PRISME

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The impacts of militarized foreign policy in the MENA region

Revitalizing the Debate on the Global Arms Trade

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ABOUT

Pathways to Renewed and Inclusive Security in the Middle East (PRISME) aims to redefine the conception of "security" in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as the starting point for strategic relations between MENA countries and their European and North American partners. It does so in pursuit of effective, collaborative approaches to ensuring a more peaceful and stable future. To this end, PRISME sponsors dialogue and debate between foreign policy professionals across diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

PRISME's first project, **Sustaining Alternative Links beyond Arms and the Military (SALAM)**, proposes to rethink the centrality of the arms trade in international relations with and among MENA countries. It seeks to foster meaningful discussions and debates among scholars and foreign policy experts on several interconnected topics. By approaching these complex issues from different angles, the goal is to systematically unpack and examine commonly held assumptions surrounding the arms trade.

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Cover photo: A vehicle mounted with Afghan National Police officers leads a patrol of dismounted U.S. soldiers from the 18th Military Police company into the village of Woluswali Kolangar, Pole-Elam District, Logar Province, Afghanistan, 17 March 2010, U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Russell Gilchrest | Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

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Previously, she was professorial lecturer and a visiting scholar at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs on two occasions, a visiting scholar at AGSIW for two years, and a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre Michel de l'Hospital, Université Clermont Auvergne (France). She worked for three and a half years at the French Ministry of Defense and for three years at Airbus Defence and Space. She received her PhD in political science from the Université Clermont Auvergne in 2017 and holds an MA in international relations from the Sorbonne University (Paris, France).

PRISME/SALAM debate #3

Synthesis paper

The third debate of the SALAM project asked: What are the impacts of militarized foreign policy, and how does it affect approaches to issues like migration and terrorism? Participants delved into the complex consequences of militarization within and upon the MENA region, noting the intricate balance of sovereignty, geopolitical interests, and humanitarian justifications in regional and external actors' foreign policies. The debate examined these policies from various perspectives: 1) analyzing trends and outcomes of the militarization of foreign policies within the MENA region; 2) assessing the roles and effects of external powers' militarized approaches to the region; and 3) evaluating the long-term repercussions on regional stability and human security. While acknowledging the historical and political factors behind the prioritization of military strategies by many actors, participants also highlighted key adverse consequences, such as the destruction of infrastructure, socioeconomic devastation, the rise of extremism, and the exacerbation of conflicts. The workshop emphasized the need to prioritize genuine humanitarian concerns and sustainable peacebuilding efforts over short-term military objectives and geopolitical gains.

Militarized Foreign Policy: A MENA Overview

In this workshop, the militarization of foreign policy refers to the strategic prioritization and utilization of military assets, strategies, and alliances by both regional and external entities to achieve political, economic, and security goals. This strategy commonly involves increased defense spending, arms manufacturing, and the deployment of military forces within and beyond national borders. Moreover, it extends to a broader securitization of policies, encompassing areas such as migration, border management, and counterterrorism measures.

In the MENA region, militarization is intricately linked to historical legacies of conflict, colonialism, and ongoing geopolitical rivalries. A key aspect discussed in this SALAM debate was the distinction between inherently militarized policies originating from military regimes and those evolving in response to specific crises. The papers presented at the workshop covered both aspects, as briefly outlined below.

In Egypt, the military's long-standing dominance has profoundly shaped policies, often favoring military solutions over diplomatic or humanitarian approaches. For example, the Egyptian military's deployment to the Sinai to manage the influx of Palestinian refugees and maintain security reflects a default to military solutions, despite concurrent diplomatic efforts. Yara Ahmed and Jaida Aboulfotouh's paper[1] examines this dual strategy in Egypt's response to the current crisis in Gaza.

1 Yara Ahmed and Jaida Aboulfotouh. "Egypt's Challenge: Balancing Borders and Stability Amid Gaza War." *PRISME Initiative*, May 29, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/egypts-balancing-borders-stability-gaza-war-jaida-aboulfotouh-yara-ahmed/.

As explored by Robert Mason, Egypt's historical militarization extends to domestic policies, resulting in "a persistent narrowing of the political economy in which military interests dominate over a broader, more inclusive, and resilient economy."[2] Similarly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) prioritizes militarized approaches, evident in significant investments in military capabilities, deployments in regional conflicts, and handling of political dissent.

The securitization of migration and militarization of borders in the Mediterranean area further exemplify this trend. Eman Ragab's paper[3] examines how countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt have increasingly adopted militarized measures to manage migration, with coast guard forces engaging in militarized border security and sea interception operations. Ragab also underscores the role of the European Union (EU) in shaping these migration policies, through border management outsourcing and incentives.

Other participants focused on the militarized foreign policies of external actors towards the MENA region, particularly those of the United States (US) and the EU. Dina Mansour-Ille[4] scrutinizes NATO's intervention in Libya within the framework of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Rachid Benharrousse[5] examines the US occupation of Iraq and its consequential impacts, as well as the EU's strategies concerning the militarization and securitization of its external borders. Waleed Hazbun provides a broader examination of the "spiral of militarization in US Policy towards the Middle East,"[6] looking at how Washington has increasingly relied on military solutions, from arms sales to drone strikes.

This overview of militarized foreign policy in the MENA region, as discussed in the SALAM debate #3, sets the stage for deeper exploration of its patterns and consequences, the roles played by external powers, and potential pathways towards de-escalation and lasting peace and stability in the MENA region in the following sections.

Trends and Outcomes of Militarized Policies within the MENA Region

The militarization of MENA countries' foreign policies reveals a complex interplay of sovereignty considerations, security concerns, economic interests, and geopolitical dynamics. This section delves into key trends within these policies and their profound impact on regional stability, national economies, and the well-being of populations.

One significant trend is the justification of prioritizing military solutions over diplomatic and humanitarian approaches through narratives of national security and sovereignty. For instance, the influx of migrants is often framed as a threat to both. Ahmed and Aboulfotouh note that Egypt's military deployments in the Sinai are driven by concerns about the "implications of hosting Palestinian refugees...[for] national security," although

2 Robert Mason. "Egypt and the United Arab Emirates: Roots and Growth of an Emerging Arab Military Ecosystem." *PRISME Initiative*, June 4, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/egypt-uae-emerging-arab-military-ecosystem-robert-mason/.

3 Eman Ragab. "The security aspect of illegal migration policies in North Africa." *PRISME Initiative*, June 7, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/security-illegal-migration-policies-north-africa-eman-ragab/.

4 Dina Mansour-Ille. "Libya's Political Crisis: A Legacy of Failed Interventionism." *PRISME Initiative*, June 11, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/libyas-political-crisis-dina-mansour-ille/.

5 Rachid Benharrousse, "From *Persona* to *Homo*: Tracing Iraqis' Depersonalization from Infrastructural Destruction to Militarized Borders." *PRISME Initiative*, June 14, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/from-persona-to-homo-tracing-iraqis-depersonalization-rachid-benharrousse/.

6 Waleed Hazbun. "The Spiral of Militarization in US Policy Towards the Middle East." *PRISME Initiative*, June 21, 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/spiral-of-militarization-us-policy-middle-east-waleed-hazbun/.

its broader opposition to a mass exodus of Palestinians also marks a firm refusal "to be complicit in what it views as [Israel's] ethnic cleansing."[7]

Similarly, Mason describes the UAE's militarized foreign policy "as part of its search for national security and…regime security," especially during regional escalation following the Arab uprisings.[8] Since 2011, the UAE has used military forces to safeguard its interests, such as intervening with Saudi Arabia to crush the Bahraini Spring and uphold monarchical rule. It has also done so to achieve geopolitical goals, as seen in Libya, where it supported General Haftar's troops against the internationally recognized Government of National Accord, supported by rival Qatar. These examples highlight a broader regional trend favoring militarization, often at the expense of sustainable solutions.

This prioritization of military solutions is evident in the economic choices of MENA countries. Despite economic challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt continue to allocate a significant portion of their GDP to military expenditure, as Ragab observes.[9] The intertwining of military interests with economic and political strategies illustrates how deeply ingrained militarization is within the governance frameworks of these countries. This approach is further compounded by strategic alliances with external powers that often bolster militaristic agendas through arms sales and military aid. The centrality of the arms trade in many of these countries' policies further exemplifies a regional trend where military considerations often overshadow other vital aspects of governance, ensuring regime stability at the cost of broader socio-economic development and political inclusivity.

The intertwining of military interests with economic and political strategies illustrates how deeply ingrained militarization is within the governance frameworks of these countries.

Another prevalent trend involves Middle Eastern regimes, like others worldwide, using labels of "terrorism" and "criminality" to justify militarized responses to political opposition and migration. For example, Egypt's counterterrorism activities in the Sinai have been critiqued as focusing more on bolstering the regime's survival and longevity than on achieving genuine security outcomes. These military operations have largely failed to apprehend insurgents or dismantle their networks, prompting speculation that the Sisi regime might be prolonging the conflict to solidify domestic support by appearing as a steadfast protector.[10]

Moreover, the lack of transparency and restricted access to Sinai makes it difficult to verify the regime's narratives or the effectiveness of its "harsh militarized approach", which "also targets non-Islamist dissidents", worsening polarization.[11] Meanwhile, the mere presence of military equipment, even when not actively deployed, serves as a tool of intimidation and enforcement. This equipment increasingly includes advanced technologies such as drones, AI systems, and biometric data collection. North African countries, with EU support, employ these technologies to manage and often militarize migration flows.

7 Ahmed and Aboulfotouh. "Egypt's Challenge: Balancing Borders and Stability Amid Gaza War."

8 Mason. "Egypt and the United Arab Emirates: Roots and Growth of an Emerging Arab Military Ecosystem."

9 Ragab. "The security aspect of illegal migration policies in North Africa."

10 Khalil Al-Anani. "Insurgency in Sinai: Challenges and Prospects." *Arab Center Washington DC*, 10 June 2022, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/insurgency-in-sinai-challenges-and-prospects/

11 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report — Egypt*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p. 6; 27.

The outcomes of these militarized approaches are multifaceted. On one hand, they have contributed to regime stability and deterred perceived threats. On the other hand, they have also triggered significant adverse effects, such as exacerbating conflicts and fueling security risks, ultimately undermining regional stability. Ragab notes that the securitization of migration in North African countries risks reinforcing the link between irregular migrants and criminal networks, potentially worsening the security challenges these policies intend to tackle.[12] Mason also highlights that the militarized foreign policies of the UAE and Egypt exacerbate instability in conflict-ridden states like Libya and Sudan, rather than alleviating it. By prioritizing short-term interests, these policies often undercut long-term peace and development prospects.

Moreover, the militarization of foreign policy has economic implications. The substantial allocation of resources towards defense spending and military operations diverts funds from critical socio-economic needs like education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.[13] This is particularly evident in Egypt, where the focus on arms imports and military expenditure has led to a monopolization of the political economy by military interests. Mason identifies two main opportunity costs: first, a failure to meet constitutionally guaranteed spending on health and education, hindering their development; second, the employment of military personnel in non-military roles distorts economic opportunities for others.[14]

Finally, militarized foreign policies significantly impact the well-being of populations, often resulting in severe human rights abuses. Ragab's analysis shows how militarized migration policies push migrants towards more dangerous routes, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of already marginalized groups. Non-profit organizations have raised concerns about practices that endanger sea migrants, including potential delays in search and rescue operations that increase the risk of fatalities. Reports also indicate that upon arrival at certain destinations, migrants face mistreatment, including use of excessive force, torture, arbitrary arrests, and collective expulsions.[15] The use of advanced technologies like drones and biometric systems further complicates public oversight due to their opaque nature. Ultimately, these policies, ostensibly aimed at enhancing security, frequently undermine human rights and dignity, exacerbating the challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations in the region. This issue is starkly exemplified in Gaza today, a topic explored further in the paper.

Roles and Impacts of External Powers' Militarized Approaches

External powers have played a significant role in shaping the landscape of the MENA region through their militarized approaches. The US and EU have been particularly influential, employing diverse tactics ranging from direct intervention to providing military aid, which has exacerbated conflicts and given rise to new challenges.

12 Ragab. "The security aspect of illegal migration policies in North Africa."

13 Emma Soubrier. "The opportunity cost of the arms trade between North America, Europe and the MENA region." *SALAM Synthesis Papers*, Nice, France: PRISME Initiative, March 2024, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/opportunity-cost-arms-trade-mena-emma-soubrier/

14 Mason. "Egypt and the United Arab Emirates: Roots and Growth of an Emerging Arab Military Ecosystem."

15 Human Rights Watch. "Tunisia: No Safe Haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees." *Human Rights Watch*, July 19, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/19/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees

The US approach to the MENA region, as detailed by Hazbun, has been characterized by a heavy reliance on military force and coercive tools to uphold its strategic interests. Post-9/11 policies, encapsulated by the Bush Doctrine, prioritized preemptive strikes and overwhelming force against perceived threats, leading to significant military engagements, from Afghanistan to Iraq, which destabilized the region.[16] Hazbun also notes that the US has increasingly turned to less conspicuous warfare tactics like drone strikes, perpetuating violence without addressing underlying political issues. Despite rhetoric about reevaluating military-centric policies, the Biden Administration's response to the Gaza-Israel conflict that began on October 7, 2023, aligns with this ongoing trend. Washington has once again placed an "unrealistic faith" in military solutions, believing the Israeli military can eliminate Hamas and US deployments can prevent regional escalation.

The US invasion and occupation of Iraq exemplify the dire consequences of militarized foreign policies, resulting in extensive infrastructural damage, economic devastation, and societal upheaval, as noted by Benharrousse.[17] Such destruction caused mass displacement, a pattern also seen in NATO's military campaign in Libya, examined by Mansour-Ille.[18] It was notably estimated that the intervention in Libya extended the civil war's duration sixfold and increased its death toll seven to ten times.[19] Similarly, ongoing Israeli operations in Gaza, as discussed by Ahmed and Aboulfotouh, show how militarized responses lead to significant civilian suffering and long-term instability. At the time of the workshop, in May 2024, Israeli forces had killed over 34,000 Palestinians and were already responsible for the displacement of 85% of Gaza's population, worsening the humanitarian crisis.[20]

Military interventions in the MENA region frequently result in population displacements, precipitating migrations directly linked to these policies. Rather than addressing the root causes of migration, Western countries tend to further securitize these human movements and respond with escalated militarization. This perpetuates a feedback loop of militarization, wherein the response to the consequences of militarized actions is yet more militarization. North African countries find themselves in the middle of this cycle, serving as both transit points and containment zones for migrants. Benharrousse and Ragab highlight how the EU has externalized its border management, turning North African countries into buffer zones to intercept migrants before they reach Europe. This has led to increased militarization of borders, with Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt bearing the brunt of these policies, often with significant support from the EU.

The EU's pervasive role in shaping these militarized migration management policies is evident in various agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) signed with North African countries. Ragab details how these agreements, such as those between the EU and Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, include substantial economic incentives to bolster border security. These policies reflect the militarized strategies of the US and EU, which rely heavily on military aid and arms sales as primary responses to regional crises.

16 Hazbun. "The Spiral of Militarization in US Policy Towards the Middle East."

17 Benharrousse, "From *Persona* to *Homo*: Tracing Iraqis' Depersonalization from Infrastructural Destruction to Militarized Borders."

18 Mansour-Ille. "Libya's Political Crisis: A Legacy of Failed Interventionism."

19 Alan Kuperman. "A Model Humanitarian Intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya Campaign." *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Summer 2013, pp. 105-136.

20 Ahmed and Aboulfotouh. "Egypt's Challenge: Balancing Borders and Stability Amid Gaza War."

Mason and Hazbun emphasize that this military aid supports regimes' security apparatuses, further entrenching militarization. Not only have countries like the UAE developed robust military capabilities with Western support but their growing military-industrial complex now fuels an emerging military ecosystem where regional powers are not only recipients of militarized policies but are also becoming significant players in arms production and military strategy. This creates another feedback loop of militarization, wherein the American hegemon increasingly views the military as a universal solution, prompting regional actors to adopt similar approaches as their only viable option. As highlighted in SALAM debate #1, this "sole focus of Western countries on weaponry as security is not only bolstering militarized foreign policy, but also opening space for other actors with a more nuanced and longer-term strategic approach to bi- and multilateral relationships."[21]

Militarized approaches, instead of offering long-term solutions, tend to perpetuate cycles of violence.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the militarized foreign policies of MENA countries and the rationale employed by external powers. In both cases, the narrative of counterterrorism serves as a blanket justification for military intervention, even as this has repeatedly proven counterproductive. Discussions in previous PRISME workshops, in addition to this one, suggest that militarized responses often expand the ranks of terrorist groups and exacerbate security threats. For instance, the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, highlighted by Hazbun, not only destabilized the region but also contributed to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. Similarly, Israel's mass killings in Gaza, purportedly aimed at eliminating Hamas, result in significant civilian suffering and long-term instability, and are actively "used by Hamas and others to recruit a next generation of militants and jihadists."[22] Conversely, arguments for a political approach to terrorism emphasize the need to address the underlying causes of terrorism rather than defaulting to military force. Militarized approaches, instead of offering long-term solutions, tend to perpetuate cycles of violence.

Similarly, the gap between the stated goals and the actual outcomes of military campaigns under humanitarian pretenses, such as in Libya, highlights a critical issue. Benharrousse analyzes how US and European military responses dehumanize populations, reducing them to objects in geopolitical games, despite being enabled by human rights rhetoric. The toll on populations is the most significant negative impact of these spirals of militarization. Understanding these human costs is crucial for evaluating long-term impacts and exploring more sustainable and genuinely humanitarian-focused policies.

21 Emma Soubrier. "What is the role of the arms trade between Europe & North America and the MENA region?" *SALAM Synthesis Papers*, Nice, France: PRISME Initiative, July 2023, https://prismeinitiative.org/blog/emma-soubrier-role-arms-trade-mena-synthesis/.

22 Nikolaj Nielsen. "Europol: Israel-Gaza galvanising Jihadist recruitment in Europe." *EUobserver*, March 18, 2024, https://euobserver.com/eu-and-the-world/arcdb7cf05.

Long-term Repercussions on Regional Stability and Human Security

Militarized foreign policies in the MENA region have profoundly and enduringly impacted regional stability and human security, as they have entrenched conflicts, weakened state structures, and worsened humanitarian conditions.

One significant long-term consequence of militarized foreign policy is state destabilization and resulting power vacuums. Mansour-Ille highlights how NATO's intervention in Libya led to "perpetual violence, fragmentation, and fragility", especially as the country was left unsupported post-conflict.[23] Similarly, in Iraq, the US invasion and poor post-conflict reconstruction severely damaged the state's economic and institutional functionality. Benharrousse discusses how the destruction of critical infrastructure triggered a cascade of destabilizing consequences, including a 41 percent decline in GDP in 2003, prolonged economic stagnation, and 40 percent unemployment by 2007. This aggravated the humanitarian crisis as more than 2 million Iraqis fled the country, overflowing into neighboring countries and straining resources while worsening existing tensions. Efforts at infrastructural rebuilding were plagued by corruption and inefficiency, leaving Iraq dependent on foreign humanitarian aid.[24] These examples show how military interventions often fail to achieve their goals, leaving fractured states and societies in their wake.

Governments frequently justify their military actions through sovereignty narratives, while paradoxically stripping invaded states of these very attributes through widespread devastation. This is evident when post-conflict reconstruction efforts are insufficient or absent. In extreme cases, like Israel's war on Gaza, military interventions make it virtually impossible for communities to rebuild. Historian William Dalrymple drew a parallel between a video showing IDF soldiers laughing after destroying a building "so that they have nothing to come back to" and the destruction of 530 Palestinian villages in 1948, highlighting the recurrence of the Nakba referenced by Ahmed and Aboulfotouh. Antony Loewenstein, author of *The Palestine Laboratory*, points to a "fetishisation of destruction," where soldiers film their war crimes with impunity,[25] reflecting a dehumanizing trend inherent in militarized approaches that diminish the value of human lives. These policies not only undermine the sovereignty of the invaded states but also perpetuate a cycle of violence and instability that obstructs any meaningful recovery or rebuilding efforts.

The concept of dehumanization is pivotal in understanding the enduring impacts of militarized foreign policy on human security, starting from policy formulation and narrative construction. Hazbun observes that the global war on terror has reframed many security challenges as "terrorism," a process that racializes and dehumanizes perceived threats. This phenomenon is starkly illustrated in recent events in Gaza, where dehumanization tactics portray the enemy as 'irrational', thereby justifying the erasure of normative constraints on the use of military force.[26] In contrast, Benharrousse highlights how humanitarian rhetoric within military interventions often reduces affected populations to passive victims devoid of political agency. While this narrative does not inherently support

23 Mansour-Ille. "Libya's Political Crisis: A Legacy of Failed Interventionism."

24 Benharrousse, "From *Persona* to *Homo*: Tracing Iraqis' Depersonalization from Infrastructural Destruction to Militarized Borders."

25 The tweets by William Dalrymple and Antony Loewenstein, from February 5, 2024, can be found here: https://x.com/antloewenstein/status/1754609417851683198. See Loewenstein. *The Palestine Laboratory*. London: Verso Books, 2023.

26 Hazbun. "The Spiral of Militarization in US Policy Towards the Middle East."

violence against those it aims to protect, it still converges with the other narrative on one aspect of dehumanization, by enabling the physical destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Benharrousse notes that the destruction of critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, water treatment facilities, and power grids, transcends institutional and state concerns, profoundly affecting social welfare and fundamental human dignity. This devastation reduces lives to "mere corporeal materiality subjected to sovereign disposability,"[27] eroding human security and perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability. Similarly, diverting resources from socio-economic needs exacerbates grievances and fuels unrest, illustrating another dimension of the long-term impacts of militarized policies. Western support through arms sales and military aid reinforces the prioritization of military solutions, perpetuating a cycle where militarization breeds further instability and compromises basic human security and dignity. This process of dehumanization, from political rhetoric to infrastructural destruction through budgetary decisions, mirrors the treatment of migrants, often marginalized as mere security risks.

The securitization of migration and the militarization of borders in the MENA region have severely impacted human security. It was already mentioned that militarized approaches to border control have increased migrants' vulnerability in many ways, which is scrutinized by nonprofit organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Statewatch UK, Stop Wapenhandel, and the Transnational Institute in Germany. Benharrousse details how the EU's evolving border control regime prioritizes narrowly defined security imperatives over humanitarian obligations, contributing to the further dehumanization of migrants. He illustrates how refugees, including Iraqis and Palestinians, are reduced to "depersonalized refugeehood," echoing the violence of their original displacement. The differential treatment of migrants based on their origin exacerbates the divide between rights-bearing citizens and dehumanized "living things." The contrast in the reception of Ukrainian and Middle Eastern refugees underlines how geopolitical and racial biases influence migration policies, perpetuating the dehumanization and marginalization of already vulnerable populations.

Where Do We Go from Here? Recommendations and Future Directions

Addressing the adverse impacts of militarized foreign policy requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. Pervasive militarization has failed to achieve stability, instead intensifying conflicts and introducing new challenges. Moving forward, a fundamental reassessment of foreign policy approaches is essential for ensuring sustainable peace and development. The recent escalation in Gaza and responses to it starkly highlight the human cost of militarized policies, underscoring the need for a more humane and just approach to conflict resolution. The ongoing mass atrocities call for urgent international action to safeguard civilians. Discussions and papers presented in this SALAM workshop emphasized the critical need for a paradigm shift, presenting several key recommendations.

One idea, formulated by Hazbun, is to methodically "unwind the multiple forces driving the spiral of militarization" and rethink grand strategies. The US must reconsider its vision for global order and interpretation of its interests within it to foster threat reduction and promote alternative security frameworks: "*With more modest goals, the US might be*

27 Rachid Benharrousse. *They Cannot Not Escape: Necropolitics, Pre-Migratory Expectations, and the Elsewhere* (unpublished) [Doctoral Dissertation, Mohammed V University in Rabat, 2024].

able to navigate global politics with reduced leverage by accepting that it can satisfy its security needs through negotiations and diplomacy with less resort to military force and coercive tools."[28] Hazbun suggests that reducing reliance on military strength could weaken the ties the fuel the arms industry. Promoting diplomacy might challenge the entrenched militarized mindset in US policy, while prioritizing global issues like climate change and inequality could lead to a more peaceful approach to international security.

A critical area of focus is challenging the justifications for interventions. Participants emphasized the need to critically evaluate how human rights and democracy are invoked in foreign policy narratives, ensuring they are not simply mobilized as a guise for geopolitical interests. With the case of Libya in mind, Mansour-Ille suggests that interventions not only must be genuinely humanitarian but also include comprehensive post-intervention measures to foster lasting peace. The R2P principle should never be misused for regime change but should instead focus on disarming belligerent forces on both sides and using force only when necessary to advance sustainable political solutions.[29]

There is a pressing need to balance security concerns with human rights, moving beyond security-centric approaches to include civil society organizations, the private sector, and communities in policy development. For instance, the emphasis on militarized border control in North African countries needs reevaluation. As Ragab discusses, policies should address the root causes of migration, such as poverty and conflict, and promote human security. Managing migration in North Africa requires sustainable solutions that prioritize economic development and job creation while ensuring humane treatment of migrants.[30]

Participants suggested reimagining responses beyond state regimes to protect people. Inspired by prison abolition concepts and divestment principles, this approach prioritizes genuine humanitarian concerns over state-centric security measures. Benharrousse advocates for

> "*Diverting resources away from militarized border enforcement toward creating expansive infrastructures for dignified refugee reception, rapid legal incorporation, and empowered socioeconomic integration. [This] also involves dismantling ideological constructs framing certain populations as security threats and (…) countering xenophobic mythologies portraying migrants as alien others*".[31]

These principles challenge prevailing security-focused narratives and highlight the need to deconstruct dominant discourses that perpetuate militarization and dehumanization.

In this respect, it was emphasized during the workshop that researchers have a crucial role in informing policymaking and exposing policy discrepancies. The concept of "immanent critique" is particularly powerful in this context. This approach "seeks, by revealing the contradictions of claim and context, to transform legitimations into emancipatory weapons."[32] It is essential to dispel government narratives that suggest coercive force is the only option. Researchers must examine whether policymakers achieve coherent and sufficient outcomes aligned with their stated objectives. Prioritizing human security and sustainable peace in the MENA region is imperative. This process involves challenging

28 Hazbun. "The Spiral of Militarization in US Policy Towards the Middle East."

29 Mansour-Ille. "Libya's Political Crisis: A Legacy of Failed Interventionism."

30 Ragab. "The security aspect of illegal migration policies in North Africa."

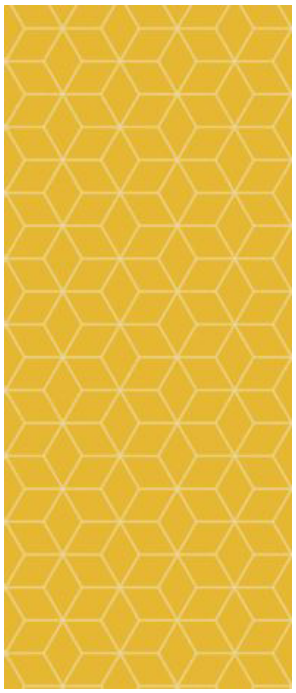
31 Benharrousse, "From *Persona* to *Homo*: Tracing Iraqis' Depersonalization from Infrastructural Destruction to Militarized Borders."

32 Robert J. Antonio. "Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 3, September 1981, pp. 338.

prevailing security-focused narratives and promoting a more nuanced understanding of the complexities at play.

Insights gleaned from the workshop and related papers underscore the critical imperative to transition from militarization toward a more balanced, humane, and sustainable future for the MENA region. Despite compelling evidence of the detrimental impacts of militarization, as extensively documented in projects such as The Cost of War at Brown University since 2010,[33] policies have seen minimal change. The systematic militarization of responses to crises has consistently proven ineffective, threatening both regional stability and human security. Yet, despite these challenges, there is still room for optimism and a steadfast commitment to instigating change. Researchers and civil society play pivotal roles in advocating for necessary adjustments and holding governments accountable. Achieving this transformation demands continuous efforts to advance policies that genuinely promote lasting peace and development.

33 Costs of War Project, "Summary of Findings," (Brown University, 2024), https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/summary



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