DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Photo: Nada Harib for DCAF.

Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa
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Introduction

The MENA region has formed an integral part of DCAF's mandate for most of the organisation's existence. Soon after its establishment in 2000, a 'MENA Working Group' was mandated to publish a handbook on 'the governance of armed forces, paramilitary organisations, police and intelligence establishments in countries of the wider Middle East'. Anchoring its engagement in principles of neutrality, independence and local ownership, DCAF was well placed to support emerging reforms , offering ministerial-level specialist SSR/G guidance and advice serving a hitherto unaddressed need. In the Middle East, Offices were established in Ramallah in 2005, and in Beirut where it was accorded diplomatic status in 2008.

Engagement with the countries of North Africa was mainly propelled by the Arab Spring and the consequent establishment, in 2012, of a Trust Fund for North Africa (TFNA). Offices were established in 2012 in Tunis and in Tripoli (moved in 2018 to temporarily operate from Tunisia).

A long and complex history of politics intertwined with foreign intervention presents an extraordinarily complex landscape, characterised by tension and where regime stability tends to mostly determine the nature of intra and extra-regional alliances. Although much of the regional tensions related to the "Cold War" remain in evidence, former East/West alliances have eroded and the region is witnessing growing polarisation around regional powers.

MENA is a region with a fast-growing and energetic young population that lends enormous potential for growth and prosperity. Youth, however, are largely disenfranchised and frustrated. Whether this owes to oppression, corruption, poor governance, shrinking space for change in some countries, or to unattained and failed political and other reforms, the fact remains that such frustrations continue to widen the gap between the state and ruling elites on the one hand, and the citizenry on the other.

Following popular movements at the start of the last decade, only very few reforms were ultimately pushed through. In most cases, popular demand was either not met, supressed, or resulted in open conflict that remains unresolved. In late 2018 the region witnessed the emergence of what some analysts refer to as a 'second wave' of such popular movements in countries such as Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan. Each has served in one way or another to underscore the widening gap between governing elites and their demographically youthful population.

Consequently, the MENA region features high on the priorities of bilateral donors and multilateral organisations. However, the high level of support to security institutions is often poorly captured by ODA disbursements, suggesting an elevated focus by donors on non-ODA eligible activities, such as procurement of defence equipment or operational training. Donor support to SSG/R in the region tends to focus on single institutions rather than working at

the sectoral/cross-sectoral level. More is needed to encourage donors to rebalance SSG/R support from aid focused on building effectiveness to management and accountability reforms.

A roundtable discussion with minors in a detention centre in Tunisia. Photo: Tunisian Ministry of Justice

Key security opportunities and challenges

Within this broader context, a legacy of authoritarianism and weak parliamentary culture has allowed strong unaccountable security actors – army, police, intelligence and others - to flourish, bypassing parliaments to shape the political system, burdening public resources and, to varying degrees, subordinating the rights of citizens to the survival of a political regime. The resulting challenges to good security sector governance are paramount, and span from deficits in oversight, legislative frameworks, and capacity, to more emerging security challenges and needs, including those related to COVID-19, and the prevalence of conflict.

Deficits in oversight

Oversight mechanisms – whether exercised by parliaments, independent institutions, civil society organisations or security institutions themselves - are largely absent or, at best, very weak across the region. At one end of the scale this allows overly bureaucratic, fiscally inefficient, and wasteful security service provision and at the other, recurrent abuses of individual rights and freedoms. While in some cases serious attempts have been made to introduce internal control mechanisms, external and independent control and oversight is still absent or weak at best.

Legislative, regulatory and normative frameworks

Where partner governments are engaged in processes of reform, DCAF shall help build capacities and conditions to overcome the lack of adherence to international norms and standards. Deficits in checks and balances can be addressed through the appliance of, and adherence to, regulatory frameworks contained within for example, SDGs 5 and 16, UNSCR 1325, the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda and other important instruments such as the conventions against corruption (UNCAC) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

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Deficits in security provision

Deficits in (quality) service provision form a central focus for DCAF in the MENA region. Gaps extend to all levels, whether administrators and law makers working at the national level or at the local level within the security services interfacing directly with citizens enforcing the rule of law. The ability to train, equip, manage people and information within a coherent and well understood doctrinal and organisational framework are fundamental elements of any capability maturity model conceived at any level.

Exclusion from decision making processes, which remain the preserve of a disconnected and economically privileged elite, is a common trend. The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent example of a crisis where weaknesses and deficits were quicky exposed and where responses were designed and implemented top down and without participation, including hastily drafted and un-scrutinised security legislation, limiting oversight and opening channels for rapid funding and a broader mandate for security forces. Such measures may erode public trust, impact legitimacy and weaken the social contract.

Prevalence of conflict

MENA is a region too often associated with conflict. These may be social, economic, dormant, latent, or open conflicts, involving national but also regional and international actors. Increasingly states witness the involvement of non-state or hybrid security actors, threatening their monopoly on the use of force. Conflict drivers are often rooted in decades old resentments, however emerging political, economic, environmental and energy-related conflicts impact the lives and sensitivities of people across the region . SSR/G centred initiatives can be effective in helping to mitigate, manage, prevent and possibly solve conflict when efficiently designed and timely applied.

These deficits, as well as other challenges, exacerbate the inherent fragility of the regions' governance structures, further fuelling instability, violent extremism and to a large extent, migration flows - highlighting the need for reform of the security sector.

Group of Al-Haq staff in the Occupied Palestinian Territories at a training facilitated by DCAF on awareness-raising strategies and legal frameworks for the prevention of torture. Photo: Al-Haq

DCAF's approach

DCAF recognises that national actors hold the primary responsibility for undertaking SSR. DCAF focuses on accompanying national efforts and processes in a way that reinforces local ownership. When advising national authorities, DCAF will always seek to provide them with a comparative perspective on international norms and standards, as well as existing good practice, and will seek to tailor advice to best address the national context and needs.

DCAF prioritises building trusted partnerships with national actors, emphasises the neutral/impartial nature of its advice, applies a holistic approach to SSR, and supports all security sector actors – those providing, managing, controlling and overseeing security. DCAF also cooperates with and supports international actors with whom DCAF shares a common objective.

The overall objective of DCAF activities in the MENA region is to contribute to peace, stability and democracy by supporting good governance of the security sector. This is mainly achieved through

1. facilitation of policy dialogue and security cooperation;

2. design and implementation of programmes providing tailored capacity building and policy advice to executive, legislative and judicial authorities;

3. development of policy and knowledge products, tailored to influence policy and underpin capacity-building processes;

4. expert backstopping support for local civil society organisations to engage in related policy research and in promoting human-centered SSR;

5. support to international actors engaged in SSG/R to ensure their engagement is coordinated and in line with international good practice.

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Objectives

Reaffirm the value of democratic governance in addressing current and emerging security challenges.

Oversight and accountability

Efforts to reinforce weak parliamentary culture have slowed adoption of oversight mechanisms whether parliamentary through select committees, or through independent institutions such as ombuds institutions and the 'national preventative mechanisms' envisaged under OPCAT, or whether through civil society actors working to achieve accountability over security and justice actors. DCAF will continue to learn and adapt its approach to help state signatories to the OPCAT to meet their obligations, in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine. It will continue to expand efforts to improve citizens' access to information beyond its programmes in Tunisia and Morocco. DCAF also aims to work with state security providers such as the Lebanese Internal Security Forces to enhance internal control mechanisms, promoting self-regulate and developing knowledge and understanding of inspections over places of detention.

Gender and security: Inclusion, with particular emphasis on gender integration, youth participation, minority rights, as well as the access to security of vulnerable or traditionally excluded groups is a cross cutting theme that lies at the heart of all programming in the region. DCAF will support key SSG stakeholders in promoting gender equality in security provision, management and oversight. Support to communication strategies more generally within the security sector shall also contribute to ensuring enhanced inclusion for better informed societies.

Transparency

This forms an important parallel track by which security sector actors may contribute to legitimacy. Making information relating to governance and legislation freely available to citizens promotes knowledge and can improve legitimacy. DCAF supports access to laws through the online publication of security related legislation (Lebanon, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia) and aims to extend the scope of this support to include the deliberations of oversight bodies, information relating to inspections and criminal justice system databases.

Good management

A key element of DCAF's contribution to strengthening democratic security sector governance will be the work to improve management within security forces and relevant ministries. Efforts naturally focus on ministries of the interior in their role managing internal security. The strategy work starting in Tunisia concerning good governance in integrity mirrors the Palestinian Authority Administration Programme. These and other previous engagements in related areas by DCAF (i.e. Jordan or Lebanon), serve to inform intended future work in Iraq and possibly Jordan.

Civil society and the media

CSOs and media play a vital role in holding the actions of security providers to account. Building their capacity to do so, vectors with efforts to improve transparency through access to information and accountability through complaint handling. DCAF aims to ensure that civil society groups, such as youth and women's organisations and also media associations, understand the role they can play and the means by which they can establish a healthy discussion around vital topics that have a positive impact at a national level - such as the work planned in Morocco to raise awareness around gender-based violence.

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Regulatory & policy frameworks

Many challenges to good SSG originate in deficient or inadequate normative frameworks. Whilst legal reforms have been introduced, these are often confused, being the product of chaotic legal reform processes. DCAF aims to help improve such processes, but also to work to ensure they are underpinned by clear

legal frameworks prioritising gender equality, the prevention of torture and prison reform.

Prevention of violent extremism

Given the high impact of this emerging threat, DCAF will prioritise efforts in supporting programmes of PVE, building upon lessons from its programme in Tunisia and from comparative programmes around the world, supporting youth and community initiatives on PVE and juvenile justice system reform.

Cyber security

Is an area that shall increasingly be addressed as part of DCAF's overall support to democratic SSG in the MENA region. The need is ever more important in an era where protection of data (whether managed by the state or owned by citizens) is exposed to threats of an increasingly sophisticated nature.

Corruption

Countering corruption and work to improve complaints systems are complementary areas in which DCAF has been engaged for many years. Findings from the ongoing study into its work with Palestinian Authority institutions and experience in supporting anti-corruption bodies there and in Morocco, will be used to inform programme design across the region and in discussions with emerging partners in Iraq.

Business and Security

Oil and gas companies/industries throughout the MENA region, as well as other key business actors increasingly rely on private security services to ensure business continuity. This exponential growth is a concern where regulation remains weak. There is a need to better understand and address the relationship between business operations and SSG/R priorities in the region, and the challenges it presents for security sector oversight and accountability.

COVID-19: DCAF will continue to monitor governmental responses to the pandemic aiming to safeguard citizens from the negative consequences of hastily developed emergency provisions. Through its Marsad platform, DCAF will highlight incidences where oversight mechanisms may be bypassed for longer than the situation justifies. Capacity development can be offered to police, in instances where new decrees and laws are introduced more quickly than appropriate training allows for, or where complaints systems are inadequate.

Enhance engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Dialogue

DCAF aims to expand and deepen its engagement with Yemeni stakeholders to enhance security and cooperation and to support a peaceful end to the conflict. It aims to develop knowledge products offering frameworks for the inclusion of security sector factors as part of peace processes.

Multi-stakeholder approaches

Security sits at the intersection of multiple diplomacy tracks but is often excluded from explicit consideration. Working with international partners, DCAF will seek to highlight the benefit of SSR/G centric analyses in conflict resolution through active support to stabilisation programmes. Support will be offered to international actors in Libya, in particular UNSMIL, UNDP and EUBAM in implementing stabilisation projects In Iraq a consultative inception phase will aim to identify priorities for new partnerships on SSG/R.

Community based approaches

'Ground-up' community-based approaches to improving security offer an entry point to improving lives in conflict affected countries where state institutions are weakened and unable or unwilling to offer security. Being built around community participation and consultation, such approaches have proved remarkably resilient and capable in addressing everyday needs. DCAF aims to develop initiatives in fragile contexts such as Gaza, working with local youth activists and civil police to strengthen cooperation and understanding of community security needs, and in Libya to undertake a community-based assessment of security and justice needs, in order to inform international engagements.

Conflict resolution and peace building

Support programmes will focus on prevention of violent extremism, migration and border management issues and the advancement of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Expanding on lessons observed from work on Yemen, DCAF aims at increasingly becoming the reference organisation in matters of SSR in conflict, contributing to de-escalation narratives, tailoring confidence building measures and interim security arrangements, or promoting shared longer term SSG visions that facilitate the settlement of disputes and resolution of conflicts in the short-term.

Strengthen contributions of SSG/R to international policy and practice.

Agenda 2030

DCAF amplifies the role of SSG/R in sustainable development as expressed within SDG16 targets. These constitute important entry points for additional engagements that help countries in the region meet their international commitments, as much work is still needed in countries in the MENA region to ensure their legal frameworks, strategic planning and reform process are aligned with their obligations/commitments under SDGs. SDGs also provide an opportunity to reinforce other priorities through work with civil society and state institutions in the design of measures to implement and monitor progress towards achieving the purposes of SDG16.

Multilaterals

DCAF will continue to work with bilateral donors and multilateral organisations in the region that share the commitment to democratic governance, building on its experience of helping to reinforce and improve the way in which they individually and collectively support SSG/R. This includes UN OROLSI in reinforcing its initiative to design and put into practice Technical Guidance Notes on SSR. DCAF will also continue to support building the capacities of bilateral and multilateral actors to more efficiently define and implement their SSR/G support strategies in the region, such as UN political missions (UNSMIL, OSESGY) and others.

Sharing lessons learned in SSG/R

Capturing and sharing lessons from the field will also be a high priority for DCAF and a valuable contribution to international policy and practice. DCAF's wide network of partners and diverse portfolio of support projects facilitates the development of unique insights which can shape international policy and practice in areas such as Women, Peace and Security, the integration of security actors in conflict resolution processes, and the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Supporting parties to the conflict in Yemen to work together on highly sensitive security arrangements. Photo: DCAF

Implementation

The efficient implementation of DCAF's MENA strategy requires the development of flexible annual work-plans that need to be anchored in and consider the following factors:

Geographic coverage

DCAF is prepared to engage in all MENA countries under thematic programmes that fall within its mandate and described in thematic terms in the sections above. Conditions for engagement include the safety of staff but, importantly, an expressed will to initiate a programmes of reform and demand for DCAF services, resources and capacities. Consolidation needs, strategic priorities and funding will always constitute a principal guiding element before new engagements are decided. DCAF's presence and stand across the region, with a reputation of a trusted and reliable partner, further helps create the conditions for more opportunities of engagement. Additionally, the unsettled conflicts and a rather generalized sense of instability that impedes sustainable development, is increasingly encouraging government and civil societies a like to seek out for efficient support to implement reforms that enable the establishment of minimal conditions for development.

Concerns related to spill-over of conflicts and their effects is among the key drivers for both state and non-state actors to resort to specialized organizations like DCAF to ensure capacities and tools are available to implement change. Such a widely open spectrum of opportunities is equally true in more and in less democratized systems of governance, as well as across republican countries and kingdoms the like. DCAF is therefore well placed to become, through this strategy timeframe, yet a more strongly relied on and reputed partner and companion of reform processes across the MENA region.

Beyond its ongoing engagements across countries in MENA (including Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen), and within the described parameters, DCAF plans to engage as of 2021 in Iraq, based on the groundwork to date that included consultations with the relevant Iraqi authorities in charge of SSR, as well as exchanges with donors and coordination with leading international actors in the field in Iraq, such as UNDP and the EU.

Jordan and Syria will remain under observation for possible openings, considering the strategic importance of Jordan as partner for international organisations such as NATO and the

anticipated paramount reform needs in Syria, as soon as the situation there allows. While countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may only show vague support for reform, selected engagements with semi-official think tanks from countries like Saudi Arabia and Oman may lead to openings, based on earlier exchanges with DCAF.

Algeria continues to show potential, although recent events confirm that possibilities for engagement remain limited. The plebiscite approval, with extremely low popular participation, of a new constitution was widely seen as falling short from meeting public expectations. On the other hand, civil mobilisation, as expressed by continued mass street demonstrations, continues to indicate widespread popular demand for change. Egypt's standing in regional affairs may eventually point to the need to engage with Egyptian state actors in the context of regional conflicts. However interest in engagement over domestic reforms by the government remains absent.

A police officer helping a youngster at a street celebration in Tripoli, Libya. Photo: Nada Harib for DCAF

Regional and/or subregional organizations and structures, such as the league of Arab States, the Islamic Conference, the Union for the Maghreb or development banks and funds, generally lack any mandates related to SSG/R. Nevertheless, DCAF will remain open to considering exchanges and cooperation, not least building on some of its supported nascent initiatives for regional exchanges and piloting engagements at the regional level, beyond national borders on SSG/R shared needs and visions.

Strengthen partnerships

Cooperation/contribution beyond the MENA region will be important to leverage the experience gained form the MENA region to support activities in other geographic areas and vice-versa, Cooperation with interna-

tional organisations with mandates and/or programmes relevant to DCAF's mandate and involving several countries in MENA (i.e. UN system, International IDEA, German stiftungen, ISPI, Peace Institutes, Endowments, etc) will remain a priority. In this regard, it is important to underline the need to ensure stronger relationships with the EU in MENA, as well as with the UN (particularly UN political missions).

DCAF also adapts to external considerations. Donor strategic priorities and DCAF's annual work-plans must adapt accordingly. Opportunities exist to engage private donors and self-funding can be applied to lever broader impact. In addition, regional (conflicts) or global (i.e. COVID-19) crises affecting the region are monitored to ensure that potential impacts on longer-term programming is addressed through adaptive responses and solutions.

Staffing and deployment

DCAFs structures and approach will continue to evolve to meet partners needs and to ensure optimal configuration for efficient programme delivery, response capacity, value for money and maintenance of DCAF's reputation as a world class knowledge-based organisation. Cooperation and synergies between divisions and departments shall be part of the process to optimise DCAFs impact and to capitalise on DCAF's in-house expertise.

The value of DCAF's field presence, which has grown in recent years, has been further underscored by COVID-19. Field offices not only provide valuable local expertise and insights, but also played a key role in ensuring continuity of operations throughout 2020. The role of field offices, in combination with remote advising, will remain central in the coming years, with the added advantage of minimizing DCAF's carbon footprint by reducing the need for travel. Additional field offices, some of which may eventually serve as regional hubs, will be considered as DCAF's operations continue to expand.

Evolution in the context of COVID-19

Throughout the global pandemic in 2020, DCAF adapted its operations continually to provide the best possible support to partners in security institutions facing a rapidly evolving situation. E-learning and remote advising have become an increasingly important part of DCAF's offer. These forms of support will be further expanded and enhanced in the coming years, as they offer an excellent way to engage more frequently with a wider range of stakeholders. DCAF is already working with partners to capture lessons learned and identify new opportunities for SSR emerging as a result of the effects of and government responses to the pandemic; this work will remain relevant in the coming years as the effects of COVID-19 are expected to endure.

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DCAF is dedicated to making people more secure through accountable and effective security and justice.

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