

EWIS 2026 - Call for Papers

Rethinking Security Sector Reform and the Politics of External Security Assistance

Keith Krause keith.krause@graduateinstitute.ch & Bilal Salayme bilal.salayme@graduateinstitute.ch

Questions surrounding external security assistance and security sector reform (SSR) are central to processes of state-building and reform and lie at the core of the state's legitimate monopoly over the use of force. These questions also speak to state's security alliances and political positioning.

In the last two decades, security sector reform has become an agenda for many international interventions from UN peace missions to bilateral security assistance in line with liberal interventionist and peacebuilding. While mainly targeting post-conflict countries from Timor Leste to Sub-Saharan Africa and Central America, this agenda was also implemented in countries undergoing political transition and democratization, notably in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In recent years, however, the SSR agenda has come under growing scrutiny. The retreat of the liberal international order and of liberal peacebuilding, the emergence of new and non-Western security providers (state, non-state, and regional actors), the return of interstate conflicts, and the evolving nature of security threats have all contributed to reshaping both the goals and the practices of security assistance and SSR. In parallel, peace missions have been shifting from liberal peacebuilding to stabilization, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency agendas. These shifts raise fundamental questions about the assumptions that underpin SSR, the diversity of international approaches to security assistance, and the long-term implications for state-building in different contexts.

This workshop seeks to deepen scholarly debate on the future of security sector reform and the wider field of international security assistance. It invites contributions that engage with, but are not limited to, the following questions and themes:

- **Outcomes and failures of externally led SSR:** What has been achieved, what has failed, and why?
- **Normative and conceptual foundations of SSR:** How do the assumptions underpinning SSR programming reflect the historical experiences and practices of donors, and how do they align (or clash) with the institutional realities of recipient states?
- **Non-Western and regional approaches to SSR and security assistance:** How do actors such as Russia, China, and Turkey design and deliver post-conflict security assistance?
- **SSR and state-building:** To what extent do SSR programmes contribute to (or undermine) post-conflict statebuilding and political transition?
- **Competing security assistance providers:** What patterns emerge among Western and non-Western actors, and how do recipient governments leverage this competition?
- **From peacebuilding to stabilization:** How has this shift reshaped the goals, tools, and metrics of SSR, and with what implications for local order and long-term state-building?
- **Changing security landscapes:** How do the decline of the liberal peace model, new security providers, and emerging threats (cyber, hybrid, climate, corruption, organized crime) affect the framing and practice of SSR?
- **Training and capacity-building in SSR:** What do these practices mean to different actors, and how do they shape professionalism, socializing, and institutional legitimacy?

The workshop encourages participation from researchers and academics of all backgrounds, drawing on diverse methodological and epistemological approaches. Depending on the papers, the conveners would explore the possibility of proposing a special issue.