

**PATHWAYS OF POST-WAR SSR,  
PART I:  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND  
COMPARATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN**

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# About this publication project

This publication is part of a policy research project on post-war Security Sector Reform, entitled 'Striking a Balance between Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability in Post-War Defense Sector Reform: Lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view toward Ukraine' undertaken by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

This comparative policy research project aims to identify challenges and best practices of post-war Security Sector Reform (SSR). It focuses on external strategies for building defense and security alliances, and internal strategies aimed at enhancing credible deterrence, democratic civil-military relations, and accountability – drawing lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view to Ukraine. In a similar way as Ukraine, these countries were at war and have experienced a permanent threat of war over decades. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in enforcing their sovereignty despite facing asymmetrical power relations and being on the edge of geopolitical tensions. Moreover, they have managed to become consolidated democracies despite the constant pressure of securitization. What lessons can inspire, and which challenges may provide food-for-thought for Ukraine's own SSR efforts during and post-war?

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# List of acronyms and abbreviations

<b>CMR</b>	Civil-Military Relations
<b>DCAF</b>	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
<b>DSR</b>	Defence Sector Reform
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IR</b>	International Relations
<b>IRT</b>	International Relations Theory
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>RT</b>	Research and Training
<b>SSG</b>	Security Sector Governance
<b>SSG/R</b>	Security Sector Governance and Reform
<b>SSR</b>	Security Sector Reform
<b>US</b>	United States

# About the authors

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# Setting the scene: why post-war security sector reform matters

Security, in its most fundamental sense, constitutes the precondition that enables individuals, communities, and institutions to function and thrive. At both the domestic and international levels, political order and social development depend on the containment of violence, the deterrence of external aggression, and the existence of institutions capable of providing security in a legitimate and predictable manner. In democratic systems, these functions must be exercised within a framework of accountability, transparency, rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. These principles lie at the core of the concept of Security Sector Governance (SSG), which seeks to ensure that security institutions are not only effective but also democratically governed.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) represents the political and technical process through which states strive to align their security institutions with these normative foundations. As articulated in DCAF's conceptual framework, SSG describes the reality of how security provision, management, and oversight function in practice, while good SSG denotes the normative standard to which states aspire, balancing effectiveness and accountability across all components of the security sector. SSR is the process through which this transformation is pursued, encompassing legal, institutional, political, and societal reforms.

These tensions have long occupied the literature on civil–military relations. Classical scholarship emphasized the challenge of maintaining military effectiveness while ensuring civilian political control (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960). More recent approaches expanded this debate by examining how democratic oversight, institutional effectiveness, and societal legitimacy shape the relationship between the armed forces and political authority in different security environments (Schiff 1995; Bruneau & Matei 2008). In post-war settings, where military institutions often acquire heightened political authority and operational autonomy, the challenge of reconciling defense effectiveness with democratic governance becomes especially acute.

Post-war contexts pose particularly acute challenges for SSR. War fundamentally reshapes political incentives, concentrates power, accelerates militarization, and often normalizes exceptional governance arrangements. During armed conflict, military effectiveness and survival imperatives understandably take precedence over democratic oversight, transparency, and participatory decision-making. These wartime arrangements, however, frequently create institutional path dependencies that often persist into the post-war period. As a result, post-war societies face the dual task of rebuilding and reforming their security institutions while simultaneously re-establishing democratic control and accountability mechanisms weakened or suspended during conflict.

The literature on SSR consistently emphasizes that the security environment is a decisive factor shaping reform trajectories. Ideal-type SSR conditions—characterized by stable peace, broad political consensus, and sufficient resources, are rarely present in practice. Post-war environments are instead marked by strategic uncertainty, resource scarcity, societal polarization, and often the continuation of external threats (Born & Schnabel 2009: 13–16). This challenge is especially pronounced in cases where war does not culminate in a comprehensive peace settlement but transitions into prolonged periods of insecurity. In such settings, defense sectors tend to remain large, politically influential, and resource-intensive for extended periods of time. The risks of securitization of politics, militarization of public life, and weakening of civilian oversight are correspondingly high. At the same time, insufficient defense capacity or premature demobilization may undermine deterrence and expose states to renewed coercion or invasion.

It is precisely this security dilemma, situated at the intersection of effectiveness and democratic accountability, that lies at the heart of this comparative research project. In such contexts, the central challenge of SSR becomes one of balance: how to strengthen defense and security institutions sufficiently to deter renewed aggression while preventing the consolidation of unchecked military power and the erosion of democratic governance.

## CHAPTER 2

# Research rationale and focus: learning for Ukraine from comparable experiences

This comparative policy research project, conducted by DCAF Research and Training in collaboration with DCAF's Ukraine team and international and country experts, seeks to address the future challenge of post-war Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction in Ukraine, with a specific focus on defense governance and civil–military relations. Since 2014, and particularly following the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine has been compelled to rapidly expand and transform its defense sector. Military expenditure has increased dramatically, defense production has scaled up at unprecedented speed, and the armed forces have undergone profound operational and organizational adaptation under conditions of active warfare.

While these developments have been indispensable for Ukraine's survival and resistance, they also generate significant present and future governance challenges. As long as Ukraine continues to face an existential external threat, it must maintain a highly capable, professional, and resilient defense sector. At the same time, once the country transitions, partially or fully, to a post-war environment, the consolidation of democratic oversight, accountability, integrity, and rule-of-law mechanisms within the defense sector will be critical for the preservation of democratic governance and long-term stability.

Ukraine, however, is not the first state to confront such a predicament. Several countries have experienced wars of invasion or persistent threats to their sovereignty while simultaneously navigating processes of post-war reconstruction, defense reform, and democratic consolidation. This project therefore proceeds from the assumption that historically grounded comparative analysis can offer valuable insight into the conditions, pathways, and trade-offs involved in balancing effective defense with democratic accountability.

Rather than assuming the existence of universally transferable “best practices,” the project adopts a historically and institutionally sensitive comparative approach. The aim is not to identify a single model

of post-war SSR, but to examine how different states have reconciled tensions between external threat, military effectiveness, and democratic accountability under distinct geopolitical and institutional conditions.

The project focuses on three primary comparative cases: Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan. These countries were selected because they share several characteristics highly relevant to Ukraine's trajectory. All three experienced major wars or violent conflicts that profoundly shaped their statehood and security institutions under conditions of intense geopolitical competition and shifting international orders. All faced sustained and asymmetric military threats over decades, often from more powerful adversaries that challenged their sovereignty or right to exist. Despite these pressures, all three succeeded—through different pathways—in consolidating democratic political systems and embedding civilian control over the armed forces.

Importantly, these cases also differ significantly in terms of historical legacies, geopolitical positioning, political regimes, and institutional arrangements. These differences allow the project not only to identify good practices, but also to highlight constraints, tensions, and context-specific trade-offs that caution against simplistic policy transfer.

Ukraine occupies a dual role in this research. It is both the principal beneficiary of the comparative analysis and an empirical case in its own right. Two dedicated papers examine Ukraine's current defense governance challenges and strategic horizon, recognizing that post-war SSR thinking must begin during wartime, when institutional choices, power relations, and reform trajectories are already being shaped.

# Conceptual framework: defense sector reform (DSR) in post-war environments

## 3.1 SSG and DSR in Post-War Contexts

This research is anchored in the understanding of SSG and SSR developed by DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, which conceptualizes security as a governance relationship rather than a purely coercive function. From this perspective, the legitimacy of security institutions derives not only from their capacity to counter threats, but also from the manner in which authority over force is structured, exercised, constrained, and contested within a constitutional and legal order. Democratic control, accountability, transparency, respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law are therefore constitutive elements of security itself rather than secondary or optional objectives<sup>1</sup>.

Within this framework, the defense sector is understood as the institutional system through which the state organizes and governs its capacity to use military force in response to external threats. It encompasses the armed forces as force providers; civilian political authorities responsible for defining defense policy and authorizing the use of force; executive and administrative institutions responsible for planning, budgeting, procurement, and personnel management; and oversight institutions, including parliaments, audit bodies, courts, and independent monitoring mechanisms, that exercise democratic control over military power (Born, Fluri & Johnsson 2003). In many contemporary settings, the defense sector also includes interfaces with defense-industrial actors and private contractors whose growing role in procurement, logistics, and sustainment introduces additional governance challenges. Defense sector reform, therefore, extends beyond military modernization or capacity-building and entails the reconfiguration of authority, accountability, and institutional relationships across the broader defense governance system.

In post-war and post-conflict environments, however, defense sector reform rarely unfolds under conditions conducive to linear or technocratic change. Rather, it

takes place within political systems characterized by institutional fragility, contested authority, and sustained insecurity. Armed forces are often expected simultaneously to deter external threats, manage internal security risks, and contribute to state consolidation and political stabilization. These overlapping functions generate persistent tensions between military effectiveness and democratic governance – tensions that lie at the core of SSG/R.

Post-war environments frequently intensify these dilemmas. Emergency decision-making, rapid force expansion, and exceptional security measures may be perceived as necessary for survival, yet they may also weaken civilian oversight, normalize expanded military autonomy, and entrench informal power networks within the defense sector. Oversight institutions often lack sufficient political leverage or administrative capacity, while parliaments, courts, and civil society actors may struggle to exercise meaningful scrutiny under conditions of sustained threat. At the same time, post-war settlements frequently rest on elite bargains and power-sharing arrangements that fragment control over coercive institutions and constrain reform trajectories. International assistance, while often substantial, may prioritize operational capability and deterrence over governance and accountability, thereby reinforcing imbalances between effectiveness and democratic control.

These conditions expose an important limitation of SSR frameworks when applied in isolation. While SSG/R provides a robust normative and institutional foundation for defense reform, it does not fully explain how conflictual international environments shape the feasibility, sequencing, and content of reform processes (Schnabel & Born 2018). To address this limitation, the research integrates insights from international relations theory to examine how domestic governance dynamics interact with external security pressures in post-war settings.

<sup>1</sup> See SSR Backgrounders on [Security Sector Governance](#) and [Security Sector Reform](#).

### 3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Post-War Defense Sector Reform

The research adopts an **analytically eclectic approach** (Sil & Katzenstein 2010), combining insights from realist, liberal, constructivist, and historical institutionalist traditions to capture the interaction between structural pressures, institutional constraints, and socially embedded security practices. Rather than treating these perspectives as mutually exclusive paradigms, the study draws selectively on their complementary explanatory strengths.

#### 3.2.1 Liberal Approaches

Liberal approaches to international relations provide an important starting point. They emphasize the role of democratic institutions, checks and balances, and societal participation in constraining the use of force and preventing the militarization of politics. From this perspective, post-war SSR serves to embed democratic norms within the defense sector, restore civilian primacy, and create political and civic spaces in which security and defense policies can be debated, scrutinized, and co-decided. Liberal approaches prioritize the rule of law, civil liberties, and human rights, and adopt a predominantly bottom-up understanding of security governance in which domestic actors, political leaders, institutions, experts, and civil society, shape policy preferences and reform trajectories. This logic closely aligns with the normative foundations of SSG/R.

Yet liberal approaches provide only a partial explanation in contexts characterized by sustained external threat or asymmetric interstate conflict. Domestic institutions do not operate in a vacuum, but within an international system marked by power asymmetries, strategic competition, and uncertainty.

#### 3.2.2 Realist Approaches

Realist approaches foreground these structural constraints by emphasizing the primacy of survival, the centrality of military and economic capabilities, and the pressures generated by an anarchic international system. From this perspective, states confronting existential threats are often compelled to centralize authority, expand military autonomy, and prioritize effectiveness over accountability, particularly during wartime or prolonged insecurity. Defense governance is therefore shaped not only by domestic institutional preferences, but also by a state's position within the international system and the external pressures it confronts.

#### 3.2.3 Constructivist Approaches

While liberal and realist approaches illuminate the institutional and structural conditions under which post-war defense reform unfolds, constructivism explains how these pressures and institutional arrangements are interpreted, legitimized, and enacted within specific historical and national contexts (Wendt 1999; Katzenstein 1996; Adler 2005). Constructivism therefore functions as an interpretive layer linking material pressures and institutional designs to historically embedded meanings, identities, and security cultures. It helps explain why states exposed to similar structural constraints may nevertheless pursue divergent reform trajectories. By foregrounding discourse, norm internalization, and socially embedded security practices, constructivism deepens understanding of how defense reform becomes politically meaningful and institutionally legitimate.

### 3.3 Internal and External Balancing as an Analytical Framework

Building on these theoretical perspectives, the research conceptualizes post-war defense sector reform as a balancing process unfolding along two interrelated dimensions: external balancing and internal balancing. Originating in balance-of-power theory (Waltz 1979; Walt 1987; Mearsheimer 2001), these concepts describe how states respond to threats and power asymmetries within an anarchic international system. In post-war settings characterized by sustained insecurity, they provide an analytically useful framework for understanding how defense reform is simultaneously shaped by external strategic pressures and domestic governance dynamics.

#### 3.3.1 External Balancing

External balancing refers to strategies through which states seek to mitigate external threats by leveraging external capabilities, deterrence arrangements, and political support. Traditionally, this has included military alliances, collective defense agreements, and security guarantees (Walt 1987). In contemporary practice, external balancing may also encompass defense diplomacy, military cooperation, interoperability arrangements, arms transfers, joint exercises, and participation in multilateral security institutions. Beyond formal alliances such as NATO, states may also engage in forms of “soft balancing” (Lieber & Alexander 2005) through diplomatic coordination, institutional cooperation, and strategic alignment designed to constrain stronger adversaries without entering binding alliance commitments. External balancing may provide relatively rapid security gains, but it may also generate risks of dependence, abandonment, entanglement, or distorted domestic incentives.

#### 3.3.2 Internal Balancing

Internal balancing, by contrast, refers to efforts undertaken within the state to strengthen its own material, institutional, and symbolic capacity to deter or withstand external threats (Waltz 1979). In classical realist terms, this includes expanding military capabilities, increasing defense spending, investing

in technological innovation, and strengthening industrial capacity. Within the context of defense sector reform, however, internal balancing must be understood more broadly to include governance reforms that shape how military power is organized and controlled. Strategic planning systems, procurement frameworks, human resource management, professional military education, integrity mechanisms, and civilian oversight institutions therefore constitute central components of a state's internal balancing repertoire. From an SSG/R perspective, internal balancing encompasses both effectiveness and accountability dimensions. Strengthening operational readiness without institutionalizing democratic control may enhance short-term deterrence while undermining long-term legitimacy and institutional resilience.

#### 3.3.3 Interaction Between Internal and External Balancing

States rarely rely exclusively on one balancing strategy. Rather, they combine internal and external balancing in varying configurations depending on threat perceptions, alliance opportunities, domestic political structures, and resource constraints (Rose 1998). External security guarantees may create political space for gradual internal reforms by alleviating immediate survival pressures. At the same time, extensive dependence on external actors may reshape domestic civil–military relations, alter procurement incentives, and reinforce institutional asymmetries within the defense sector. Conversely, ambitious internal military build-ups may strengthen bargaining power within alliances while simultaneously centralizing authority and weakening oversight mechanisms.

In post-war environments, particularly those characterized by persistent or recurrent aggression, the interaction between these dimensions becomes especially pronounced. Defense sector reform is not merely a technical process of institutional modernization; it is embedded in broader strategic choices concerning alliance alignment, deterrence posture, sovereignty, and national identity. External balancing strategies may accelerate interoperability

and capability development while simultaneously privileging operational effectiveness over governance reforms. Internal balancing strategies may strengthen self-reliance and professionalization while also entrenching powerful military institutions whose autonomy challenges democratic oversight. Understanding post-war defense reform through the dual lens of internal and external balancing therefore allows for a more dynamic and politically grounded analysis. Reform trajectories are shaped not only by domestic institutional design or normative commitments to democratic governance, but also by systemic pressures, alliance structures, and evolving security practices.

### **3.4 Historical and Longitudinal Dimensions of Defense Reform**

The historical and longitudinal dimension of this research is analytically constitutive rather than merely contextual. Historical institutionalist and constructivist scholarship emphasizes that security identities, threat perceptions, and civil–military norms are produced and reproduced through historically situated interaction (Hall & Taylor 1996; Pierson 2004; Wendt 1999; Hopf 2002). Experiences of war, occupation, alliance dependence, neutrality, or authoritarian rule become embedded within institutional memory and political discourse, shaping how defense reform is interpreted and legitimized over time. National narratives concerning sovereignty, professionalism, and survival influence whether alliances are framed as necessary guarantees or problematic dependencies, and whether military autonomy is perceived as indispensable or normatively problematic. By incorporating a longitudinal perspective, the research traces how balancing strategies are historically constructed, reinterpreted, and institutionalized across critical junctures. Defense sector reform thus emerges not as a discrete policy intervention, but as a temporally layered process in which past experiences shape present institutional choices and future trajectories.

### **3.5 Integrated Analytical Framework**

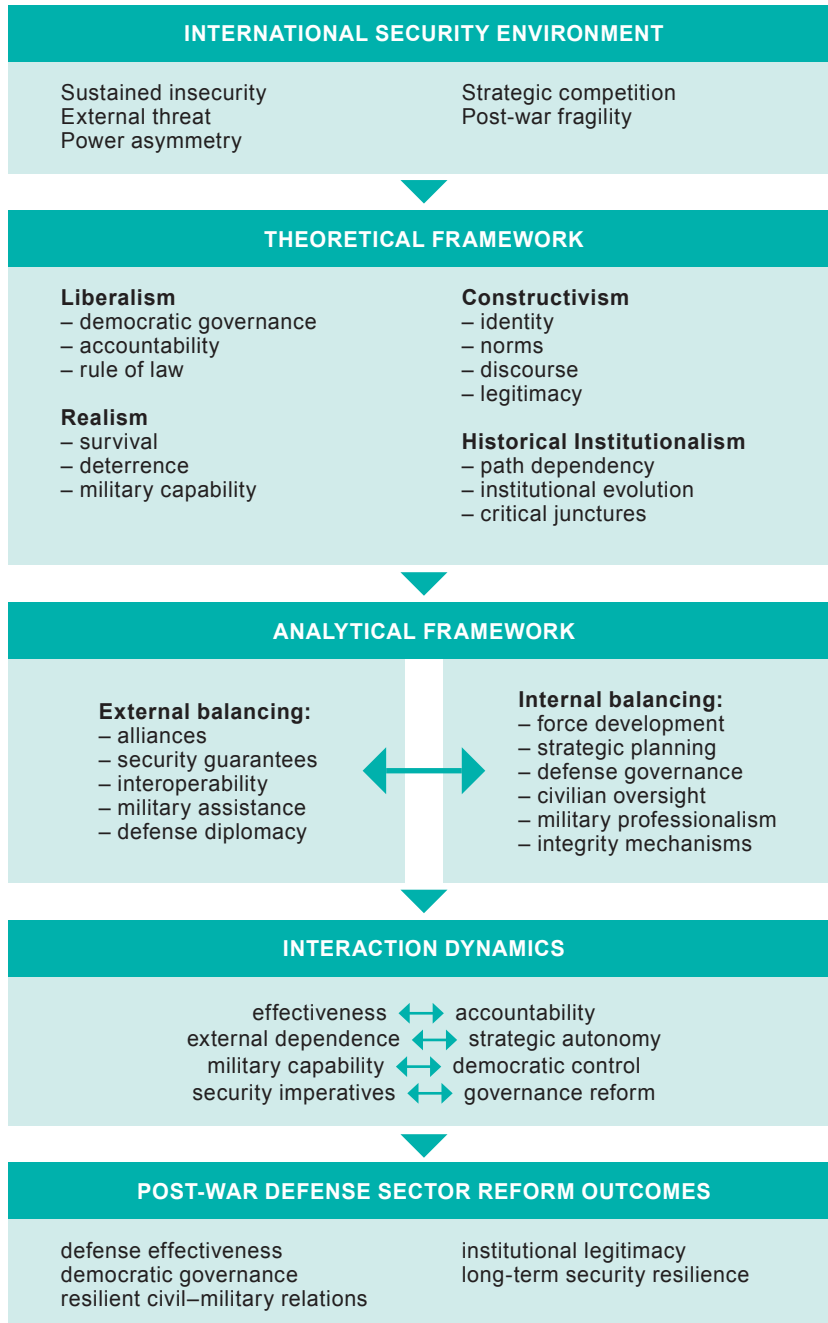
By situating defense sector reform at the intersection of governance, security, and international politics, this conceptual framework provides an analytical lens capable of capturing the specific challenges of post-war SSR under conditions of sustained insecurity and asymmetric conflict.

The framework integrates:

- liberal insights concerning democratic governance and institutional accountability;
- realist understandings of external threat and strategic competition;
- constructivist attention to identities, discourse, and legitimacy;
- and historical institutionalist perspectives on path dependency and institutional evolution.

These theoretical dimensions are operationalized through the interaction between internal and external balancing strategies, which together provide the central analytical framework guiding the comparative analysis that follows.

**Figure 1 Integrated Analytical Framework for Comparative Analysis**



# Methodology and research design

The methodological design follows directly from the conceptual framework outlined above. If post-war defense sector reform is understood as the interaction between structural pressures, balancing strategies, institutional evolution, and socially embedded security practices, then the research design must be capable of capturing temporal sequencing, institutional transformation, and discursive change across cases.

Accordingly, the project adopts a qualitative, historically grounded, and theory-informed comparative research design. The study combines process tracing and structured, focused comparison (George & Bennett 2005) to identify causal mechanisms linking external threat environments, balancing strategies, identity narratives, and governance outcomes. Rather than testing a single deterministic hypothesis, the research seeks to identify patterned relationships and institutional mechanisms across cases while preserving contextual depth and historical specificity.

The research further integrates insights from historical institutionalism and constructivism. Historical institutionalism enables analysis of path dependency, sequencing, institutional adaptation, and critical junctures (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004, Thelen 1999), while constructivist analysis captures how threat perceptions, security identities, and civil–military norms shape reform trajectories through discourse and institutional practice. Combining these perspectives allows the study to examine both the material and ideational dimensions of post-war defense reform.

## 4.1 Longitudinal Within-Case Analysis

Each case study traces the evolution of defense governance across three broad historical phases:

- pre-war conditions,
- wartime and transitional dynamics,
- and post-war reform trajectories.

This longitudinal design enables analysis of institutional learning processes, identity reconfigurations, and path-dependent developments across time. Historical depth

is therefore not merely descriptive but analytical, allowing examination of how balancing strategies and governance arrangements stabilize, adapt, or transform under conditions of prolonged insecurity.

## 4.2 Operationalization of the Analytical Framework

The integrated conceptual framework is operationalized through two interrelated analytical dimensions: external balancing and internal balancing.

### External balancing

Indicators include:

- alliance formation and evolution,
- security guarantees,
- defense diplomacy,
- external military assistance,
- interoperability arrangements,
- and integration into multilateral security institutions.

### Internal balancing

Indicators include:

- force development and strategic planning,
- defense procurement and industrial policy,
- civilian oversight and parliamentary control,
- anti-corruption and integrity mechanisms,
- military professionalism and education,
- and the institutionalization of accountability norms.

The interaction between these dimensions constitutes the central analytical focus of the research. In particular, the study examines:

- how external guarantees may facilitate governance reforms or reinforce military autonomy;
- how internal reforms may strengthen democratic legitimacy while generating operational constraints;
- and how identity narratives and threat discourses shape the legitimacy and institutionalization of both balancing strategies.

### 4.3 Cross-Case Comparison

The comparative analysis proceeds across the cases of Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Ukraine. The aim is not statistical generalization but analytical generalization (Yin 2018). The research therefore seeks to identify:

- convergences in balancing configurations,
- divergences in civil–military evolution,
- institutional mechanisms sustaining democratic control under threat,
- and conditions under which reform processes stalled, adapted, or regressed.

Ukraine occupies a particular position within the comparative design. While it shares important structural similarities with the other cases, including asymmetric conflict and reliance on external security assistance, it also represents a contemporary case of reform unfolding during ongoing war. Ukraine therefore functions both as a critical contemporary case and as the principal recipient of comparative policy lessons generated through the broader analysis.

### 4.4 Case Selection and Comparative Logic

The case selection follows a structured comparative logic grounded in shared strategic conditions rather than radically divergent outcomes. All four cases confront sustained external threat and significant power asymmetry vis-à-vis stronger adversaries. Each has developed a substantial defense sector under conditions in which state survival and democratic governance are simultaneously at stake. This common structural context provides a controlled basis for comparison consistent with a most-similar systems design (Przeworski & Teune 1970; Lijphart 1971).

At the same time, the cases differ in several important respects, including:

- regime trajectories,
- alliance configurations,
- sequencing of reforms,
- civil–military institutional traditions,
- and patterns of external dependence.

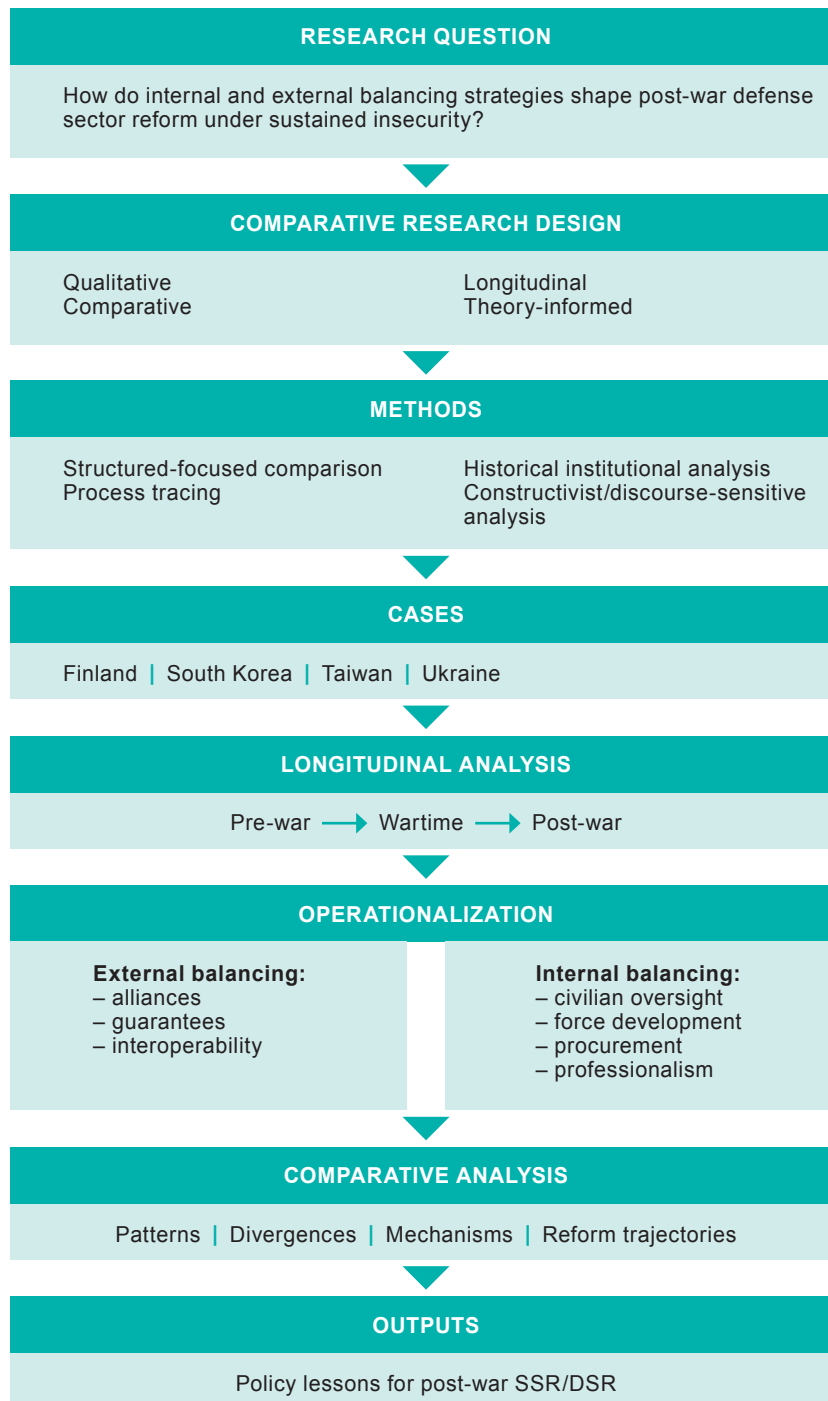
These differences generate variation not in ultimate objectives, all cases seek to reconcile defense effectiveness with democratic accountability, but in reform pathways and institutional configurations. The analytical focus therefore lies on how different combinations of internal and external balancing have been sequenced, institutionalized, and legitimized over time.

By tracing these trajectories longitudinally, the research identifies mechanisms through which states under sustained threat manage tensions between operational effectiveness and democratic control. The structured comparison thus enables the identification of policy-relevant governance patterns without assuming that defense reform follows a single linear model.

### 4.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies primarily on qualitative analysis and therefore does not seek statistical generalizability. Second, access to defense-related information varies across cases and may be constrained by classification, political sensitivity, or wartime conditions. Third, the historical and contextual specificity of each case limits direct policy transferability. Nevertheless, the comparative and longitudinal design provides substantial analytical leverage for identifying broader institutional patterns, governance mechanisms, and strategic dilemmas relevant to post-war defense reform under conditions of sustained insecurity.

**Figure 2 Research Design and Comparative Methodology**



# Structure of the publication series and cumulative logic

The publication series follows a cumulative comparative logic. The individual papers do not function as isolated case studies, but as interconnected analyses examining how states exposed to sustained external threat have balanced military effectiveness, democratic governance, and institutional adaptation across different historical trajectories. Collectively, the series seeks to identify the institutional mechanisms, strategic choices, and reform pathways through which post-war defense sector reform can contribute simultaneously to security resilience and democratic accountability.

The research project consists of six interlinked papers designed to build progressively towards a comparative synthesis. The overarching analytical framework is provided by the two-part paper *Pathways of Post-War SSR*, which serves both as the conceptual anchor and the concluding comparative assessment of the publication series. The first part introduces the project's rationale, conceptual framework, and comparative methodology, while the second part synthesizes findings across cases and formulates policy recommendations for post-war SSR under conditions of sustained insecurity. Drawing on the project's empirical findings, an accompanying *SSR Backgrounder on Post-War SSR* has also been developed as a practical tool for policymakers and practitioners.

## **Pathways of Post-War SSR, Part I: Conceptual Framework and Comparative Research Design**

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**Maria-Gabriela Manea & Mariia Kostiv**

The first part of *Pathways of Post-War SSR* constitutes the conceptual and methodological introduction to the publication series. It outlines the project's research rationale, analytical framework, and comparative design, situating post-war SSR at the intersection of security governance, civil–military relations, and international politics. The paper develops the integrated analytical framework based on liberal, realist, constructivist, and historical institutionalist perspectives, operationalized through the interaction between internal and external balancing strategies. It also introduces the comparative logic underpinning the selection of Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Ukraine.

## Post-War Security Sector Reform in Finland

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Ilmari Käihkö

Finland represents a particularly relevant comparative case of a small frontline state balancing democratic resilience and defense readiness across multiple periods of existential threat. Käihkö's study analyses six historical phases of Finnish civil–military relations, spanning the 1918 civil war, the Second World War, the Cold War, and Finland's accession to NATO in 2023. The paper identifies several mechanisms that have enabled Finland to preserve democratic governance despite sustained external pressure and repeated incentives to centralize power or militarize governance structures. These include:

- strong rule-of-law traditions and institutional continuity;
- cohesive national identity and broad political consensus;
- conscription-based territorial defense;
- high levels of societal trust in the armed forces;
- and forms of external balancing through selective partnerships and strategic diplomacy.

At the same time, the study challenges idealized portrayals of Finland as a uniformly successful “model democracy” by highlighting periods in which wartime pressures constrained civilian oversight and expanded executive authority. Finland's experience therefore illustrates both the possibilities and tensions inherent in maintaining democratic governance under prolonged insecurity.

## Post-War Security Sector Reform in South Korea

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Insoo Kim

South Korea illustrates a distinct reform trajectory in which militarization initially constrained democratic development before subsequent reforms gradually strengthened civilian control over the armed forces.

The paper examines:

- the evolution of the South Korea–United States alliance and its implications for sovereignty and defense governance;
- the transition from troop-intensive to technology-intensive force structures;
- the establishment of forms of subjective civilian control (Huntington 1957) and their institutional implications;
- and the enduring tensions between security imperatives and democratic institutions.

South Korea's transformation from war devastation to a major economic and military power offers important lessons concerning alliance management, defense innovation, force modernization, and the gradual demilitarization of politics under conditions of persistent external threat. The case also highlights the complex interaction between external security guarantees, domestic political development, and evolving civil–military relations.

## Post-War Security Sector Reform in Taiwan

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Wei-chin Lee

Taiwan's experience is shaped by continuous pressure from a more powerful neighboring adversary alongside a complex transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

The paper examines:

- shifts in cross-Strait geopolitics and threat perceptions;
- the evolution of Taiwan's defense strategy;
- arms procurement and indigenous defense innovation;
- legislative oversight and civil-society engagement;
- and challenges related to recruitment, reserve forces, and public trust.

Taiwan demonstrates how democratic accountability and civilian oversight can be strengthened even under conditions of sustained external threat and strategic uncertainty. The case offers particularly relevant insights for Ukraine regarding deterrence, societal resilience, transparency, and the relationship between defense modernization and democratic legitimacy.

## Post-War Security Sector Reform in Ukraine: Interpretation of Insights from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan

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Julia Soldatiuk-Westerveld & Emma Caals

This paper examines Ukraine's international military cooperation, defense-sector effectiveness, and democratic oversight mechanisms through a comparative cross-case lens. Drawing on lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan, the study identifies:

- areas in which Ukraine has already adopted similar balancing strategies;
- gaps in institutional capacity and civilian oversight structures;
- vulnerabilities associated with external dependence and alliance uncertainty;
- and opportunities for strengthening both defense effectiveness and democratic governance during and after war.

The paper functions as a bridge between the historical comparative cases and Ukraine's contemporary reform trajectory, contextualizing comparative insights within Ukraine's distinct geopolitical and institutional environment.

## **Post-War Security Sector Reform in Ukraine's Strategic Horizon: Navigating War Realities and Post-War Challenges**

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**Grazvydas Jasutis**

The second Ukraine-focused paper provides an in-depth assessment of Ukraine's current wartime environment and identifies strategic priorities for future post-war SSR. It analyses:

- NATO and EU integration as long-term security anchors;
- bilateral security guarantees and transitional security arrangements;
- interoperability reforms, strategic planning, and defense-industrial modernization;
- challenges related to integrity-building, human rights protection, and democratic control;
- and the evolving role of civil society in defense governance.

The paper emphasizes that post-war reform trajectories are already being shaped during wartime and it highlights the structural transformations required to transition from wartime adaptation towards sustainable democratic defense governance.

## **Pathways of Post-War SSR, Part II: Comparative Analysis and Policy Recommendations**

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**Maria-Gabriela Manea & Mariia Kostiv**

The concluding paper integrates findings from Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Ukraine in order to identify broader strategic pathways and conditions conducive to successful post-war SSR. Building on the project's comparative framework, the paper analyzes how different configurations of internal and external balancing shaped defense governance outcomes across the cases. It formulates policy recommendations tailored to post-war environments characterized by sustained insecurity, institutional fragility, and ongoing geopolitical competition.

The paper further argues that Ukraine's experience may itself become an important future reference point for other post-war states confronting the dual challenge of preserving democratic governance while sustaining large-scale defense mobilization under conditions of persistent external threat.

## SSR Backgrounder on Post-War SSR

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**Mariia Kostiv**

Complementing the academic and policy-oriented papers, the SSR Backgrounder on Post-War SSR translates the project's core findings into a practitioner-oriented format. The Backgrounder examines how SSR can address both the legacy of unlawful territorial aggression and pre-existing structural weaknesses within the security sector in order to support the development of institutions that are simultaneously effective, accountable, and democratically governed.

It analyses the external conditions, strategic choices, and institutional trade-offs shaping SSR in post-war environments and outlines how reform processes contribute to the transformation of security institutions, clarification of roles and mandates, and restoration of democratic governance mechanisms. Particular attention is devoted to rebuilding institutional integrity, strengthening civilian oversight, and re-establishing public trust in the security sector following periods of war and emergency governance.

# Contribution and relevance

By integrating insights from security sector governance, civil–military relations scholarship, international relations theory, and comparative historical analysis, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of post-war defense sector reform under conditions of sustained insecurity. The project challenges linear assumptions about transitions from war to peace and demonstrates that post-war SSR is neither a purely technical exercise nor a universally sequenced process of democratization. Rather, defense sector reform unfolds within enduring tensions between military effectiveness, external threat management, institutional resilience, and democratic accountability.

Conceptually, the project contributes to the growing literature on analytically eclectic approaches to security governance by combining liberal, realist, constructivist, and historical institutionalist perspectives within a common analytical framework (Sil & Katzenstein 2010). The operational distinction between internal and external balancing provides a dynamic lens for analyzing how states simultaneously respond to geopolitical pressures and negotiate domestic civil–military relations. By integrating historical institutionalist and constructivist insights, the research further highlights how institutional trajectories, security cultures, and historically embedded threat perceptions shape reform pathways over time.

The project also contributes to debates on democratic civil–military relations under conditions of prolonged insecurity. Building on classical and contemporary scholarship (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Schiff 1995; Bruneau & Matei 2008), the research demonstrates that tensions between operational effectiveness and democratic oversight are not temporary wartime anomalies but enduring governance dilemmas that continue into post-war reconstruction periods. In this sense, the project moves beyond narrow institutional understandings of SSR and situates defense governance within broader political, societal, and geopolitical dynamics.

Empirically, the comparative analysis of Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Ukraine demonstrates that democratic governance of the defense sector can be maintained, adapted, and in some cases strengthened even under prolonged conditions of external threat and strategic uncertainty. At the same time, the research shows that no singular institutional model guarantees successful reform outcomes. Rather, reform trajectories depend on the interaction between external security pressures, alliance structures, political leadership, institutional sequencing, and historically rooted patterns of civil–military relations.

While Ukraine constitutes the principal contemporary reference point of the project, the broader implications of the research extend beyond the Ukrainian case. In an increasingly contested international environment characterized by renewed interstate conflict, geopolitical rivalry, democratic fragility, and accelerated militarization, the dilemmas explored in this study are relevant to a wider range of states confronting the long-term governance consequences of war and sustained insecurity. The project therefore contributes not only to ongoing debates concerning Ukraine's future post-war reconstruction, but also to wider scholarly and policy discussions on democratic governance of the defense sector in the twenty-first century.

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## **About DCAF**

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.

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