state any more competent to deal with the threats emanating from within its territory. Rather, hybrid CT arrangements should be treated as transitional instruments, and every investment in coordination – intelligence sharing, deconfliction, joint operations – should carry with it a parallel investment in the legal mandates, judicial oversight, detention standards, and accountable national institutions that must ultimately bear enduring responsibility for security

⁸ United Nations Security Council (11.10.2024): 'Letter dated 11 October 2024 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council. Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4079905?v=pdf> (26.07.2026); Salah Ali Salah (02.02.2026): *From Stagnation to Destabilization: How Yemen is Becoming the Region's Ticking Time Bomb*, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. Available at <https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/oct-dec-2025/26154> (26.07.2026).

⁹ ACLED (13.05.2026): 'Jihadist groups pose a growing and expanding threat in Africa'. Available at <https://acleddata.com/report/jihadist-groups-pose-growing-and-expanding-threat-africa> (28.07.2026).

provision. Where coordination is pursued without this institutional counterpart, pragmatic arrangements risk entrenching parallel security structures whose opacity and abuses feed the very grievances and weaknesses that armed groups exploit. The test, here as in the other cases, is whether hybrid coordination incrementally strengthens legitimate state authority or quietly substitutes for it.

Conclusion: Managing Fragmentation Without Institutionalizing It

The three cases from the Yemeni context described above expose the limits of conventional SSR frameworks in protracted conflicts. Those frameworks were built on Weberian assumptions: coherent national political authority, relatively unified institutions, centralized command, a clear line between state and non-state actors, and a sequential transition from conflict to stabilization within which institutional consolidation could proceed. In Yemen, those assumptions hold only partially, if at all. Security governance operates instead through negotiated coexistence among fragmented actors embedded in overlapping systems of local legitimacy, regional sponsorship, and hybrid authority – and comparable conditions now prevail across Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and parts of the Sahel. The Supreme Military Committee, the Yemen Maritime Security Partnership, and Yemen's evolving counterterrorism coordination structures show what stabilization looks like under these conditions: imperfect, politically contested, and operationally uneven arrangements that nonetheless manage violence, preserve operational effectiveness,

and maintain functional cooperation where comprehensive reform is not yet possible.

The policy challenge follows directly. Managing fragmentation must not become synonymous with accepting permanent hybridity. The question for contemporary stabilization policy is how coordination mechanisms, shared security arrangements, and pragmatic governance solutions can be designed so that they are 'good enough', addressing and building on the existing hybridity while at the same time incrementally reinforcing rather than undermining future state-building – in Yemen and across the growing set of conflict environments that no longer conform to traditional models of post-conflict transition. How well policymakers strike that balance between management and reform and pragmatism and institution-building may prove central to the future of the Yemeni state and international stabilization policy in the coming decades.

Policy Implications

The evolution of Yemen's security landscape carries broader implications for international approaches to stabilization and security sector support in fragmented conflict environments:

Context should determine the model of support – The experiences of Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Libya suggest that security sector support cannot be built around a single model of reform that applies to all contexts. In environments where state institutions retain legitimacy, territorial reach, and political coherence, support may continue to focus primarily on institutional

capability development and sovereign authority. In fragmented conflict environments, however, international actors face the challenge of supporting security governance in the absence of consolidated political settlements. Security assistance strategies must therefore adapt to the political and institutional realities of each context.

Managing fragmentation should not mean institutionalizing it – Hybrid security arrangements increasingly represent the operational reality of stabilization policy in protracted conflicts. However, managing fragmentation should not become synonymous with accepting permanent fragmentation. The challenge for policymakers is to support coordination, coexistence, and violence reduction while preserving pathways toward future institutional integration and state consolidation.

Coordination mechanisms are becoming strategic assets – The experience of the SMC suggests that coordination mechanisms increasingly often become as important as institutions themselves in fragmented environments. Investments in communication systems, mandate clarification, dispute resolution mechanisms, interoperability, and joint planning arrangements may often generate greater stabilization dividends in the short term than attempts at rapid institutional restructuring.

Maritime governance should be treated as stabilization policy – The maritime domain illustrates how security governance increasingly extends beyond national borders and traditional institutional mandates. Coast guard development, anti-smuggling efforts, maritime policing, and regional naval

coordination should therefore be understood not simply as technical security interventions but as core components of stabilization policy and state legitimacy promotion.

Regionalized threats require regionalized responses – The growing interconnections among terrorism, smuggling, organized crime, maritime insecurity, and conflict economies suggest that stabilization policy can no longer remain confined within national borders. The Red Sea and Horn of Africa often operate as integrated security systems requiring coordination among national institutions, regional organizations, and international partners.

Institutional legitimacy remains the long-term objective – Hybrid arrangements must therefore reinforce public institutions, not substitute for them. Hybrid arrangements are operational necessities, not strategic end states: The end goal of stabilization policy remains legitimate, accountable, and capable state institutions operating under civilian authority and the rule of law. Hybrid arrangements contribute to that goal only when they incrementally serve to strengthen rather than bypass the civilian state. Support to security coordination mechanisms should therefore be designed to identify and embed opportunities for strengthening state institutions at every stage of implementation. Rather than treating coordination and institution-building as separate lines of effort, programs should seek to reinforce the capacity of national ministries, civilian authorities, oversight bodies, and public administration through the design and operation of coordination mechanisms themselves. Wherever feasible, these mechanisms should incorporate clear pathways for progressively

transferring responsibilities to national institutions as their capabilities develop, while complementary donor interventions can provide additional support to wider governance and institutional reform efforts. Without this state-building orientation, hybrid arrangements risk becoming self-reinforcing systems of security management rather than transitional pathways toward institutional consolidation.

Peace processes should prepare for negotiated security arrangements – Peace mediation processes in fragmented conflict environments should avoid assuming that security sector integration will occur only after political settlements are reached. The experience of Yemen suggests that security coordination mechanisms often emerge before comprehensive political agreements and may even shape them or subsequently become important building blocks for future settlements. Mediators and peace support actors should therefore go beyond monitoring and understanding evolving security arrangements on the ground. They should actively develop propositions for transitional

security arrangements between the parties – command structures, deconfliction mechanisms, maritime governance, counterterrorism responsibilities, and local security provision – together with an SSR roadmap for the transition period that can be embedded in a future peace agreement. That roadmap should treat force integration as only one element of a broader agenda: governance of the security sector, civilian oversight and democratic accountability, legal mandates and judicial authority, transparent management of security sector finances and payrolls, vetting, and the reorientation of security provision toward the protection of the population. If negotiations reduce security sector questions to integration alone, they will reproduce the failures of previous transitions by marginalising precisely the state-building, accountability, and service provision questions on which durable peace depends. Preparing these propositions in advance – informed by the hybrid arrangements already operating – would both improve the prospects of security negotiations and reduce the risks of attempting rapid post-conflict integration without an agreed institutional destination.

About the Author

Ahmed A. Al-Khameri is a member of Chemonics' Conflict and Stabilization Practice and serves as Team Lead of the UK-funded Yemen Flexible Funding Mechanism. He is a national security and international policy specialist with more than 15 years of experience working on conflict, stabilization, and governance in the Middle East. He has advised the UK government, US government, and international partners on Yemen and the wider region, combining policy analysis with program leadership in complex and politically sensitive environments. His work focuses on the intersection of security governance, political settlements, and stabilization policy in fragmented conflict settings. Ahmed is a Chevening Scholar and holds an MA in International Politics from City University London.

Contact: aalkhameri@chemonics.com

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CARPO – Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient e.V.
Kaiser-Friedrich-Str. 13
53113 Bonn
Email: info@carpo-bonn.org
www.carpo-bonn.org