DCAF 25 YEARS

SSR BACKGROUNDER

POST-WAR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

ABOUT THIS SSR BACKGROUNDER

This Backgrounder examines the role of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in post-war contexts, exploring how SSR can address a legacy of unlawful territorial invasion, as well as the structural weaknesses that predate it, to support the development of a security sector that is both effective and accountable. This Backgrounder discusses the external conditions and strategic choices of post-war states that shape SSR. It outlines how SSR contributes to the transformation of security sector actors and clarifies their roles, structures, and functions in the post-war environment. It also explores internal reform processes aimed at reconstructing institutions and restoring good governance of the security sector.

THIS SSR BACKGROUNDER ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics and concepts in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic. The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand and also to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

DCAF wishes to thank
Mariia Kostiv for authorship; Gabriela Manea, Upasana Garoo, Anne Bennett, Graham Thompson, Marianne Ducasse-Rogier, Alan Bryden, Floris de Klerk Wolters, Marta Ghittoni for their comments and revisions; Kimberly Storr for copy editing; Petra Gurtner for layout and design.

Series Editor
Gabriela Manea

To cite this publication
DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. Post-War Security Sector Reform. SSR Backgrounder Series. Geneva: DCAF, 2025.

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

info@dcaf.ch
+41 22 730 94 00

www.dcaf.ch

WHAT ARE THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL UNDERPINNINGS OF POST-WAR SSR?

This Backgrounder examines the role of SSR following the use of force by one state against another, in violation of Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), without justification such as self-defense under Article 51 or authorization by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and carried out with the aim of territorial conquest, regime change, or strategic domination. In such a context, the post-war period refers to the phase following a war of aggression, characterized by large-scale invasion, widespread destruction, and severe humanitarian consequences. These actions give rise to the international responsibility of the state under international law and, given their character, gravity, and scale, may also entail individual criminal responsibility for the crime of aggression, which applies to political or military leaders who plan, prepare, initiate, or execute such acts. During the period following the war of aggression, the affected state seeks to rebuild its security sector often within a wider effort to restore and consolidate democratic governance, affected by the imposition of martial law. SSR in such a context is a critical, if often contested, element of post-war recovery and state-building, the scope and priorities of which are shaped by the political and legal environment in which the war occurred.

FIGURE 1 THE EVOLUTION OF LEGAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF WAR UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

- 1899 and 1907, the Hague Conventions codified rules governing the conduct of warfare between states, including the requirement for a formal declaration of war prior to hostilities, the means and methods of combat, and the treatment of prisoners and civilians.
- 1945, UN Charter under Article 2(4) prohibited states from threatening or using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state. The only exceptions are the right of self-defense (Article 51) and the use of force authorized by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- 1945, the Charter of the International Military Tribunal, introduced the *crime against peace,* establishing the principle of individual criminal responsibility for planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties.
- 1949, the Geneva Conventions codified the core principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), and introduced the term *armed conflict* involving both *international armed conflicts* such as declared wars and armed conflicts arising between two or more states, even if no formal declaration of war is made (Common Article 2) and *non-international armed* conflicts occurring within a single state (Common Article 3).
- 1974, UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 (XXIX) provided the definition of an *aggression* and enumerated acts that qualify as aggression regardless of a formal declaration of war (Article 3). Article 5(2) established that a war of aggression is a crime against international peace and that acts of aggression give rise to international responsibility.
- In 2010, the Review Conference of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, held in Kampala, Uganda, adopted amendments introducing a legal definition of the *crime of aggression,* establishing individual criminal responsibility for planning, preparation, initiation or execution of an act of aggression that, by its character, gravity, and scale, constitutes a manifest violation of UN Charter (Article 8 bis, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court).

On the one hand, the introduction of the term *armed conflict* in the Geneva Conventions (1949) reflected a post-war effort to expand the scope of application of IHL to newly emerging forms of violence, both between states and within them. This framing aimed to ensure the protection of victims of violence such as the wounded, the sick, prisoners of war, and civilians and to enable access for humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross or any other impartial humanitarian body, to assist affected populations regardless of the parties to the conflict. On the other hand, the term *war of aggression* is used to describe large-scale inter-state violence characterized by a manifest violation of the UN Charter which gives rise to legal responsibility before international courts.

For more information on post-conflict SSR, please refer the SSR Backgrounder: **Security Sector Reform in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding**

WHY IS SSR RELEVANT TO POST-WAR CONTEXTS?

During a post-war period, a state faces complex social, political, and economic challenges. Often, institutional capacity is weak, authority is fragmented, and public trust in governance has been deeply eroded, especially as it relates to the security sector. Security forces may be divided while irregular militias, occupying forces, or proxy structures still exert control over parts of the territory. In conditions such as these, SSR must navigate through this volatility to restore unified command, rebuild trust, and re-establish the legitimate and accountable security sector under democratic civilian control. To be lasting, SSR must also address the deeper legacies of war, which may include public trauma, unresolved grievances, and a lack of legitimacy of security actors in communities affected by occupation, violence, or forced displacement.

Typically, post-war SSR unfolds alongside other security and governance processes, such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); reconciliation; transitional justice; and constitutional or legal reforms. Where they are present, international peacekeeping or monitoring missions can provide transitional support to SSR by helping stabilize ceasefires, protect civilians, and enable reform in contested areas. In some contexts, SSR may also be situated within broader efforts to restore or consolidate democracy, especially following periods of martial law, and when democratic governance has been contested during war or is viewed by local actors as a primary post-war objective. Effectively coordinating these overlapping processes is essential to avoiding duplication, addressing the root causes of violence, and fostering public trust in reforms.

There are a range of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms by which a state recovering from a war of aggression may pursue legal accountability for war crimes and other serious violations of international law. International, hybrid, and domestic courts may all be tasked with prosecuting alleged perpetrators. Commonly, these legal accountability efforts intersect with broader processes of transitional justice, truth-seeking, and institutional reform, contributing together to restoring the rule of law, countering impunity, and reinforcing the legitimacy of post-war governance and security institutions.

To be effective, post-war SSR must align with local political dynamics and evolving security conditions. This demands a context-specific and people-centred approach designed to ensure that reforms are inclusive, legitimate, and accountable. The early involvement of diverse stakeholders including women, civil society, and local communities helps tailor reforms to meet real needs on the ground, and contributes to building public trust. It is also essential that the psychological and social consequences of violence are addressed, within security institutions and within affected populations, to restore a shared sense of confidence in the post-war security environment. The sequencing and implementation of reforms should be guided by the principle of local ownership to ensure they reflect the priorities of the society emerging from war. In this way, SSR can contribute meaningfully to long-term peace, justice, and democratic governance (see Figure 2).

In post-war contexts, SSR typically involves two interconnected phases: a restoration of basic security functions, and a structural transformation of institutional, legal, and governance frameworks. These phases are not strictly sequential and are closely interlinked, as reconstruction without reform risks entrenching the very practices that contributed to war, while reform without reconstruction may lack the operational capacity to take hold (see Figure 3).

Still, the immediate priority in the aftermath of hostilities, systemic violence, or occupation is a phase of **Security Sector Reconstruction,** focused on restoring the operational capacity and basic functionality of the security sector, and on re-establishing public order and state authority across affected territories. This typically includes a reconstituting core security function such as policing, border management, and territorial defence, which are critical to stabilizing the immediate security environment and creating conditions for reform. Yet this process carries significant risks if executed without comprehensive and context-specific planning. Efforts to rebuild security institutions that do not incorporate critical assessments may inadvertently reinforce militarized organizational cultures, entrench hierarchical and exclusionary power dynamics, and legitimize individuals or groups linked to past human rights violations, ultimately undermining the objectives of SSR.

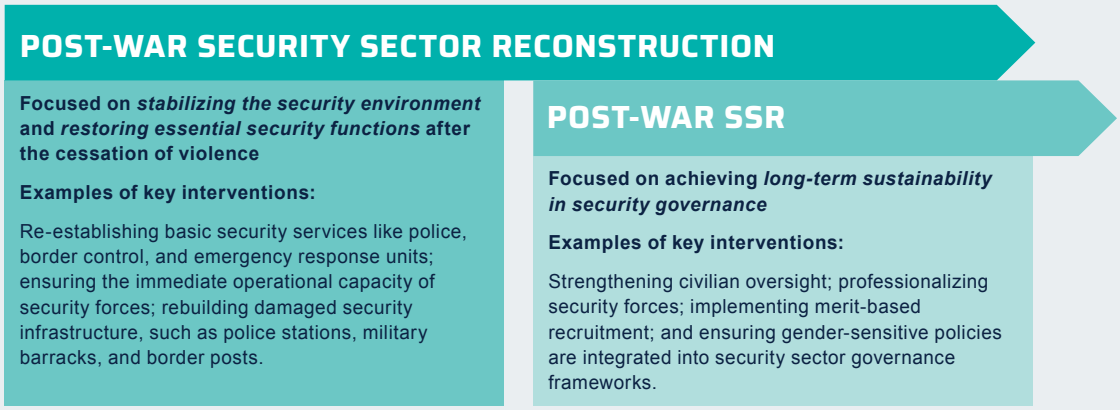
Once this reconstruction phase achieves operational stability, SSR processes can begin in earnest, marked by a shift toward addressing the institutional and governance dimensions of the security sector. This includes clarifying institutional roles and mandates, reforming legal and policy frameworks, strengthening civilian and democratic oversight, and fostering broader accountability through inclusive engagement with civil society and affected communities.

FIGURE 2 CHALLENGES TO POST-WAR SSR

ACCOUNTABILITY	In wartime, security sector actors such as armed forces, intelligence services, and police often operate with a significant degree of autonomy. In a post-war context lacking oversight, civilian leaders may also use security actors to control political power, on the premise that this is necessary to maintain stability or ensure survival. Risks such as elite capture, the militarization of civilian leadership, and the weakening or co-optation of oversight institutions present significant structural barriers to establishing democratic civilian control. Moreover, this goal is often deprioritized by states facing more immediate challenges such as physical reconstruction.
TRANSPARENCY	Prolonged intervals under state of emergency or martial law imposed during a war tend to weaken civil society and restrict fundamental rights, including political participation, access to public information, and freedom of expression. This complicates a state's post-war transition to civilian rule and delays the restoration of restricted freedoms, leading to a lack of transparency and hindering efforts to consolidate democratic governance.
RULE OF LAW	The rule of law is often severely weakened by the degradation or collapse of legal, judicial, and law enforcement institutions during a war. Legal frameworks may be outdated, unevenly applied, or ineffectively enforced. This can result in an impunity that diminishes public trust in state institutions and obstructs the broader aim of consolidating democratic governance. In such contexts, non-state dispute resolution mechanisms or hybrid legal systems may emerge to address justice needs where state institutions are unable or unwilling to do so.
PARTICIPATION	A lack of clear separation between civilian and military leadership can lead to abuses of power and politicization of the military, resulting in appointments that are based on political loyalty rather than professional competence. This undermines inclusive decision-making, erodes trust in security sector governance, and produces security policies that serve narrow interests rather than the broader population. In this context, the participation of women, ethnic and religious minorities, victims of war, and ex-combatants should be prioritized in SSR, given the disproportionate impact of war on these groups. Their meaningful participation in SSR should be a core element in the design of future security institutions and the negotiation of future post-war settlements.
RESPONSIVENESS	Security sector actors such as the armed forces, police, intelligence services, and border guards primarily focused on national defence may fail to adapt to new responsibilities in a post-war environment and may lack the capacity to meet emerging needs, such as providing humanitarian aid, managing border control, and assisting with the evacuation of refugees and internally displaced people.
EFFECTIVENESS	Armed forces remain oversized and are rarely agile or responsive to the complex and localized threats that emerge after war. Moreover, without clear systems for promotion, training, and the adoption of modern doctrines, military personnel may lack the skills and leadership needed to respond effectively to evolving security challenges.
EFFICIENCY	Defence budgets are often disproportionately large, consuming a significant portion of the limited financial resources available to a state. This can crowd out essential investments in other critical sectors and can mean that post-war states struggle to address the non-security needs of their populations while maintaining an oversized defence apparatus.
HUMAN RIGHTS	When regulation, oversight, and accountability of the security sector is lacking, the risk grows that violations of human rights, such as arbitrary detention, torture, or excessive use of force, will occur. Moreover, when access to justice is limited and civil society has eroded during wartime, it can be difficult to document these violations or hold perpetrators accountable, which reinforces a culture of impunity. In the absence of transitional justice mechanisms, past violations often remain unaddressed as well, leaving victims without appropriate recognition or redress. These factors can undermine public trust and impede efforts to establish a legitimate and accountable post-war security sector.
GENDER EQUALITY	Women play a variety of roles during war, including as combatants, supporters, or associates of armed forces or groups. This diversity of experiences is often overlooked, leading to post-war settlements and security policies that fail to adequately address the specific security needs of women, including protection from gender-based violence, the rates of which frequently increases during and after war. Ensuring accountability for perpetrators of wartime gender-based violence, including state and non-state actors, remains a particular challenge, with victims seldom able to access reparations and justice.

For more information, please refer to the following SSR Backgrounders: **Security Sector Governance: Applying the principles of good governance to the security sector**; **Peace Process: Negotiating reform of the security sector**; **Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform: Mainstreaming gender equality in security provision, management and oversight**; and **Gender Equality and Good Security Sector Governance: Gender equality for state and human security**

FIGURE 3 KEY INTERVENTIONS OF POST-WAR SECURITY SECTOR RECONSTRUCTION AND POST-WAR SSR



WHAT ARE THE KEY EXTERNAL STRATEGIES OF POST-WAR STATES TO CARRY OUT SSR?

Structural and political factors that either facilitate or constrain post-war SSR efforts and constitute the broader international, regional, and geopolitical environment in which post-war SSR unfolds are known as external conditions. These conditions are shaped by factors including the nature and terms of the post-war settlement and the extent of international engagement and therefore influence the range of external strategies available to national authorities.

External conditions that promote post-war SSR:

- **The establishment of a stable security environment,** which often follows the cessation of hostilities through a ceasefire, can open the way toward a comprehensive post-war settlement. This environment is essential to initiating and sustaining post-war SSR, and underpins the continued confidence-building measures, including monitoring, dispute resolution, and support for implementation throughout the post-war transition, that make post-war settlements credible. Such efforts may be supported by external actors through peacekeeping, monitoring missions, security guarantees, or diplomatic measures, including sanctions. This engagement may be shaped by strategic interests, regional security concerns, and normative commitments to peacebuilding and democratic governance, and may influence the form, scope, and duration of support.

- **Access to international funding and technical assistance** is essential to preventing post-war SSR from becoming slow, fragmented, or unsustainable. External actors may offer essential resources, support for institutional development, and knowledge transfer, or may help design inclusive and context-sensitive reforms. At the same time, where external actors have supported opposing parties during a war or continue to pursue divergent agendas in its aftermath, their involvement may result in uncoordinated or contradictory offers of assistance that vary to the extent to which they ensure transparency or align with national long-term SSR objectives.

- **External political and diplomatic support** helps legitimize post-war governments and their pursuit of SSR, while facilitating access to vital aid and investment. This support may include diplomatic recognition, participation in regional or multilateral forums, and advocacy for international engagement, but also the promotion of trade and economic development, which contributes to long-term stability and reduces reliance on external assistance.

When these conditions exist and are mutually reinforced, they enable effective post-war SSR. In their absence, reform efforts may not only face delays but may also suffer from poor coordination and diminished legitimacy. That said, the establishment and maintenance of external conditions for post-war SSR are shaped by broader structural factors, including the outcome of the war and the terms of the post-war settlement, all of which affect the strategic options available to national authorities for shaping the post-war environment.

External strategies are available to authorities at three levels of engagement:

- **Multilateral-level** strategies include participation in international institutions and alliances that provide post-war states with access to financial assistance, technical expertise, and long-term institutional development. These frameworks also apply a normative influence and often include stabilization mechanisms such as peacekeeping missions or training support, which are critical in the early recovery phase.

- **Regional-level** strategies emerge from the prospect of post-war states addressing shared security concerns in collaboration with neighbouring countries and regional organizations. Such a strategy may support joint responses to cross-border threats, for example, enabling context-specific technical and financial assistance. Regional engagement of this sort can reinforce the legitimacy of post-war states and lead to SSR that is tailored to local needs.

- **Bilateral-level** strategies involve targeted engagement, usually achieved through a direct partnership between two states and meant to address specific security issues of mutual concern. Bilateral cooperation can provide flexible and rapid support, whether financial, military, or diplomatic, but may create asymmetries if one actor dominates the reform agenda. The effectiveness of bilateral strategies thus depends on how closely they align with national strategies and goals, and how well they are coordinated with regional and multilateral efforts.

These forms of engagement are complementary and may overlap in practice, for instance where regional organizations contribute to multilateral peace operations, or bilateral actors engage through pooled funding or multi-stakeholder platforms. Ensuring coordination and coherence across these levels is essential to avoiding duplication. Regardless of the modality, external strategies should always support SSR processes that are nationally owned and promote democratic governance, with a particular focus on gender, youth, and inclusion.

HOW CAN SECURITY SECTOR ACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO POST-WAR SSR?

In post-war contexts, security sector actors such as armed forces, police, intelligence services, and border guards may be required to adapt swiftly to evolving roles and responsibilities. The involvement of these actors in post-war SSR is inevitably multifaceted, requiring careful oversight to mitigate risks such as the potential re-emergence of violence or the continuation of militarized governance. In some cases, this may involve engaging with militia leaders who still need to be incentivized to disengage from an armed posture and enter the political process, either through integration into formal security structures or DDR. Such a transition depends on the political context and the existence of credible incentives, and if not carefully managed, may weaken trust in the broader SSR process and hinder longer-term stabilization and reform efforts.

The roles of the security sector actors are differentiated but interdependent, spanning strategic, organizational, and operational dimensions:

- **Security providers** such as armed forces, police, intelligence agencies, and border guards are instrumental in preventing a resurgence of violence and in re-establishing trust between the state and the population. Their responsibilities in a post-war context often extend to humanitarian assistance, facilitating the return of displaced populations, support for stabilization activities, and the protection of affected populations. Non-state security actors like Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) increasingly contribute to the post-war security landscape as well. PMSCs may be comprised of former combatants, who establish or join these companies, which operate domestically and/or internationally. While the engagement of PMSCs can support reintegration and provide employment opportunities, it may also pose challenges to regulation, accountability, and the alignment of activities with national security priorities.

- **Security management mechanisms** such as the ministries of defence, interior, and justice play a vital role in facilitating a transition from military to civilian governance by establishing clear lines of authority and decision-making processes within the security sector. This is crucial to strategic planning, as well as to designing and implementing comprehensive SSR in close cooperation with both local and external actors, which is vital in settings where legitimacy and functionality may be inconsistent across a country. These actors are responsible for navigating sensitive political environments, managing legacy forces, and building inclusive frameworks for reform.

- **Formal oversight bodies** like parliaments and their specialized committees, ombuds institutions, independent oversight commissions, courts, and audit offices are key to promoting transparency and accountability across the security sector. These bodies monitor the implementation of reforms, scrutinize the conduct of security actors, review budgets and expenditures, and ensure compliance with legal and human rights standards. In post-war contexts, they may also contribute to constitutional reviews and the enactment or amendment of security-related legislation, helping to align the sector with democratic governance principles and ensure it can adapt to new security challenges. Hybrid or customary mechanisms such as traditional councils or community-based monitors may also play a critical role in providing oversight and fostering accountability in the post-war environment. These informal structures can help bridge governance gaps, though they require careful engagement and support to ensure their practices align with human rights principles and the rule of law.

- **Informal oversight bodies,** including civil society organizations, women's rights groups, associations representing ethnic and religious minorities, and independent media, have an indispensable role to play in promoting accountability and transparency in post-war environment. This becomes especially important in the aftermath of martial law, where formal democratic control may have been suspended or weakened and public trust in state institutions is often low. By monitoring security institutions, documenting abuses, advocating for the rights of victims, and promoting for inclusive and rights-based reform agendas, these informal oversight mechanisms help sustain public scrutiny, give voice to affected communities, and foster civic engagement in security governance, even where formal institutions are weak, contested, or under reconstruction. Their contributions are particularly vital in ensuring that reforms are responsive to diverse social needs and are rooted in democratic values.

- **External actors** such as international and regional organizations, donors, multilateral institutions, development agencies, and international non-governmental organizations provide critical support to post-war SSR efforts by offering technical expertise, financial resources, and capacity building, and by helping local security sector actors implement reforms, facilitating dialogue with civilian authorities.

For more information, please refer to the following SSR Backgrounders: The Security Sector: Roles and responsibilities in security provision, management and oversight; Parliaments: Roles and responsibilities in good security sector governance

HOW CAN POST-WAR SSR ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SECURITY SECTOR?

External conditions and the strategies pursued by post-war states help shape the reform environment by providing momentum, resources, and political legitimacy. Still, sustained progress depends on the degree to which a reform process results in an internal transformation. Post-war SSR enables this by realigning the functions, structures, and relationships within the security sector, enhancing its effectiveness and accountability. This calls for a comprehensive approach combining external engagement with nationally owned reform efforts, aimed at improving operational capacity while embedding strong governance and oversight.

Key actions to enhance the effectiveness of the security sector in the post-war context:

- **Clarify mandates and roles** Security sector actors often operate with blurred responsibilities and overlapping functions. SSR addresses this by clearly defining the roles and mandates of these actors, which helps ensure they operate within a legally grounded framework while reducing duplication, strengthening coherence, and supporting more effective and lawful operations. This is essential to restoring the legitimacy of the police who must shift, in the post-war context, from combat or counterinsurgency roles to the tasks of law enforcement, human rights protection, and community security.

- **Improve coordination and command structures** The development of integrated command structures, coordination mechanisms, and communication protocols is promoted by SSR, thereby strengthening leadership and operational coherence. In the post-war context, where joint operations and multi-actor engagement are common, this reduces institutional competition and enables more consistent and strategic joint operations.

- **Build operational capacity** Post-war security sector actors are likely to face very different capacity challenges and thus require tailored interventions. For example, in some contexts they may face with a crisis of diminished skills, outdated procedures, and weakened infrastructure, whereas in another context there may be an overemphasis on military needs with a limited capacity to meet civilian security mandates. In either case, SSR supports operational capacity by restoring core functions and guiding the transition to accountable, civilian-oriented security provision.

- **Support strategic planning** The long-term effectiveness of post-war SSR is tied to the development of national security strategies, operational doctrines, and institutional policies. Planning processes, which must be inclusive, should be realistic about capacity constraints and political sensitivities, and should link strategies to medium and long-term budgetary frameworks to ensure affordability and sustainability.

- **Align with security needs** Post-war SSR is aimed at restructuring a security sector to reflect the current and emerging security challenges rather than those previously experienced in wartime. Aligning the sector to the security needs of a post-war society requires an approach that is inclusive of displaced populations, citizens in former affected zones, and areas with low public trust. Such an approach should be informed by local security assessments and should engage communities in priority-setting dialogue.

HOW CAN POST-WAR SSR ENHANCE ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE SECURITY SECTOR?

In post-war contexts, accountability within the security sector is both a core objective of SSR and a prerequisite for the consolidation of democratic governance and sustainable peace. During wartime, the prolonged application of states of emergency or martial law often leads to an erosion of institutional checks and balances. The structured framework of SSR supports the restoration of legal and political accountability, the establishment of effective civilian oversight, and the alignment of a security sector with democratic principles.

Key actions to enhance accountability within the security sector in the post-war context:

- **Support civilian governance of security policy** Free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections are essential to conferring legitimacy on civilian leadership and establishing an institutional basis for security sector oversight. SSR can support credible and transparent electoral processes by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of security actors and ensuring

professional conduct in line with constitutional mandates. This helps to prevent political interference, builds public trust, and reinforces the legitimacy of both the electoral process and broader governance structures.

- **(Re)establish internal and external oversight** SSR promotes the role of parliaments, oversight commissions, ombuds institutions, and civil society in representing various layers of the population by monitoring the conduct and spending of security sector actors. In post-war contexts where policing has been militarized, SSR also supports the re-establishment of civilian policing, which requires training, institutional reform, and independent oversight mechanisms.

- **Strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks** In post-war contexts, the legal frameworks are often outdated, fragmented, or misaligned with democratic standards. SSR supports a process to draft and revise laws related to the security sector, so that they clearly define the mandates, limits, and responsibilities of security actors, providing a basis for lawful conduct and enabling effective accountability mechanisms.

- **Promote transparency in budgeting and operations** In post-war environments, financial oversight is commonly weak, increasing vulnerabilities to corruption. SSR introduces standardized procedures, independent audits, and reporting obligations that make processes for budget planning, procurement, and expenditure more transparent. When budgeting and financial planning are an integral part of SSR, reforms are also likely to be more realistic and sustainable over time.

- **Support human rights training and standards** Where past violations may have occurred, post-war SSR helps prevent future abuses and builds a stronger foundation for accountability by integrating international human rights norms and principles of international humanitarian law into training, codes of conduct, and operational procedures, institutionalizing rights-based practices. This includes training on the lawful treatment of detainees and prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva Conventions (1949), measures to ensure accountability for sexual violence, and the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches within the security sector.

- **Integrate transitional justice mechanisms** Addressing past abuses is essential to rebuilding public trust and establishing sustainable accountability in the aftermath of war. Transitional justice provides a framework for dealing with serious wartime violations, aimed at acknowledging the rights of victims, preventing a recurrence of past violations, and laying the foundations for a legitimate and accountable state. SSR contributes to these goals by reforming the institutions implicated in past abuses and embedding human rights, transparency, and democratic oversight into the security sector.

- **Reform justice and criminal justice systems** In post-war contexts, justice institutions such as courts, prosecutors, and prison systems, are often weak, politicized, or linked to past abuses. By promoting human rights compliance, institutional vetting, and coordination between security forces and judicial institutions, SSR supports justice and criminal justice reform, both of which are essential to restoring the rule of law and reinforcing public trust in the post-war state.

- **Pursue legal accountability through international legal mechanisms** Legal accountability plays an important role in rebuilding trust once the war has ended. This includes both individual criminal responsibility, for example for the crime of aggression, and the international responsibility of the state for conducting acts of aggression. Efforts to seek accountability may involve initiating proceedings for the unlawful use of force before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to establish state responsibility, cooperating with the International Criminal Court (ICC), or advocating for the creation of special tribunals where jurisdictional gaps exist. An affected state may also engage with regional human rights courts, advocate for the exercise of universal jurisdiction by third states, and invest in documentation and evidence preservation.

WHAT TO READ NEXT

- Schnabel, Albrecht and Hans-Georg Ehrhart, eds. **Security sector reform and post-conflict peacebuilding. United Nations University Press, 2005.** https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/565830?v=pdf

- Linke, Jasper **Provisions on SSR and DDR in Peace Agreements. Thematic brief. DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2020.** https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/EN_SSR_DDR_Peace_Agreements_2020.pdf

- DCAF & UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force **Security Sector Reform & Governance (SSR&G) and Sustaining Peace.** *Policy Note, 4 October 2024.* https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/dcaf-un_inter-agency_ssr_task_force_-_policy_note_thematic_consultation_pbar.pdf

- Glorioso, Ludovico and Susan Pond, eds. **Enhancing Stabilization and Strategic Partnership in a Post-Conflict Environment: A Comprehensive Approach to Human Security.** *NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence, 2024.* https://www.nsfacoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Enhancing-Stabilization-and-Strategic-Partnership-in-a-Post-Conflict-Environment-A-Comprehensive-Approach-to-Human-Security.pdf

- Transparency International UK **The Missing Element: Addressing Corruption through Security Sector Reform in West Africa** *Transparency International Defence and Security, 2025.* https://ti-defence.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SSR_in_WA_ENG_Report_v1.2.pdf

- Manea, Gabriela and Mariia Kostiv. **Pathways of Post-War Security Sector Reform in Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Ukraine: Conceptual and Comparative Frameworks** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

- Käihkö, Ilmari **Post-War Security Sector Reform in Finland** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

- Kim, Insoo **Post-War Security Sector Reform in South Korea** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

- Lee, Wei-chin **Post-War Security Sector Reform in Taiwan** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

- Soldatiuk-Westerveld, Julia and Emma Caals **Post-War Security Sector Reform in Ukraine: An Interpretation of Insights from Finland, South Korea and Taiwan** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

- Jasutis, Grazvydas **Post-War Security Sector Reform in Ukraine's Strategic Horizon: Navigating War Realities and Post-War Challenges** *Geneva: DCAF, 2025.*

MORE DCAF SSR RESOURCES

DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at **www.dcaf.ch**

Many resources are also available in languages other than English.

WHAT DCAF DOES

Help to improve the way national security sectors are governed.

Guide the development of sound, sustainable security governance policies.

Promote locally owned reforms that are inclusive, participatory, and gender responsive.

HOW WE DO IT

Provide technical expertise to nationally led SSG/R processes.

Build the capacity of state and non-state actors.

Publish research and knowledge products.

Promote internationally recommended good governance practices.

Advise on security sector-related legal and policy questions.

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

info@dcaf.ch
+41 22 730 94 00

www.dcaf.ch