The Crisis of Security Sector Reform in Fragmented States: Oligopolies, Duopolies, and Monopolies of Violence

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ABSTRACT

Building a strong organization capable of producing violence and coercion has been a fundamental aspect of state formation. However, since the end of the Cold War, it appears that increasing numbers of states have encountered numerous difficulties in creating a 'modern' state that has full monopolistic control over the instruments of violence within its territory. Thus, these states are generally considered weak, failed, collapsed, and fragmented, etc. Part of this problem has been caused by structural changes in the international system. In addition, numerous political actors in these weak state contexts have weaponized politics. This has resulted in many of these contemporary weak states to have various state and non-state actors – situated around economic interests and political, ideological, ethnic, and other identities – to develop security capabilities loyal to themselves (i.e. oligopoly of violence), which are not aligned with the desires of the state in which they reside. In other state contexts, two major groups of elites can emerge with their own robust security capabilities that look similar but are opposed to one another (i.e. duopoly of violence). Based on field research in Africa and the Middle East, we argue that Western attempts to force these fragmented states to have centralized control over violence is a lost cause in the short-term, because it creates various security quandaries. Instead, we contend that creating stability and regime durability in these fragmented societies is dependent upon reaching a sub-optimal equilibrium of violence in which there is a manageable oligopoly in the use of force. We rely on cases studies of Kurdistan and the Iraqi government to frame our discussion on the militarization of politics in fragmented societies in the literature of security sector reform.

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The Crisis of Security Sector Reform in Fragmented States:

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Avoiding state failure is a chief concern of the United States (U.S.) in the Middle East, north Africa and the Sahel region. In the Sahel, Mali is a ward of the international community. In the rest of the Sahel, both the European Union (EU) and U.S. lead advise and assist programs, which are intended to strengthen the security architecture of these countries to help fight Boko-Haram, but also to prevent state collapse.[1] In Iraq, the U.S. concern is a relapse into state failure. Iraq's security forces (i.e. military and militias) have almost completed the liberation of Islamic State held territories. Iraq has achieved this with the help of over forty non-state militias loosely affiliated to the state, of which the Iraqi army is treated like one of the many militias.[2] This is a highly unusual configuration of state power as it deviates from Western notions that the state should have a full monopoly over the exercise of violence within its territory.

The attempt to consolidate these highly fragmented militias along sectarian, ethnic and political party lines into the Iraqi state has begun in earnest. However, Iraq had long been fragmented along territorial, ethnic, sectarian, regional, and political lines long before ISIS ever showed up on the scene in 2014.[3] These divisions allowed (and exacerbated) the rise of ISIS and the same dynamics still threaten to tear Iraq apart for the foreseeable future. The current forces of fragmentation are somewhat dampened by constructive engagement from the U.S. and Iran, each in their own political ways committed to preventing an Iraqi state collapse. But an acute security

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[1] Based on interviews with military officials from the EU and U.S., and it seems that part of this Western security involvement is driven by the concern of refugees coming to Europe and causing political instability. Interviews, U.S. Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany, August 1-5, 2017.

[2] Renad Mansour and Faleh A. Jabar, "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 28, 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/2017/04/28/popular-mobilization-forces-and-iraq-s-future-pub-68810

[3] Buddhika B. Jayamaha, Kevin Petit, and Will Reno, "Iraq's path to state failure," *Small Wars Journal*, April 21, 2017, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/iraq%E2%80%99s-path-to-state-failure

dilemma persists between the multiple armed actors on the ground.[4] There is an absence of an overarching security guarantee, and American and Iranian efforts pull in different directions. In addition, attempts to infuse the Iraqi government with aid in the short-term will have little payoff as institutional 'absorptive capabilities' are typically very low in states just emerging from a violent conflict.[5] From a game theoretical perspective, this essentially means that we are nearing a point where each armed actor might decide to 'defect' instead of 'cooperate'. Maintaining 'cooperation' between the various armed actors is key to keeping the state of Iraq from fracturing. It is needed just as much in other fragile states with numerous armed actors (e.g. South Sudan, Afghanistan, etc.) that have a fluid and dynamic relationship with the government that is in the gray area between 'ally' and 'adversary'.

Based on our experience doing fieldwork (i.e. interviews with various political, economic, and military actors) in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa, we argue that there is nothing inevitable about state failure, and in fact, it can be avoided. This requires a political solution to the security dilemma that exists between armed groups. This mechanism can be created only if we shed our Western desires for an ideal-type Weberian-like monopoly on the use of force within the state since the political conditions necessary for such ideal type states do not exist on the ground. However, the international community, namely the West, lack the political willpower to deploy the resources (e.g. troops, money, etc.) needed to create the necessary conditions on the ground in many of these weak states to create a robust monopoly of force. We need to acknowledge the context of such bifurcated states and the numerous patronage networks that act as a tenuous adhesive to the state, by promoting a manageable ***oligopoly in the use of force***.[6]

Unlike economist views that treat such violent actors as a commodity in terms of supply and demand, we contend that such armed actors are not fungible and are a foundational political reality

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[4] For a deeper explanation of security dilemmas, refer to: Posen, Barry R. "The security dilemma and ethnic conflict." *Survival* 35, No. 1 (1993): 27-47.

[5] Monika François and Inder Sud, "Promoting Stability and Development in Fragile and Failed States," *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2006): 141-160.

[6] We coin this expression to reflect patronage networks and political and social realities, which is derived from Mehler's (2004) original economist conception of this phenomena. Andres Mehler, "Oligopolies of violence in Africa south of the Sahara." *Nord-Süd aktuell* 18, No. 3 (2004): 539-548. For deeper analysis, refer to: Kenneth Omeje, "Markets or Oligopolies of Violence? The Case of Sudan," *African Security* 3, No. 3 (2010): 168-189.

that is contextually embedded at various levels from the state all the way down to the neighbor-hood level. Acknowledging this, is a much more realistic approach to Security Sector Reform (SSR) and would be an important initial step in avoiding state collapse, enabling such states to escape the crucial 5-year 'conflict trap' period where civil war relapse is most likely to occur.[7]

The advantage of such a strategy is that the political, economic, and military dynamics on the ground already generate this contextual political oligopoly of violence. Essentially, a *natural equilibrium of violence* has been reached between enumerable armed actors. Such undercurrents are not novel or new in Iraq, Syria, or elsewhere, as there are at least 300 pro-government mili-tias currently in existence around the world.[8] Rather, it has become a harsh global reality since the end of the Cold War that creating a new monopoly on violence is incredibly difficult due to economic globalization, social media technologies, and the emergence of cheaper, stronger, and versatile military weapons, and ideational changes in the west.

Monopoly in the use of force is a highly coercive intensive process that create winners and los-ers. Unfortunately, the Western ideational context today is that the sole winner of a civil war can quickly become a war-criminal. This can make it near-to-impossible for a single hegemonic do-mestic power to emerge that will be recognized as 'legitimate' by the international community.[9] In fact, evidence suggests that rebel groups and the military of a state during a civil war some-times vie more for international legitimacy than warfare against one another, in hopes of obtain-ing international donors that are keen on 'human rights' and respect for international law.[10] This skews traditional state formation theories, where the organization better at making war makes

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[7] Paul Collier, et. al., *Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2003).

[8] Sabine C. Carey, Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe, "States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-Government Militias," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, No. 2 (2013): 249-258. For an up to date dataset, see: The Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD), May 18, 2017, https://dataverse.har-vard.edu/dataverse/pgmd

[9] Anthony W. Pereira, "Armed Forces, Coercive Monopolies, and Changing Patterns of State Formation and Vio-lence," in Diane E. Davis and AnthonyW. Pereira (eds.), *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 387-407; Emily O. Goldman and Leslie C. Eliason (eds.), *The Diffusion of Military Technology and Ideas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons from the Vietcong to the Islamic State* (New York: Oxford Uni-versity Press, 2017).

[10] Jessica A. Stanton, *Violence and restraint in civil war: civilian targeting in the shadow of international law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

them equally as good at building a state.[11] Making matters worse, many Western state-building attempts rely on an orthodox strategy of building a state they want, not the type of state the population wants in their recipient state. This creates a strategic mismatch, where donors prefer a loyal leader to run the state, but this individual usually lacks legitimacy in the eyes of his or her own people, making the state untenable and ripe for state fragmentation.[12]

We – namely the U.S. and international community – should encourage and reinforce a *pragmatic* oligopoly of violence, where various actors are controlled and integrated within a broader SSR framework. Such a reform is a necessary pre-condition for short-term regime durability *and* long-term state formation. Oligopoly in the use of force is hardly ideal and it will not bring these states out of the periphery but it will lock these states into a sub-optimal military, political and economic equilibrium that will avoid the worst-case scenario, a race to the bottom (i.e. every actor defects). Otherwise, the inevitable 'race-to-the-bottom' for various levels of parochial power will only lead to intensified fragmentation in a post-Islamic State Iraq, and in other countries recovering from recent internal wars across the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Avoiding State Failure: SSR to the Rescue?

Political fragmentation in Iraq closely mirrors the fragmented military-militia reality, as political, ethnic, and sectarian fragmentation generates a self-reinforcing dynamic. This cycle of violence, which races towards the lowest common denominators, threatens to tip Iraq over the edge towards a failed state status (again) in the near term. This military-militia problem worsened in Iraq at the end of 2015, when the Iraqi government decided to formally recognize and integrate armed Shia groups and other Iranian backed militias into the Iraqi military.[13] While there will be innumerable initiatives to reconcile, engage, and generate positive engagements between actors,

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[11] Many cite Tilly's maxim that "war made the state and the state made war" as a cornerstone of this theory of state formation. Charles C. Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

[12] David A. Lake, *The statebuilder's dilemma: On the limits of foreign intervention* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

[13] Jack Watling, "The Shia militias of Iraq," *The Atlantic*, December 22, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/12/shia-militias-iraq-isis/510938/

all of it will come to naught without a *realistic* plan to reform the intensely fragmented security sector.

Conventional attempts to impose a Western styled military on a fragile state that is supposedly independent of society and their political problems is a fantasy.[14] Without agreeable solutions in place between political elites and formal and informal actors that wield the tools of coercion, such fragile states will never find an equilibrium of peace or violence. Nor will such governments permit the creation of a 'modern' military because of the danger such an effective security apparatus might pose to the political survival of the regime that might rely on multiple state agencies and non-state armed actors to balance one another.[15] Foreign donors will eventually be disappointed to realize that their sizeable contributions of security aid and assistance will only create a "Fabergé egg military" that is costly and sparkly, but as brittle as the current political situation.[16] Hence, many of these 'subsidized' militaries lack the institutional capacity to be effective, because their political context will not allow it.

SSR, though conventionally presented in terms of a technical solution to a technical problem, remains an intensely political process fraught with challenges. The inability to make SSR effective is exactly why ISIS was able to rise so quickly and defeat a larger Iraqi military – "ghost troops" on the payroll do not count – that was better trained and equipped by the "the finest fighting force in the history of the world" (America).[17] Looking at the future of Iraq, SSR will be especially difficult if the Iraqi security sector remains the primary forum through which politics are

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[14] William Reno, "Security Assistance to Failed States in Africa: Charades and Realities," *African Affairs*, 2018 (forthcoming).

[15] A modern military means a security apparatus that is given autonomy to generate military power and can operate in a professional fashion without fear of being coup-proofed or personalized by corrupt politicians (i.e. using the military as patronage, etc.). Libya's Muammar Gaddafi was notorious for relying on various non-state armed actors to act as a 'check-and-balance' on his large and expensive military. Syria's Bashar al-Assad also relied on numerous militias and various other security agencies to spy and monitor one another.

[16] Jahara W. Matisek, "The Crisis of American Military Assistance," *Parameters*, 2018 (forthcoming).

[17] Jonathan Marcus, "Factors behind the precipitate collapse of Iraq's army," *BBC News*, June 13, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838435; BBC, "Iraqi army 'had 50,000 ghost troops' on payroll," November 30, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30269343; American President Barack Obama quoted in James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/

conducted.[18] If violence is the 'ways and means' of communicating politics in Iraqi society – to include other fragile states attempting post-war reconstruction – then there needs to be amicable political-military-militia relations that find agreement in stability and the mutual benefits derived from such a political agreement. In similar ways, such problems of controlling violence is best illustrated with the concept of limited access orders (LAOs), where those with coercive capacity use this to leverage the political system to extract rents from the state.[19]

Therefore, a realistic goal in Iraq (and states with similar dynamics) is to build on the existing structural context and worry less about creating a centralized apparatus that tries to monopolize violence. It is better to assist in the creation of various institutions and mechanisms that permit an oligopoly in the use of force, that can lead to beneficial peace between all armed actors. While normally suboptimal, an oligopoly of violence within the existing federal structure in Iraq or similar confederal states will be a substantial improvement in the short- to medium-term, contributing to stability. Once a generation passes through such a security arrangement, then security dilemmas and other similarly destructive iterative games over the tools of coercion will finally be removed from the equation. This will facilitate the eventual transition to a more 'modern-looking' state and formal security apparatus with a tighter control over the use of violence. Such a process is not immediate, but requires time and patience, as citizens, armed actors, society, and state, will become institutionally embedded in a new security reality that is devoid of the typical 'spirals of violence' and other similarly pathologically destructive political forces that drive individuals to insurgency and local strongmen (i.e. warlords) to provocatively contest state authority for personal gain.[20]

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[18] Andreas Krieg, "ISIS' Success in Iraq: A testimony to failed security sector reform," *Centre for Security Governance*, July 22, 2014, http://secgovcentre.org/2014/07/isis-success-in-iraq-a-testimony-to-failed-security-sector-reform/

[19] Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and social orders: a conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[20] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Sons of the soil, migrants, and civil war," *World Development* 39, No. 2 (2011): 199-211.

SSR – The U.S. Government and Third-Party Interventions

SSR came to prominence through American bilateral aid programs in the mid-1990s during the Balkan wars. SSR espoused "reform efforts directed at the institutions, processes, and forces that provide security and promote the rule of law."[21] In other words, the U.S. engaged in state-building efforts in all but name. SSR remains the most challenging aspect of institutional reforms. It is especially difficult in weak states such as Iraq, though there is similar SSR crisis ongoing in South Sudan.[22] This challenge speaks to the central dilemma of SSR in many contemporary weak states where insurgents and warlords – for some time – have played a centrally defining feature in the political and cultural landscape. For SSR to work, requires political willpower and at least a modicum of central government capacity to implement; factors that are largely missing amidst the fragmentation of the country's political groups, armed and otherwise. Similarly, many weak regimes perceive capable state institutions as a threat to their own personalist rule.[23]

Many tend to forget that security, development, and governance are linked.[24] If the leaders of a government are engaged in activities that undermine their own government's authority, such as lending support to militias attached to particular political parties and sectarian interests, those same officials are unlikely to seriously implement SSR that is directed against these interests. For example, any international attempt to impose SSR in Guinea-Bissau would be a lost cause; political and military elites profit from their collusion with transnational drug traffickers.[25] It is even worse when different elements of the military also get politicized by different power brokers in the state. This happened to the Malian military in the mid-2000s, which led to degraded

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[21] "Security Sector Reform," U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of Defense, and U.S. Department of State, February 2009, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/115810.pdf, 1.

[22] Lauren Hutton, *South Sudan: From Fragility at Independence to a Crisis of Sovereignty* (The Hague: The Clingendael Institute, 2014), 21-25.

[23] Joel S. Migdal, *State in society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[24] Mark Duffield, *Global governance and the new wars: The merging of development and security* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014); Caroline Thomas, "Global governance, development and human security: Exploring the links," *Third World Quarterly* 22, No. 2 (2001): 159-175.

[25] Interviews, U.S. Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany, August 1-5, 2017.

professionalism and discipline, eventually leading to a *coup d'état* that overthrew the Malian government, which, up until that point had been considered a "Model African Democracy."[26]

Finally, government officials in weak states are likely to perceive intervening actors as a threat, but with the caveat of extracting as much without undermining current configurations of state power. This is because officials also perceive that a superficial commitment to SSR (i.e. rent-seeking) might encourage intervening actors such as the U.S. and other altruistic Western donors to provide education, training, and material aid that they can then direct to their local supporters and armed allies for which they can take political credit.[27] Indeed, there is a perverse moral hazard with SSR; Western assistance in this arena might actually contribute to sustaining (and worsening) the behavior that SSR is meant to eradicate.

SSR and Weak States

SSR is the foremost issue confronted in the state building enterprise, both historically and at present. The current American conceptualization of SSR translates into

> *partner governments to provide effective, legitimate, and accountable security for*
> *their citizens. In so doing, SSR assists these governments to respond appropri-*
> *ately to threats within and outside their borders*.[28]

The desired endpoint is the creation of state that can make binding rules, enforce them in a way that citizens accept as legitimate, while holding a monopoly on violence. Of course, the new dynamic that makes it more difficult in contemporary times is the role of external states and an international audience. This particular matter complicates reforms and enforcement mechanisms because the politicians overseeing these societies must exert control in the only way they know

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[26] Senegalese military officers working with the Malian military in the mid-2000's noted a dramatic rise in unprofessional behaviors, such as fraternization and other inappropriate behaviors while conducting training exercises with them. Interviews, Dakar, Senegal, August 14-18, 2017; Adam Nossiter, "Soldiers Overthrow Mali Government in Setback for Democracy in Africa," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/africa/mali-coup-france-calls-for-elections.html; Thurston, Alex. "Mali: The Disintegration of a "Model African Democracy"," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, No. 1 (2013): article 2.

[27] Numerous military and government officials interviewed in Senegal, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, spoke of the various benefits of receiving Western education and training (i.e. prestige, new job opportunities, etc.). Interviews in Africa, August 5-28, 2017.

[28] "Security Sector Reform," 2009, 1.

how to be perceived as domestically legitimate, but is constrained by a globalized environment that abhors non-standard means and ways of legitimizing state control.

This is a particularly frustrating and confounding variable of trying to maintain international legitimacy, which did not exist for most Western countries during their state-formation processes (pre-20th century) since coalitions of international observers did not try to superimpose their vision on another state. Just think of how the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Reconstruction period (1865-1877) would have played out if UN peacekeepers had been deployed or if international actors imposed requirements on how the U.S. reasserted control in the South. It likely would have had a distorting effect on the U.S. government and military, leading to a very different outcome of how the American state would look today. [29] One could even hypothetically muse if the actions of American Generals Sherman and Grant (and others) during the course of the war would have resulted in them being arrested and sent to The Hague for war crimes. This means the conduct of the American Civil War by both sides might have adjusted to conform to various international desires and audiences, and possibly resulted in a bad state-building outcome in the long-term.

Achieving 'state control of security' generates huge economies of scale and several virtuous dynamics.[30] The first order impact is that individuals, communities, and organizations can operate under longer time-horizons and become effective economic agents whose individual decisions will have positive aggregate outcomes. In practical terms, some form of hegemonic authority on the ground (i.e. informal security), enables bustling markets and goods in shops (and at cheaper prices), while encouraging investments.

Life in failed states like Somalia shows that the presence of competing militias is not a libertarian paradise either. Optimists laud the cleverness of Somalis who manage to do business in this environment, but the reality is that all profits must be made quick and investment is scarce. Businessmen become involved in militias or have their own, because this is the business of survival in

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[29] Jahara W. Matisek, "The "Goldilocks Zone" of War and Peace," *Peace Review*, 2018 (forthcoming)

[30] Charles Tilly, *Regimes and repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Michael Mann, "Has globalization ended the rise and rise of the nation-state?" *Review of international political economy* 4, No. 3 (1997): 472-496.

which they operate. This creates a pragmatic response for those with the ways and means to protect their wealth and businesses, as this is one of the few ways to enforce contracts and hold off well-armed competitors. Moreover, some 'clever' militias rely on the veneer of religion to give an air of credibility, and to legitimize their violence, with their local level control being supplemented by the informal mechanisms that religion can bring.[31]

A second-order impact of SSR is that with the decrease in each unit price of security, a modicum of complicity is generated, if not support. The provider of security generates a sense of legitimacy. When scholars point out that local vendors, business people, and individuals had "more buy-in" towards a specific actor that provided security, they are in effect pointing out that new economies of scale have made security cheaper and subsequently everything else becomes cheaper – from transportation to a myriad of formal and informal transactions costs.[32] It is a moment where increasing returns set-in, security begets security, and people's complicity turn into support reifying the form of hegemonic authority on the ground.

Politics of SSR in Weak States

The stark reality is that the countries that need SSR the most, such as Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, South Sudan, etc., are usually societies with the most fragmented political contexts that are the most difficult to reform. The multitude of actors in these states cannot be blamed for the patronage and securitization strategies; it is an agential choice for survival at the expense of building a state, which in the short-term, cannot protect them or their interests. This is compounded further by state institutions that are often tied to political and economic patronage networks. The core group of elites at the top of these networks relies on these institutions as a means of maintaining political power and buying loyalty while generating distributive outcomes of power. These same processes also keep violence low, assuming that each leader of an armed

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[31] Aisha Ahmad, "The security bazaar: business interests and Islamist power in civil war Somalia," *International Security* 39, No. 3 (2015): 89-117.

[32] Ahmad (2017) has done considerable field work in Somalia. Paradoxically, she highlights the economic dynamics without ever bringing in the security sector consolidation that led to massive decreases in security rent. Aisha Ahmad, *Jihad & Co.: Black Markets and Islamist Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

group is satiated with his or her rents, and does not perceive any imbalances in preferential treatment to other warlords and similar 'strongmen'. The only downside of course is that such negotiations undermine long-term state development as such armed actors only provide the aesthetic appearance of security without the necessary state-centric institutions to maintain 'peace' over time.[33]

This does not mean institutional reforms are impossible. There are plenty of examples of successful warlord reform occurring in places like Georgia.[34] But success comes only if the external actors' desires manage to structure local incentives in such a way where local institutional and political elites find enough 'buy-in' to the institutional reform agenda. In addition, such state consolidation also requires the state to break up existing informal networks that local 'big men' rely on to exert power and stay one step ahead of the state. Overcoming the networks of such localized strong actors requires fine grained information to circumvent their power base, creating new institutions and networks more loyal to the state.

In weak, failing or collapsed states, the security sector becomes the forum and the means in which politics is conducted, subsequently mirroring the fragmented political realities. The provision of security takes on an intensely distributive character: one's security comes at the cost of security to someone else. This reality is firmly etched in the minds of civilians. It also makes various forms of cooperation from the national to the city block incredibly difficult as "fear" and "risk" are 'spoiler' variables that make it difficult for various factions to estimate threats and counter appropriately.[35] Such dynamics only further escalate armed tensions, and elites seeking more power, can play on these forces, which generally center on identity politics, to strengthen their own position – all at the expense of the state.

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[33] Kimberly Marten, *Warlords: Strong-arm brokers in weak states* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
[34] Marten, *Warlords*, chapter 4.
[35] John H. Herz, "Idealist internationalism and the security dilemma," *World politics* 2, No. 2 (1950), 157; Jervis, Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the security dilemma." World politics 30, No. 2 (1978), 172; Roger Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

In the absence of proper institutions and enforcement capacity, violence plays a prominent role where politics is contested because the tools of coercion, as part and parcel of security, is politicized. This is also further complicated by localized politics being influenced by religion in weak states.[36] When violence is politicized in the guise of security, all the political and economic institutional tentacles begin to develop around the networks that control violence. And yet, we know that for 'normal' politics to emerge in such factionalized states, there needs to be a stable and safe security situation. For example, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria is representative of a successful local militia program, where leaders in Abuja delegated the tools and authority of violence to small rural communities where police have never existed or been effective. The Nigerian solution to the Boko Haram crisis has been the utilization of CJTFs scattered across northeastern Nigeria to combat extremist jihadists, but to Western observers these non-standard militias blur "cultural, moral, and legal frameworks concerning the state's monopoly on force."[37] However, such activities that give more authority and autonomy to allied non-state actors to exercise violence in these peripheral areas that lack state presence are vital, because it contributes to overall state security albeit through an informal dispersion of coercion in the form of an oligopoly. In turn, it provides the necessary political 'space' to conduct state business at the lowest levels of society, with some modicum of loyalty to the state at the expense of armed anti-regime actors.

Since doing business requires the blessing of a violent network, slowly but surely, economic agents small and large get co-opted by necessity into the same violent networks. This creates a lock-in effect (i.e. path dependence) and increasing returns, binding its members ever closer to the network. If the individuals at the heads of these networks have defined areas of territorial control and begin to mete out justice, then they have effectively become warlords.[38] Afghanistan

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[36] Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[37] Sam Wilkins, "From Security to Reconciliation: How Nigeria Can Win Its Bloody War with Boko Haram," *War on the Rocks*, December 8, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/from-security-to-reconciliation-how-nigeria-can-win-its-bloody-war-with-boko-haram/

[38] Romain Malejacq, "Warlords, Intervention, and State Consolidation: A Typology of Political Orders in Weak and Failed States," *Security Studies* 25, No. 1 (2016): 85-110; Romain Malejacq, "From Rebel to Quasi-State: Governance, Diplomacy and Legitimacy in the Midst of Afghanistan's Wars (1979–2001)," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, No. 4-5 (2017): 867-886.

epitomizes this situation while in Iraq the situation is more nuanced, because violent entrepreneurs and politicians overlap and the sense of control is not just territorial but also institutional. That is to say, violent entrepreneurs and politicians with capacity for violence cannot be neatly categorized as warlords, bandits, or gangsters, because some of them are part of the legally constituted state.[39]

In this context, if SSR means integrating these violent networks into a larger network, one could conceive of at least minimal reforms. If the network is to be *replaced* as part of a reformation, then the process will face economic and political resistance, likely in the form of violence. Put otherwise, monopolizing violence, the idealized SSR endpoint, or minimizing the number of actors with capacity to wield organized military power has historically been a coercively intense process, and it will remain so.[40] Attempting to maintain a monopoly of violence in such weak states will be an extraordinarily difficult task to achieve, short of an intervening force imposing itself on the country, which creates its own problems and new dynamics. The American experience in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2001 and 2003 respectively, failed to grasp the ramification of pursuing such a monumental task.[41]

In post-conflict states, effective political action requires working within the system of politics and power brokers as it exists, while trying to find points of leverage that can be used to shift political actors' incentives to encourage more cooperation and a reduction of violence. In addition, it also means enticing various strongmen to seek non-violent forms of inclusion in governmental politics. However, this paradoxically requires a neutral third-party (e.g. UN peacekeepers) to solve the politics of security dilemmas, since many of these power brokers cannot trust the new institutions of the state to protect them and their interests, and many have a socially constructed 'position' to maintain in their society and patronage network juncture. Not recognizing this reality and adapting policies to this, is what leads to hedging (i.e. keeping private security forces and

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[39] Buddhika B. Jayamaha, "Combatants, Inside and Out," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 2018.

[40] Antonio Giustozzi, *The art of coercion: the primitive accumulation and management of coercive power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[41] Herbert Wulf, *Challenging the Weberian Concept of the State: The Future of the Monopoly of Violence* (Brisbane: Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2007).

various patron-client networks) and calls for violence against a newly formed state that has effectively 'left them in the cold'.[42] The presence of such a neutral third-party with the ability to enforce consequences for those that try to 'defect' or 'spoil' the peace process, make such peace more durable, as it removes the various dilemmas facing various armed groups in a post-conflict scenario.

External actors that attempt SSR face a simple puzzle: How does an external actor structure the elite incentives at the heads of multiple violent networks? Some are embedded into the local society, some to the legally constituted states, and others to external patrons, which can complicate the broader objective of SSR. Unfortunately, such a process makes some 'winners' and others 'losers', and somehow, we need to facilitate the creation of 'magnanimous winners' and 'gracious losers'. This is a difficult prospect – and not just from an economist or rational choice perspective – but Somaliland does provide a good model for how reconciliation can work when emerging from civil war cessation in achieving a peaceful transition.[43] In the case of Iraq, politicized dynamics of violence play out in a socio-political context of intense competition among and fragmentation along ethnic, sectarian, and political lines. As tends to be the case with such ambiguous orders, the military often mirrors the politics of this state fragmentation.[44]

There is no single center in Iraq, and rarely either in similarly weak states, but multiple centers of power exist, intertangled with one another and playing each other off one another. Any attempt at preventing Iraq from disintegrating at the end of the joint coalition fight against ISIS requires coming to terms with how the security sector has become synonymous with politics. And in this place, politics has multiple political centers; SSR needs to stop swimming upstream. Instead, going with the flow of current realities in such fragile states, means incorporating several centers into the state, and acknowledging the fundamental reality that such states will never "govern like us" in the West.[45]

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[42] Anders Themnér (ed.), *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2017).

[43] Michael Walls, "The emergence of a Somali state: Building peace from civil war in Somaliland," *African Affairs* 108, No. 432 (2009): 371-389.

[44] Herbert M. Howe, *Ambiguous order: military forces in African states* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

[45] Melissa Annette Thomas, *Govern Like Us: US Expectations of Poor Countries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

Iraq's Challenge

With over fifty non-state armed actors by last count, the Iraqi state is a long way from monopolizing the use of violence. Iraqi-Syrian state fragmentation has generated dozens of armed actors with formidable capacity for violence – partly due to the assistance and support by various external states – and these armed groups are embedded in the specific societal milieu that supports them. Therefore, any coercive intensive attempt by the central government of Iraq to reign them in, will face deep societal opposition. That leaves the central government and its external patrons with the option of trying to implement SSR by relying on collusion, cooptation, and cooperation. Institutional incentives as a means of SSR makes the process far more political.

Hence, in the currently fragmented nature that is the 'Iraqi state', the politics of violence are heightened and understanding the political dynamics will be critical. Using broad brush strokes, we seek to highlight the most prominent political dynamics that will play a prominent role that Iraq and an international audience will have to consider now that the Islamic State in Iraq has essentially been defeated. To highlight our argument, we point out the military dynamics that underlie the ethnic, sectarian, and intra-ethnic and intra-sectarian divisions. Each of these generate a mutually reinforcing dynamic being pushed by various endogenous and exogenous variables. We contend that stability, reconciliation, and long-term state-building can occur, if policies by Iraqi politicians and international donors acknowledge the layers of nuance and context, and strive towards creating an oligopoly of violence out of the morass.

Kurdistan Regional Government: A Duopoly of Violence

The slow and steady evolution of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) presents an image of success premised on continued Western support.[46] It is a functioning state insofar as individuals, communities and organizations relate to the state and to each other as proscribed by deeply

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[46] Julia Pettengill, "Don't Forget 'The Other Iraq:' Why the US and UK should do more to support Iraqi Kurdistan," *Henry Jackson Society*, August 4, 2008, posted on Kurdistan Regional Government's official webpage, http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/print.aspx?l=12&smap=010000&a=25066

rooted and internalized institutions. But recently the KRG is stuck in a military, economic and political stalemate, in terms of a duopoly of political power, which is mirrored in the control of the KRG's armed forces, the Peshmerga. The KRG's situation highlights the intractable difficulties inherent to SSR. However, bringing the rest of Iraq to the level of Iraqi-Kurdistan region would be a great medium-term success.

The KRG represents an overarching Kurdish state in the making that really remains a merger of two shadow states separated by their respective armed forces. There are two shadow power structures along the two dominant political parties, parallel economic centers with economic elites maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the two ruling parties and two armed forces. While beholden to the two ruling parties, the two state-like armies are further fragmented in terms of their command and control since political elites with specific familial and/or patronage networks remain at the heads of varied security organizations. The level of stability one sees in KRG is arrived at by the two ruling parties integrating smaller militias into their fold through a mixture of collusion, cooperation, and coercion. The two dominant parties have created a formidable duopoly in security, that is more coherent and effective than the much larger Iraqi Army.[47]

In an ideal world, holding politics and economics constant, the multiple armed groups belonging to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) would be integrated into the formal command structure running through the Peshmerga, and each of their intelligence agencies belonging to the ruling parties would be integrated into the single Asayesh directorate of the KRG. Numerous smaller armed groups and militias would also be integrated into forces under the control of the ministry of interior, to create their own particular form of a reserve army and national guard. Ultimately, instead of the party leaders, the parliament would control the armed forces and citizens would hold the parliament, and by extension, the security sector accountable. This is the argument made by the major opposition movement Goran in Kurdistan.[48]

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[47] Opinion of serval American military personnel that have worked with the Kurdish and Iraqi militaries. Interviews, Pentagon, Washington, DC, July 26-28, 2017.
[48] Goran Party leaders, Suleimaniya, Interviews, December 2014, March 2015, December 2015, January 2017.

Most Kurds recognize that this needs to happen, and hope it will happen. However, most Kurds are also certain that it will not happen in the foreseeable future, because the KRG is in an arrested form of development with its state-building process paralyzed by the duopoly of violence in place. Worse yet, the two hegemonic parties that managed to integrate the smaller ones with a duopoly are at an impasse. The stalemate remains intractable because the security architectures of the two ruling parties remains the foundation on which their political and economic fortunes are built. These armies at the same time also guarantee their fortunes and political survival for the foreseeable future.

The intractability of their gridlock is further reinforced by the influence of external actors, another ineluctable reality in Iraq. Iran's alliance with PUK, and by extension, the PUK's close relations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), provide Iran with leverage to limit Turkish influence in Iraq and regionally, while also checking KDP ambitions. Turkey, allied with KDP, uses its influence to check Iran's influence, stymieing the PUK's ambitions and counteracting the PKK. These political ties inhibit the creation of a strong political Center in the KRG. At the same time, in KRG territory, violence is rarely manifest in its lethal form and the average individual does not worry for his or her safety, and economic agents have some semblance of predictability. While violence is politicized, the politicized violence has become well routinized – as in the case of any state building project – and the rest of the institutional appurtenances of statehood are weaved around institutionalized violence. In the next couple of decades, if one could entertain the possibility of the authorities in Baghdad reaching the relative standards of the KRG in how violence is routinized and institutionalized, Iraq could be finally referred to as a 'success'. Regrettably, the realistic SSR vision for the rest of Iraq however is neither a monopoly on violence nor a duopoly in the Kurdish mold, but instead an oligopoly in violence. Managing this current Iraqi situation with SSR reforms centered on acknowledging this pre-condition, is the only way of preventing another collapse of Iraqi security forces, and return to yet another civil war.

An Oligopoly of Violence: Politics of SSR in Baghdad

Iraq as a whole, lacks a political and military center. In the emerging post-Islamic State environment, avoiding Iraqi state failure means preventing the creation of ever smaller armed groups. If not, many of these organizations pose the problem of multiple competing actors with capabilities to be robustly powerfully militarily speaking. This will likely generate a scenario reminiscent of Mogadishu in the 1990s. Mogadishu illustrates the difficulty of exiting the failed state condition. Fortunately, Iraq's situation may not be so dire due to it not having the same degree and severity of clan politics. Additionally, there are enough major domestic actors with enough overlapping interests and interactions that could reconcile, creating room for an oligopoly in the use of violence. Despite the proliferation of armed actors and various weapons, there are structural dynamics in Iraq that favor an oligopoly. Iraq's neighbors also share interests in not seeing Iraq descend into a complete collapse of central authority (again), because neighbors, such as Iran have suffered significant disruptions and terrorist attacks themselves that have emanated from the Syrian-Iraqi hinterlands.[49]

If SSR in Baghdad could be brought to the level of that in Kurdish regions of Iraq, that would be a great success in at least creating some modicum of security actor devotion to the Iraqi state identity. It would generate immediate first and second order benefits in terms of enhanced economic activity and people's support and complicity towards the Iraqi government, strengthening it further. Achieving this though, will not be simply solved through Western advise and assist missions and funding, as this will only continue the failed Iraqi status quo politics.

Baghdad vis-à-vis the Government of Iraq

As the Iraqi army collapsed in the wake of the Islamic State advance, a multitude of non-state armed actors stepped up to assist what remained of the Iraqi army with repelling their advance. These groups operated under the broader category of popular mobilization forces. At present, there are at least over forty Shia popular mobilization units (PMU's). The government by prime-

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[49] Nader Hashemi, "Surely some mistake. Why did ISIS attack Iran?" *Newsweek*, June 15, 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/surely-some-mistake-why-did-isis-attack-iran-625253

ministerial edict made all the PMU's part of the central government, granting them formal mili-
tary recognition and integration, without explicitly articulating the nature of their relationship to
the central state. This new civil-military-militia configuration was enough to cause some Iraqi
generals and other officers to seek asylum in the West, as many of them foresaw the long-term
consequences of integrating Shia militias with questionable allegiances.[50] Many of these militias
are essentially Iranian backed proxies – hardly the sort of help needed in creating an Iraqi sense
of nationalism and identity that is a prerequisite step in state formation.

The character of the PMUs varies. They are not acting with a single motive, with a central loyal
focus point. Some of the PMU's are rebranded and reconstituted paramilitaries of political par-
ties. In the case of the Peace Companies, it remains a reconstituted version of the old Mahdi
army with its own political party, social movement, and spiritual leader. There is the Badr bri-
gade, formerly the military wing of the main Shia political party SCIRI, that now constitutes its
own political party and military force. There is Asaib-al-Haq, a splinter version of the Mahdi
army, turned Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) proxy that attacked the American
armed forces, now reconstituted into a PMU, and apparently allied with former Prime Minister
Maliki.[51] The list of various armed groups in Iraqi is enumerable, with each having their own
'brand' and 'ingredients' to constitute a uniquely different militia with different visions and pa-
rochial interests.

The one common strand of every PMU is that each remains exclusively Shia. Each PMU group
pays homage to Shia martyrs; maintains the implicit and explicit narrative of Shia persecution;
and carries flags, banners, and posters of historical Shia leaders. They articulate the present
struggle in explicitly sectarian terms as if it is a continuation of their millennial struggle between
the sects. Nearly every one of the PMU's pay some form of homage to a Shia Ayatollah as a
spiritual leader, though that is not a singular statement on where their loyalties lie, because some
of them such as Badr corps and Asaib-ul-Haq remain explicit proxies of the IRGC. Some are
loyal to Iraqi Shia political parties, but look suspiciously like Iranian proxies. But they are best

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[50] U.S. Government Official, Interview, March 10, 2016.
[51] Interviews, Kurdistan, January 2017.

seen as militarized patronage networks, defined along sectarian, political, and clerical lines. Almost all retain hierarchical command and control organizational structures. Every unit, except the Badr Corps, remains tactically analogous to mechanized cavalry battalions, with the biggest wielding Brigade-level elements, albeit relying on Iraqi coalition military forces for close air support and indirect fire support (i.e. artillery, etc.).

The "legalization" of PMUs is seen by both Kurds and Sunnis as creating a "Shia army" whose loyalties are either to Iran or to some Ayatollah but hardly to the Iraqi central government. Opponents of PMUs point out that Iranians and Iraqi Shia are creating an armed force analogous to the IRGC and the *Basiji* militia's in Iran. That outcome is not preordained, and, in fact, if the Iranian goal is to create a single IRGC structure that parallels the Iraqi Army, (that we are creating again) they may run into the same political challenges. Iranians are in effect 'reforming' the Security Sector in ways that they know works, and that will keep armed Iraqis beholden to them. But this need not be so.

Movement towards an Oligopoly

PMUs have an aesthetic form of power, that is lacking with most 'formal' Iraqi security units. They emulate the *Basiji* militias and paramilitaries in Iran by way of IRGC. But Iraqi PMUs are hardly the Iranian *Basijis*. Iranians may have created them in a *Basiji* mold because that is the model they know and is a model that Iranians use in Lebanon and Syria. Yet, now it is the Iraqi state that is paying their salaries. This fact creates an opportunity for the main Shia militias that have been political players since shortly after the 2003 American led invasion of Iraq.
The likely scenario is that the major Iraqi political parties that have had their militias for a long time, that have controlled myriad Iraqi institutions, could integrate some of them into a more durable Iraqi government institutional structure. The Iraqi Army will be one of the many militias in this circumstance, albeit, the militia that answers to the prime-minister. In this scenario, if upon integration and compelling the myriad militias to bandwagon, and the Iraqi government could reduce the number of actors with an autonomous capacity for military power to less than two-handful, preferably to a handful. This would allow the Iraqi political scene to arrive at some modicum of stable, if sub-optimal equilibrium. There will be multiple centers of power, around

which will grow multiple political, economic and ideologically inclined networks of power, multiple centers of gravity, multiple centers of power, all of them integrated into the legally constituted state.

This oligopoly would mean security will be far more expensive than if it was to be provided by a single actor. The practical impact will be that Iraq, as most poor countries, will be an expensive place to live and do business, but in the immediate term, it may stop short of internecine violence. This will happen if external actors could structure the incentives to create this coalition. This less than efficient outcome overcomes the main problem of conventional SSR: The distributional consequence of trying to monopolize violence are most acute in the context of failed or collapsing states. In these contexts, military power remains the elemental power source that defines everything else.

Those with military power not only have an advantage with initiating combat, but also in managing violence. Moreover, they have the capacity to provide security, control economic distribution networks, and by extension, maintain a strangle hold on people's complicity, if not support. This is the genesis of political control. At present, the majority of these Iraqi militias have generated authority and credibility, and are perceived of as legitimate actors and partners in the legally constituted state. Unlike many other scholar's assumptions about such chaotic environments, these are not bandits or criminals, but legitimate political actors at the head of violent networks with the capacity for violence.[52] These 'politicians' blur the formal and informal linkages of the state and various networks of security. In sum, they take care of and oppress people, they are the businessmen that maintain global-local linkages, and they also take care of the opposition violently.

In short, Iraq faces a massive Hobbesian problem of order, but trying to provide a Hobbesian solution to such 'anarchy' only stands to make it worse. Attempts to reassert a monopoly in a state, where it never existed under the old regime of Saddam Hussein, means an 'old-school' power

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[52] Tilly and Olson both provide their own analogies and metaphors on such actors being bandits and criminals, in relating to state-building. Charles Tilly, "Warmaking and Statemaking as Organized Crime," University of Michigan Center for Research on Social Organizations Working Paper 256; Mancur Olson, *Power and prosperity: Outgrowing communist and capitalist dictatorships: Outgrowing communist and capitalist dictatorships* (New York: Basic books, 2000), 3-6.

grab that leaves far too many losers. It is especially problematic in a society where violent expressions are the most commonly understood form of 'brute democracy,' expressing a 'vote' one way or another. But an oligopoly could bring a suboptimal equilibrium where people are better off, not as better as they could be, but certainly better than they are at the moment. Such a suboptimal solution also prevents violent entrepreneurs and other 'spoilers' from disrupting the equilibrium, because the violent elites comprising the oligopoly would view such outsiders as an existential threat to the entire coalition, and would deal with them accordingly.[53] Such scenarios may make international audiences squeamish, but we have already learned the dismal outcome in places such as Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and in other collapsed states, where naïve policies were pursued in an attempt to assert a singular actor for centralized control of violence. In such societies – where politics are militarized – centralizing violence is not only untenable, but a dangerous proposition because coercion is a normal precondition for daily politics, interactions, and negotiations between local power brokers.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to be optimistic about Iraq. It retains vestiges of old bureaucratic institutions and human capital. Some of the institutions are manned by individuals with institutional memories, and some violent actors even seek legitimacy by trying to formally ally with the state, often, with their capacity for violence intact or with at least the 'reach-back' capability to reactivate networks that would rearm in support of any new cause. That desire to be part of the legally constituted state means, with proper incentives, one could use SSR to bring the number of militias down to a handful and get them to be part of the legally constituted state. Since Iraq is actually a democracy, in the most minimalist sense, some form of elite contestation will occur. In this context, contestation involves those with considerable violent capabilities, and such competition (i.e. political violence) can be avoided if each is given an incentive to participate in a positive fashion (non-violence).

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[53] Anders Themnér, "A leap of faith: When and how ex-combatants resort to violence," *Security Studies* 22, No. 2 (2013): 295-329; Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, "The fallacy of constructing hybrid political orders: a reappraisal of the hybrid turn in peacebuilding," *International Peacekeeping* 23, No. 2 (2016): 219-239.

As long as repeated interactions have left the elites with the sentiment that no one is attempting a Hobbesian solution to a Hobbesian problem (i.e. using violence to eradicate those with the capacity for violence), then perhaps there is a better way to state-building in Iraq.[54] An ideal alternative would be a Kantian approach, which would achieve 'law and order', but the current political context would end up making the violent elites better off than the majority. [55] Such a Kantian scenario could lead to some modicum of peaceful contestation, but ultimately it would be nothing more than an elite bargain that would define the outcome at the top. The key however, is avoiding a Schmittian pursuit of violence on the basis of political polarization along the spectrum of ideologies.[56] For the time being, Iraq appears to teeter more towards a severe Schmittian problem of violence, unless of course an oligopoly of violence is brokered by elites, which could bring the requisite Kantian order needed in Iraq.

Unfortunately, the problem of in-fighting within groups persists in Iraq, suggesting that it could be a fanciful idea that an elite coalition could ever broker a truce. There have been numerous instances of Shia-on-Shia violence, including assassinations of their own elites for any combination of ideological, economic, military, or political reasons. This is merely a repeat of history, dating back to Jewish zealots, known at the *Sicarri*, that had no problem killing fellow Jews in the pursuit of their own ideological beliefs and cause.[57] Regardless, there have not been lengthy or protracted and relentless fighting between Shia groups. Even when clashes occurred, often it was the Sadrists trying to outflank their more conservative and "elitist" Shia coalition partners, and the militia affiliated with former prime minister Maliki trying to flank the Sadrists for opposing him. The fights were between the rank and file, supporters and opponents, and they fought only until the leaders sat down and resolved their squabble, by understanding each other's disagreements. All of which is to say, while the Shia elites have serious contestants in terms of their explicit aspirations to be at the heads of power networks, they recognize their limitations in trying to be the first among equals with the use of military power alone. Consequently, their ambitions

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[54] Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, edited by C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1651]).

[55] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, M. Gregor (translated) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1797]).

[56] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976 [1932]).

[57] Donathan Taylor and Yannick Gautron, "The cases of the Sicarii and the Assassins," in Randall D. Law (ed.), *The Routledge History of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 28-45.

are checked by reality because there is enough familial, pedagogical, military, economic, and ideological overlap in terms of these power networks.

The Shia patrician elites, in Baghdad, Kadhimiya, Najaf, and Karbala, have plenty of leverage within their own networks. Furthermore, their collective status (e.g. social, political, etc.) enables collaboration, meaning anything that might undermine Shia coalition dominance, is collectively responded to. When there has been in-fighting, the Shia elites of all forms closed ranks and brought tempers and violence back under control. And crucially, Iranians always backed the Iraqi Shia elites when they closed ranks. This suggests that there is a threshold above which the Shia elites are not willing to let their difference spiral out of control into open warfare, which could squander the privileged situation they have finally gained in Iraq. This reality may not be great news to the UN or a Western audience, but it generates room for progress towards consolidation of an oligopoly in the use of violence.

Iraq's Shia militias, and to a lesser degree the established ruling parties in Iraqi-Kurdistan, represent a particular military dynamic where these violent actors that are part of the legally constituted state paradoxically play a role in regime survival. While in the Kurdish case the duopoly is well consolidated, in the case of Iraqi Shia militias they are still jostling for position and making ostensible claims to be part of the legally constituted state. In this context, it is feasible to integrate the smaller 'legalized' militias into the larger ones. This is the only feasible short-term option in employing SSR successfully. External actors will have to relate to this reality on the ground in the context of necessary SSR reform, and assist the Government of Iraq (GOI) structure with incentives and align them.

Finally, westernized professional militaries would be welcome of course to deploy as trainers and advisors, to impose SSR on these various military factions. These Western militaries could be used to improve their military capabilities, while relaying the importance of adhering to the laws of war, human rights training, etc. Such training would help serve as a veneer in appeasing international audiences that expect such factionalized militaries to behave as nicely as their own militaries, despite operating in a violently different context, in which such norms do not work,

since it increases exposure and vulnerabilities. Ultimately, it is the politics of the regime that determine whether such assistance is absorbed effectively and put to good use in context of regime and elite strategic interests.[58]

Sunni Predicament in Iraq vs. Baghdad

Sunni Iraq stands as a fundamental contrast to both the Shia and Kurdish regions of Iraq in terms of how societal actors have organized military power, and the relationship that exist between these multiple actors. There are no structural forces moving the actors toward a naturally predetermined security oligopoly. Yet at the same time, as difficult as it may seem at first glance, given the scattered, disoriented, and weakened nature of the Sunni Iraqi military space, the weakness of the Sunni actors broadly is ironically good news at the same time.

It would require some magnanimity by Shia actors in Baghdad and the U.S. will have to mitigate the actions of external spoilers, namely the intentions of Sunni countries from the Gulf, Turkey and Iran that stands at variance. The United States remains the only magnanimous actor in this context and it will have to leverage all its owed debts to generate a form a security oligopoly in the Sunni context. Of course, this might all change depending how neighboring countries decide to interject themselves into negotiations at the national level and in local communities

The Sunni Predicament

The Sunni predicament in Iraq is that its political center resembles a tattered tapestry, scattered around the Sunni regions of Iraq, with most leaders in exile. Inhabiting a state with no real political center, the Sunnis are not reverting to ancient tribal affiliations. In reality, they represent "neo-tribes" – recent creations of economic, political, and military patronage networks, using labels developed under the Saddam Hussein regime during the "sanctions decade" of the 1990s. During this period, Saddam used his personal discretion to allow some local political figures to engage in illicit commercial activities such as smuggling and access to insider deals in exchange

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[58] Jahara W. Matisek, "African Armies and State-Building: Redefining Military Effectiveness in an African Context," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 2018.

for ensuring the political loyalty of their networks. This strategy was intended to fragment social power, as Saddam economically benefitted from this and also took care to cultivate local political and often personal tensions between these recipients of his favor. This pattern of divisive localism was reinforced to some extent when the U.S. used Sunni militias to fight al-Qaeda through the Awakening Councils.

This political "neo-traditionalism" altered Sunni society, and the Islamic State has exacerbated this trend of fragmentation. Many of the ablest Sunnis that were part of the Maliki government from 2011-2014 were forced into exile as their own government interpreted their competence and popular appeal as a challenge to its power. Those in Islamic State territory were given the "option" to stay and ally with ISIS, and in fact some preferred to rely on it to protect them from their own government.

The exiled Sunni elites have tried to reactivate their old networks as Islamic State fighters pushed back. These Sunni militias are regional and even neighborhood vigilantes, most of them fighting to protect their claims to property and take retribution for violence done to their families. Some of them may believe, just as others did before, that the United States will use its influence to make sure that Baghdad will not turn against them. There are also new actors, as the United States and Turkey have armed and empowered additional Kurdish and Iraqi groups to fight ISIS. Not without irony, Sunnis in Iraq rely on their former enemies, the Americans and the Kurds, as the best hope of having any leverage *vis-à-vis* Shia-dominated militias and their backers in Tehran.[59]

This time, the Shia dominated government appears to realize the necessity of allowing the Sunni leaders a place at the table of power, while also making it known that they fear a single Sunni actor consolidating power at the expense of others. Most Shia leaders would not mind seeing an oligopoly of violence in terms of the varied Sunni actors. Though this runs counter to the expected wisdom gathered from literature on institution building, rather than engaging in an unrealizable farce of monopolizing power alongside local level peace-building measures that never really move beyond the neighborhood, the only realistic course of action is to help key Sunni leaders

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[59] Jayamaha, et. al. "Iraq's path to state failure," 2017

with their own militias link them to the local political context. This will incorporate their net-
works into a larger patronage-based elite coalition in which they will not need their own autono-
mous military capacities. They will also have to be made, at a minimum, a quasi-legal actor if
not fully legal actors that are part of the legally constituted state so that they are not left at the
good intentions of their former enemies.

Conclusion: An Oligopoly of Violence as a Solution for Fragmented States

The ideal end of SSR is a state with a monopoly on the use of force accountable to its citizens.
Our suggestion to create a security oligopoly is counterintuitive and stands in contrast to the ac-
cepted wisdom touted in the capitals of the West and in the UN. Yet, our conclusion and recom-
mendation is based on substantial evidence and fieldwork, where the logics of political violence
in a fragmented society can spiral out of control if recognition and 'rents' are not divided
properly. Iraq is an intensely fragmented state with varied armed actors and the two together
generate specific structural dynamics where the best short-term outcome is an inclusive ruling
coalition allowing for the brokerage, in principal, administrating violence. This outcome allows
numerous armed actors to become part of the legally constituted state, with their capacity for or-
ganized violence intact where there is an oligopoly in the use of force. This is hardly optimal, but
it is realizable in the given context, and is likely the only good option of all the bad options at
present.

Our recommendation is built on our field research where we argue that the nature of the state (in-
tensely fragmented) and how state power is actually exercised, with brokerage administration of
violence, has a primary impact on the character of armed group behavior. States with strong for-
mal institutions draw and maintain stark distinctions between state and its challengers in internal
wars. States with ineffective institutions, such as Iraq, particularly where officials rule through
insider deals and the use of non-state groups as proxies, tend to integrate armed groups or are tar-

gets of infiltration by these groups. Further, civil wars generate varied and at times counterintuitive institutional outcomes, sometimes fundamentally altering the "rules of the game"[60] that regulate and cage individuals in societies.

The bitter pill needs to be swallowed: a successful Iraqi state in 20 to 30 years will likely still have an oligopoly in the use of force, but will have a stronger Iraqi sense of national identity. The sweet pill at present, will only provide the theoretical enjoyment of an illusion in throwing resources at an Iraqi state that presupposes it can monopolize violence without any negative externalities. Such illusions at present, mean that many of us need to move past the fantastical beliefs that authorities in Baghdad will ever control peripheral parts of the state; something former empires could not accomplish either. Such a prospect for the GOI is complicated further by it lacking capacity and willpower to consolidate all regions of the state.

The best policy outcome then, is to pursue oligopolies of force, so that when new challenges arise, state failure can be avoided by ensuring buy-in from various security elites. Only then, after several decades of such agreements, can trust and loyalty be generated to transition the Iraqi state towards the typical Weberian state that monopolizes violence. This will require substantial patience by patron states and their respective domestic audiences that cannot comprehend the nuance of fragmented societies and states. Such solutions to the Iraqi factionalized problem requires *time*, necessitating the playing out of iterative games of cooperation to signal loyalty and collaboration. Rushing such a process will only lead to the dreaded 'defection' scenario of all security elites putting their selfish interests first, and trying to eliminate weaker partners in the oligopoly. The structural forces on the ground in Iraq currently favor an oligopoly of force, and external assistance that helps facilitates institutional change towards a multifaceted security framework would avoid a race to the bottom that would lead Iraq from being a dysfunctional state towards a completely failed and fragmented state.

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[60] Douglas North, *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.