Borders and Sovereignties in an era of ‘Statebuilding Lite’:
International Security Assistance and the Militarization of Lebanese Border Management

Introduction

This article explores how international border management strategies have implications for the relationship between borders and sovereignty in the Middle East after the 2011 Arab upheavals. In a world often described in post-national terms, where the relationship between borders, authority and sovereignty is in flux, how are practices of controlling and managing the border exported from one actor to another? How do domestic security agencies utilize global discourses of order, sovereignty and statebuilding, and what are the consequences for civil-military relations? By demonstrating how border management has become a key issue in post-2011 Lebanon, and how strategic donor priorities for control and directions of the wider Middle East play out along the Lebanese-Syrian border, it is possible to discern how global practices and discourses of border control interacts with domestic political realities in Lebanon.

Borders in the MENA region have traditionally been simultaneously hard and soft: they are hard inasmuch as low levels of formal trade and integration, coupled with regional conflicts and centralised state systems, foster rigid and military control of external borders. They are also soft, however, since colonial border demarcation entailed arbitrary division of social groups, and created a practice of fluid borderlands where tribes and cross-border exchanges have rendered non-state governance models resilient and durable. In the wake of the Arab upheavals in 2011, we may witness increased pressure on regional borders, and subsequent militarisation of borders and borderlands. What we also observe is increased cross-border activity, and in some cases a *de jure* or *de facto* challenging of formal borders (Del Sarto, this issue), which further adds to the question of how changes at the border structure Middle East sovereignty processes. While, as Fawcett explicates elsewhere in this issue, the Western state model and its borders may have proven durable, challenges ‘at the border’ are likely to have implications for governance and sovereignty processes in composite political systems.

In the Middle East, and akin to debates elsewhere on hybrid political orders, some have argued
for using the term ‘hybrid sovereignty’ to describe the co-existence of traditional and state forms of authority. While certainly more apt at describing non-Western states than the weak/fragile/failed state rhetoric, which effectively infantilises non-Western states, such hybrid systems must be seen as a variant of sovereignty, rather than an alternative, where governance modalities are expressed and felt differently than in the Western state, and where elements of both formal and non-formal governance structures interact and overlap within a social space. This perspective is useful inasmuch as it points to the importance of a pluralist perspective on sovereignty processes which turns the focus on practiced sovereignty, e.g. that which is felt, that which affects people’s everyday lives. A ‘deficit perspective’, as embedded in the Weak States canon, fails to recognize the productive processes inherent in such hybrid systems. By accepting hybridity not as an illness but as a solution to local or domestic collective problems, we can move beyond artificial dichotomies, and rather study political processes in their own right.

This article examines external actors’ engagement in border control processes, and explores how donors seek to reconfigure the relationship between the external border and the core in such cases of ‘hybrid sovereignty’. This amounts to a reading of security assistance as a form of statebuilding, yet with one important difference from previous iterations: whereas statebuilding as we witnessed in its heyday in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Liberia and East Timor was made up of roughly coherent strategic concepts such as Security Sector Reform (SSR), Rule of Law, institution building, and so forth, and where political commitment to these (supposedly) coordinated processes were considered *sine qua non*, the current version of security assistance takes place without (much) domestic political-strategic involvement. International security assistance – defined here as assistance aiming to “organize, train, equip, rebuild/build and advise foreign security forces and their supporting institutions from the tactical to ministerial levels” – is typically initiated by individual donor countries, rather than taking place within a formally coordinated framework, and establishes direct and often informal links with specific domestic security agencies of choice. In this way, security assistance is depoliticised and decentralised, and it allows each donor to pursue its own normativities, i.e. its own structure of statebuilding. It is pragmatic and *ad hoc*. It follows non-transparent patterns of implementation, and it is subject to parallel strategic priorities rather than cohesive reform intentions. As a consequence, it is difficult to evaluate and difficult to analyse the effect of . Assemblage approaches helps to define the fuzzy linkages that exist. Following on from Saskia Sassen’s work on


how dual process of state disassembly and (global) reassembly create new forms of social interaction practices that reconfigure distinctions between the public/private and the global/local, Abrahamsen and Williams propose ‘global security assemblages’ as a means to analyse how a “range of different security agents and normativities interact, cooperate and compete, to produce new institutions, practices and forms of security governance”.3 Treating contemporary security assistance as a global security assemblage allows a focus on how different agents and the normativities they espouse interact and compete in contexts described as ‘fragile’. Such ‘fragile’ contexts are particularly relevant as sites of global security assemblages: they are defined as weak and characterized by patterns of ‘hybrid sovereignty’, so that state and non-state actors interact in ways that defy conventional expectations to the sovereign nationstate. The current intensity in security assistance, necessitated by global discourses of transnational terrorism, migration and the danger of failed states, is in need of alternative and critical analyses that move beyond evaluations as to their ‘success’ or ‘failure’.

The Lebanese case is instructive when exploring such ‘statebuilding lite’ processes. Seen for decades as a pariah state, a weak state, or even a non-state, and as a void in the otherwise state-centric Middle East, Lebanon has emerged as a bulwark against escalating instability in the Levant, and has proven more resilient than expected.4 This despite the serious spill-over effects from the Syrian war, both in terms of refugee influxes, and a rekindling of sectarian conflicts that mirrors in part that of the Syrian conflict. Lebanon is however a battleground in the broader Middle East competition for influence, and security assistance, authorized under UNSC Resolution 1701, which call upon the international community “to support the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized border”,5 must be seen in the context of Iranian-Saudi/US struggle for power over domestic political directions. Since 2006, substantial amounts of military aid have propped up the Lebanese Armed Forces, the police, intelligence, and other security agencies. This accelerated significantly after 2011, as the Middle East unravelled and strategic priorities of countering Jihadism and Iranian influence gave renewed relevance for security assistance in the region. Subsequently, external security assistance is now undertaken by nearly every European and North American embassy in Beirut. The modus operandi appears to be one in which each ‘donor’ dig into their ‘niche’, supporting ‘its’ agency among the myriad of security actors, in what can best be described as a security assistance ‘bonanza’.6 Local security institutions, locked in a delicate system of

6 Security Assistance Monitor’s data shows that US’ military aid alone in the period 2010-2016 amounts to just over $1 billion. See http://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Lebanon/
sectarian power sharing, are keen to exploit the momentum, and each agency has its ‘diplomatic corps’ of liaisons that ensure that flows of security assistance reach their departments. This security assistance bonanza takes place without significant political steering and control, much due to the polarized and unstable political situation. Political instability and inability to govern effectively is partly endemic to the post-conflict system of power-sharing among Lebanon’s sects, but has seen further polarization and paralysis after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, which led to street violence and the formation of two competing alliances. One set of parties, the so-called March 8 alliance including the Shia ‘state-within-a-state’ party Hezbollah, staunchly support Assad, while a second camp, the March 14 alliance, led by the Sunni-based Future Movement led by Rafik Hariri’s son PM Saad Hariri, demand a break with Lebanon’s historically strong ties to Syria. The polarization has severe effects on Lebanese socio-political life, and for the purpose of security assistance it is notable how much of the ‘niche approach’ is determined by sub-national politics and individual liaisons engaging with the donor community. In this delicate political environment, we are witnessing a form of ‘statebuilding lite’: not through comprehensive peacebuilding missions. Not through politico-economic restructuring and good governance training (although remnants of its rhetoric still exist). Instead, it takes place through training and equipping of the various bits and pieces of the security apparatus, in a modality void of coordination and strategic direction, except to prevent spill over of the Syrian civil war, and to gain a foothold in the geopolitical hotspot of Lebanon.

The article first defines the perspective of security assistance as ‘statebuilding lite’, before outlining the EU Integrated Border Management (IBM) concept. It then briefly describes the current border management situation in Lebanon, before analysing the findings from research over 2015 and 2016 on the effects of the EU IBM project on Lebanese sovereignty processes, i.e. how sovereignty is practiced and global discourses on border control interact with domestic realities, particularly related to counter-terrorism, territorial control, and migration management. In conclusion, the article reflects on how this analysis has implications for broader debates on the relationship between borders and sovereignty in the changing Middle East region.

International Security Assistance and Border Management in an Era of ‘Statebuilding Lite’

Controlling international borders has morphed into an increasingly diverse practice. Far from witnessing their declining importance, logics of control over globalized flows in people, goods and intangible assets have reshaped the policy and practice of managing borders, eventually redefining the relationship between territory and sovereignty. Such a transformation move beyond linear logics, and

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lead to processes where territorial border zones are seen as creating a security continuum, and even a ‘Möbius ribbon’, which erases the distinction between inside and outside, rather than affirming any fixed point of separation.\textsuperscript{8} Moreover, we may observe how borders have become ‘mobile’, inasmuch as rebordering processes are to be seen across everyday life, and not only at the external territorial border.\textsuperscript{9} Global-local assemblages, in which the global enters into the local in ways that defy conceptions of sovereign power and the state, are increasingly at the forefront of research into post-national practices.\textsuperscript{10}

Parallel to this transformation of the nature and effect of border processes, there is no shortage of actors seeking to influence border control practices of other states. A complex web of external/international actors are increasingly involved in border management programs across the globe – from \textit{ad hoc} Train & Equip of border patrols in geopolitically significant regions, to long-term ‘capacity building’ of Customs organisations, border guards and intelligence agencies. To some extent, border management has become an umbrella term, encompassing the entire gamut of strategic priorities, e.g. counter-terrorism, counter-organised crime, migration management and territorial sovereignty. Given the deeply transformative rebordering processes that are taking place next to the surge in global flows, there is a need to analyse the nature and effects that such border management practices have on the political order in the respective domestic contexts. Describing the current practice as ‘statebuilding lite’ – i.e. the \textit{ad hoc}, bilateral and pragmatic security assistance modalities that have replaced comprehensive statebuilding policies – allows for recognition of the changing character of contemporary security assistance, while still recognising how external actors and their normativities enter into local contexts. It also calls for attention to the political consequences on sovereignty processes, beyond technical evaluations. In many contexts where international interventions in border management takes place – in unstable countries where so-called ‘porous’ borders are considered to pose threats to global security – the existing situation is often one of soft frontier rather than fixed hard borders. The aim of border management programs is subsequently often a process of turning open-ended spaces along the external rim of the state into hard and controllable boundaries – albeit with flexibility to filter ‘desirable’ goods and people for purposes of


trade and economic integration. Border management strategies are thus neoliberal and ‘soft’ in principle, but often find rigid and ‘hard’ manifestations.\textsuperscript{11}

Border management as a part of security assistance ought therefore to be treated as a set of ideas that emerge in one context and is transferred to another, and which encompasses strategic donor priorities as well as normative structures. EU IBM, while building on the US concept of IBM as it developed after 9/11, seeks to introduce coordination within border agencies, integration between the different agencies dealing with border control, as well as ensure international coordination in a globalized world. The concept originated in the context of the borderless Schengen area, and has gradually been rolled out also in its ‘Neighbourhood’: in the Western Balkans, where it is seen as a statebuilding tool;\textsuperscript{12} in Turkey, where it has been an enlargement mechanism;\textsuperscript{13} and also in Central Asia and the ‘Southern Neighbourhood’, where the 2009 ‘Guidelines for Integrated Border Management in EC External Cooperation’, outline, over 136 pages, the specificities of EU best practices in the field of border management, including on risk analysis, data protection, and fighting corruption.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to the Practical Handbook for Border Guards, i.e. the ‘Schengen Handbook’,\textsuperscript{15} and the Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders, i.e. the ‘Schengen Borders Code’,\textsuperscript{16} the Guidelines are what the implementing agencies on the ground call “the bible”.\textsuperscript{17} When conceptualizing border management not as technical a panacea of ‘best practices’, but as inherently projecting a socio-political model where order and control ‘marry trade and security interests’,\textsuperscript{18} we begin to discern different normativities of ‘sovereignty’, and differing ideas of order and governance. Key is how IBM assumes the presence of a depoliticised bureaucracy, in which each ministry and each border agency reports directly to a hierarchically structured Government. In such a model, decisions are taken at the top, and executed by institutions further down in the system. In many states, particularly post-conflict countries like Lebanon, specific groups dominate domestic

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\item Gemma Collantes-Celador and Ana E. Juncos, “The EU and Border Management in the Western Balkans: Preparing for European Integration or Safeguarding EU External Borders?,” \textit{Southeast European and Black Sea Studies} 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 201–20.
\item European Commission, “Guidelines for Integrated Border Management in EC External Cooperation” (Brussels: EuropeAid Cooperation Office, 2009).
\item Interview ICMPD project staff, Beirut June 2015, Interview ICMPD Head April 2016
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institutions, or see institutional loyalty above political decision making, rendering the integration process between them an extremely delicate and political process. In Lebanon, as elsewhere, ‘integration’ infringes on sensitive issues of access to power by sub-national groups, and ‘coordination’ implies sharing information of a kind that might damage allies and yield influence to adversaries. In many ways, Lebanon is still a post-conflict society, and relationships between the ‘mutually coexistent’ Lebanese sects and their political representation is still based on the 1989 Taif Agreement that ended the Lebanese Civil War. The basic principles of IBM therefore, enter into a dramatically different context than the European: as an interviewee in the Lebanese Customs complained, there is little use in implementing the results from risk analysis programs, when the Army opens every container it wishes as soon as it is outside the perimeter of the Port or Border Crossing Point. The current situation is one where competition between the agencies defines the daily work, and where a deep distrust between them makes the prospects of EU styled Integrated Border Management unlikely. As an official in EU’s Directorate General HOME working on IBM stated: “In Lebanon we call it IBM because we like to call it so. In practice we are just telling them the obvious”. There seems to be an element of truth to this blunt statement, inasmuch as it is questionable what remains of the sophisticated IBM concept after rounds of negotiation with and between the ‘beneficiaries’. What we need to know then, is how the resources spent and discourses deployed impact on the political order in the specific context. In Lebanon, we need to engage with the characteristic hybrid political order, and explore how empowerment of specific agencies – via resources and discourses - impact on delicate domestic structures.

The following will first outline how security assistance enters into; gets localized; and eventually produce a political effect in Lebanon, before illustrating how the EU IBM project in Lebanon provides an example of the way global discourses of ‘border management’ reverberate and gets instrumentalised in contexts of hybrid sovereignty. The Lebanese case corresponds to the conception of Integrated Border Management in the context of SSR, where democratic control and oversight are supposed to feature as the main issues, although it is crucial to note how these features are absent in the case of EU IBM in Lebanon – in line with the ‘statebuilding lite’ hypothesis.

20 Interview Colonel in Lebanese Customs, Beirut Sea Port, 8 June 2015
21 Interview senior official in DG Home, Brussels 17 March 2015
22 As opposed to IBM in other contexts, such as within the Schengen area, or part of FRONTEX’ mandate, as per Otwin Marenin, “Challenges for Integrated Border Management in the European Union,” DCAF Occasional Papers (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2009).
Security assistance in Lebanon must be seen as part of the geopolitical struggle for wider Middle East control and directions. After the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, and the ensuing conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, UNSC Resolution 1701 authorized international assistance to support the “territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence” of Lebanon, and reinforced the UNIFIL mission with robust peacekeepers. Subsequent security assistance programs have flourished, and seen intensification and redirection after 2011. Total international security assistance from 2006-2013 to the LAF alone amounts to 1.16 billion, with a variety of actors involved: the US, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Poland, Russia, China and others.

Security assistance must however be seen as driven primarily by strategic interests in the region, and less by a comprehensive vision for the consolidation of the Lebanese security sector. Iranian and Syrian support for Hezbollah remains a major concern for US and Saudi interests in the region, and the Sunni-Shi’a competition over domestic political influence renders security assistance an important vehicle in the wider Middle East game.

Iranian support to Hezbollah over three decades has created a robust, cohesive and resilient politico-military force, widely considered the strongest force in the country. The Lebanese Armed Forces, on the other hand, has historically been a loosely structured, poorly equipped, and politically divided military, and in some parts of the country, notably in Hezbollah controlled areas as well as in borderlands along the Syrian border, considered nothing more than an expeditionary force in its own country. The weakness of the LAF reflects that of other national institutions, which are locked in a delicate politico-sectarian system as set out in the Taif peace agreement that settled the long-lasting Lebanese civil war. While the LAF’s self-styled narrative of the only truly national institution has some merit, inasmuch as it is a relatively close-knit cross-sectarian (yet not non-sectarian) institution, it is ridden by many of the same tensions as other Lebanese institutions: inter-sect competition over influence, dependency on complicated political horse-trading processes, and restrictions stemming from the geopolitical Iranian-Saudi/US competition. Security assistance to the LAF, and any other Lebanese security agency is therefore a strategic policy to counter Hezbollah and ultimately Iranian influence, while seeking to influence force structures that do not directly challenge the Shi’a group’s

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24 Resolution 1701.
26 See for example Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah*, Princeton University Press (2009), where the militia cum political party and social service provider is presented as the single most powerful player in Lebanon. Author interviews with political analysts in Beirut during four visits over 2015 and 2016 supports this view, while noting that its military engagement in Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad has challenged some of its legitimacy among non-core sympathisers.
27 Nerguizian, Lebanon at the Crossroads, p.36
domestic interests. In addition to this approach of incrementally developing aspects of LAF capacity so to gradually envision an effective and truly national military force, at least three other concerns dictate foreign security assistance, determined principally by US policies for the Middle East: first, maintaining Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge (QME), which implies restrictions on the kind of weaponry delivered; second, enhancing counter-terrorism capacities of the Lebanese security institutions, aimed at containing spill-over from the Syrian conflict specifically, and spearheading regional efforts to combat Jihadism generally; and finally, enhancing centralized territorial control in so-called ‘weak states’.

**Global Priorities and Discourses of Border Management**

In this context of regional Iranian-Saudi/US competition over influence, border management in Lebanon offers a number of key priorities through which we can understand global-domestic interlinkages. In fact, it has been argued that the post-2011 prioritization of border management and control has enabled the LAF to strengthen its position nationally, and that a more cohesive and robust military is emerging. The strategic landscape along Lebanon’s borders is unusually complex, with undemarcated borders to the South and the East, UN Peacekeepers stationed along the border with its hostile neighbor Israel, Hezbollah controlling significant portions of territory, and a history of fluid borderlands along the Northern and Eastern border. Internationally recognized borders were drawn up by colonial powers in 1920, while the Blue Line along the border with Israel was drawn up in 2000 by the UN, and has become the *de facto* southern border. The Blue Line leaves a number of issues unsettled, in particular the question of the Shebaa Farms, an area that falls within Lebanon’s international borders but outside the Blue Line, and which is currently located in Israeli occupied Syria. While UNIFIL is authorised to control the Blue Line, and official Lebanese security institutions are formally excluded from exercising authority over this border until it is demarcated, Hezbollah still remains territorially present in the area, engaged in on-off low-intensity confrontations with the IDF. Along the Eastern and Northern border with Syria, central authorities have never fully exercised control over territorial borders, which for decades were seen as spaces of interaction and exchange rather than a boundary. It is in these fluid borderlands that the current efforts to bolster Lebanese security forces are currently concentrated, driven by at least three external strategic concerns, and accompanying global discourses: territorial control, counter-terrorism, and migration pressures.

The first, territorial control, echoing global discourses on the problem of ‘weak states’,

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28 Waleed Hazbun, “Assembling Security in a ‘weak State:’ the Contentious Politics of Plural Governance in Lebanon since 2005,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 6 (June 2, 2016)


30 See Nicholas Blanford, “Case Study: The Lebanon-Syria Border” (Rethinking International Relations after the Arab Revolutions, Universite Saint Joseph, Beirut, 2016).
proscribe consolidation of central authority on the fringes of the sovereign state, and have worked up an ‘international consensus’ of the need to strengthen the sovereignty of Lebanon. Karim Makdisi discusses the way in which the Global War on Terror has been localized via set of UN Security Council Resolutions on Lebanon, and argues that narratives of the country as a ‘weak state’ which can only be salvaged by elimination of Hezbollah and the consolidation of, in Kofi Annan’s words, a “sovereign, independent and democratic” state, opened up a “violently contested site of representation”, which led to internal strife in Lebanon up until the Doha accords in 2008.31 This discussion on hegemonic discourses of sovereignty is particularly instructive for exploring how international border management strategies are at the core of Lebanon’s security priorities. Controlling the borders of Lebanon implies a) contesting Hezbollah’s presence and influence, which is in line with countering Iranian-Syrian influence in Lebanon; b) extending the central state to its frontier regions, thereby consolidating the “sovereign, independent and democratic” state, turning fluid borderlands into areas where Lebanese institutions exercise authority and legitimacy; and c) establishing defensive capabilities to defend national sovereignty against external threats. Newly established Land Border Regiments (LBR), tasked with patrolling and monitoring the Eastern and Northern border with Syria, is the pride of LAF’s new border strategy.32 The UK has actively supported the deployment of LBR 1 and 2, and aided the construction of 12 Protected Border Observation Posts along 140km of the border. These are fitted with remote-control long-range cameras with night vision that allow clear-resolution images up to 20 km away, 33 allowing situational awareness to monitor these borderlands in unprecedented ways. The commander of the LAF has authorized the establishment of LBR 3 to cover a further 70km of the border south from Arsal to Tfail, with the UK supporting it through a GBP 5 million donation.34 Part of the donated equipment is second hand and recycled from the UK’s strategy of constructing mobile border towers in Northern Ireland.35 A fourth Land Border Regiment is also in the making, and will cover the remaining area between Arsal and Masnaa,36 completing the military presence and territorial control along the northern and eastern borders. Constructing up to four new Land Border Regiments, a major development for a ‘weak’ army such as LAF, implies that soldiers are being trained to guard borders, a task which many would be pleased to see in the hands of civilian

32 Interview General in the Lebanese Armed Forces, Yarzeh Military Base, Beirut 7 June 2015
33 Blanford, “Case Study: The Lebanon-Syria Border.”
35 Interview Head of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut 28 April 2016
36 Blanford, “Case Study: The Lebanon-Syria Border.”
agencies. The LAF has successfully capitalized on the security situation as well as taken the momentum under the political crisis in Lebanon to increase its military presence. Although other agencies complain about LAF being too dominant in border management – as an interviewee said; “Lebanon relies too much on LAF – it is not normal to rely on the army for border management issues!” – the consensus presented is that LAF has been able to source popular and political support for its increased role by emphasising the volatile situation on the ground along the Eastern border, and the LAF’s narrative of the only ‘guardian of the nation’ in the composite Lebanese society. In addition, its cooperation with external actors and the discursive emphasis on inter-agency ‘integration’ and agreement with the EU IBM idea that soldiers now trained in IBM will one day move into civilian agencies, have augmented its status as the leading Lebanese security agency, also for internal security. However, we may also detect fears that such training will charge the LAF with expertise that will be difficult to undo, coupled with tension over competencies at the Border Crossing Points, where the LAF is increasingly intervening at will, both vis-à-vis cargo and people. Altogether, the discourse of territorial control has powerful connotations to statebuilding processes, which is paradoxical given that the majority of security assistance takes place outside such official statebuilding frameworks. By referring to UNSC Resolution 1701, and by couching the support to Lebanese security agencies in terms consistent with consolidating the sovereignty of Lebanon, territorial control appears as a pragmatic approach to statebuilding.

Related to the prioritization of territorial control and consolidation of sovereignty, most of the early post-2011 US security assistance was aimed at developing counter-terrorism capabilities for the fledging Lebanese Army and other security agencies. Besides Hezbollah, a number of Palestinian ‘militias’ are present in the Palestinian refugee camps scattered across the country, and the 2007 battles between Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese Army in the Nahr Al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon served as a critical juncture for realizing the potential threat to national stability the system of hybrid governance is, as well as how severely incapacitated the Lebanese state was when confronted with internal security threats. Subsequent efforts to bolster the LAF have centred significantly on counter-terrorism, which in the post-2011 period has been increasingly about controlling Jihadist elements in the traditionally poor Sunni communities in the North East, in addition to gaining better intelligence capabilities throughout the territory. The presence of ISIS cells and claimed attack on mainly Hezbollah targets has also created momentum for strengthening Lebanese counter-terror capabilities. In 2016, as ISIS is pressured on a number of fronts, there are fears that an eventual retreat will point in the direction to the Lebanon, which is seen as weaker both in security

37 Interview external consultant (former GS General) to the EU IBM Lebanon, Beirut 5 June 2015
38 Interview General in the Lebanese Armed Forces, Yarzeh Military Base, Beirut 7 June 2015
39 Nerguizian, Lebanon at the Crossroads
and political terms than alternative regional states. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, therefore, the Lebanese Army has increased its presence throughout the country, as well as its firepower: some say as much as 30-40 per cent. The Army seems to have been better than Hezbollah at countering the type of urban warfare and counterinsurgency required from irregular forces, and the intense training and robust equipment – modest helicopters for mobility, Cessna aircrafts for surveillance and reconnaissance abilities, enhanced firepower with Hellfire missiles, M198 Howitzers and M-60A3 and M48A5 tanks – has given the LAF a growing reputation as a credible force. Counter-terrorism is however part of rebordering processes, whereby the internal-external divide becomes blurred, and where the many security agencies in Lebanon are competing over competence. What it effectively has authorised is an increasingly omnipresent Lebanese Army, whose role in internal security has expanded significantly since 2011. Using counter-terrorism, and its relative success in preventing escalation of violence, to further consolidate its position as “the only truly national institution” in Lebanon, the LAF has effectively tapped into global discourses and international funds to enhance its role in domestic security affairs. In particular, the raging battles along the Northern border during 2012 and 2013 and Hezbollah’s offense in the Qalamoun Mountains on the Eastern border during 2014, have enabled the Army to build up a presence and emerging patterns of authority in the border areas. This emergence of a “real world security and border regime” along the Lebanese-Syrian border is allowing the LAF to be more than an expeditionary force in its own country. Yet it also brings to the fore the contested objective of security assistance: while external, primarily US, support to counter-terrorism ultimately aims at contending Hezbollah’s role in the country, and their control over vital cross-border supply lines, the LAF is largely content with targeting radical Sunni and Palestinian militias, viewing Hezbollah as a complementary military force that will be crucial in the event of a military confrontation with Israel.

Finally, belonging to the architecture of localized manifestations of global threats in Lebanon, the influx of up to 1.5 million Syrian refugees is considered a threat to stability, economy and socio-political structures. The major pressure that the presence of Syrian refugees has had on Lebanese communities, and the lack of sufficient international funds to aid the Lebanese in adequately catering to their needs, has led to an increasingly demeaning discourse of Syrian refugees as posing a direct threat to national security. In mid-2014, official UNHCR data reported that the number of Syrian

40 Interview retired LAF General, Beirut 14 December 2016
41 Basem Shabb, “The Syrian Conflict and the Ascendancy of the Lebanese Armed Forces”, Middle East Institute, November 25, 2014
42 Shabb, “The Syrian Conflict and the Ascendancy of the Lebanese Armed Forces.”
43 Blanford, “Case Study: The Lebanon-Syria Border”
44 Nerguizian, Lebanon at the Crossroads, p.35
45 Nerguizian, Lebanon at the Crossroads
refugees in Lebanon had reached 1 million. Around the same time, elections in Syria took place, with Syrians in Lebanon allowed to vote. The combination of politicized Syrians in Lebanon, and reaching the 1 million threshold led to a turning point in perceptions of Syrian refugees, and adoption of more restrictive policies. In 2014, the LAF engaged in battles around Arsal in the Bekaa valley, in order to retake the area from Salafists that sought to expand their territory in Syria. In these operations, dozens of LAF soldiers were captured, a situation that lead to claims that Syrian settlements served as breeding grounds for Salafism, and to a further exacerbation of the security-migration link among the Lebanese public. Data, albeit from before these events, shows however that there is a discrepancy between people’s perceptions of insecurity related to Syrian refugees, and their own experiences with crime or other threats posed by refugees. Consequently, perceptions of insecurity in combination with major donor assistance has largely permitted the Army to tackle much of the issues related to refugees, which in turn has not only securitized migration but militarized the handling of migrants, including the use of notorious military courts to clamp down on Syrian refugees for crimes allegedly linked to national security. Besides the fact that the Army is not trained to handle vulnerable persons and perform internal security tasks, such a militarization of migration management has the effect of deepening the global migration-security nexus. European states, the European Union as well as International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other INGOs involved in ‘soft’ security, donor assistance for migration management is descending on the Lebanese Army, police, intelligence agency, and customs. Each donor wants a piece of the pie, regardless of whether that creates competition or collaboration. Lebanon’s migration management has emerged as a key site in security and development assistance, and the boundaries between these fields are increasingly blurred.

In what can best be described as a bonanza – inasmuch as it takes place without overarching coordination and driven primarily by strategic interest rather than a well-defined national security strategy – donors carve into their ‘niche’, competing but also cooperating in the densely woven politico-security landscape in Lebanon. Donor cooperation in the crowded security assistance realm is in theory to take place within the framework of the Support Group for Lebanon, established by UN Secretary General with then Lebanese President Michel Sleiman in 2013 to mobilize support for Lebanon’s stability, sovereignty and state institutions. This mechanism is intended to ensure that security assistance does not overlap, and that recipients are embedded in a national security strategy, yet it is a common perception that it is simply allowing donors to do what they wish under the heading of coordination. In the meantime, the security sector expands and deepens its presence, while political

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crises continue to hinder effective governance and comprehensive reform. International Crisis Group reports from the besieged Lebanese border town Arsal in the Bakaa in 2016: “Beyond the Arsal case, which is troubling in its own right, lies the bigger story of the state’s gradual abdication of its duties. As its performance on governance and representative politics grows more dismal by the day, it increasingly falls back on security measures devoid of any serious political, humanitarian or developmental component.” Militarization has the potential to lead to a legitimization of dysfunctional public policy, and leave governance in the hand of non-state actors straddling the illegal/legitimate distinction.

Support to border management is a broad and multifaceted activity. The US (which is the primary supporter of equipment and training to LAF, as well as working with the International Security Forces), France (support to General Security’s activities at Beirut International Airport), and the UK (training platform with the US, and funding of situational awareness equipment to the LAF) are the main donors, but many other are involved in smaller projects. One of these is an EU project on Integrated Border Management. The ICMPD – a ‘favoured partner’ of the EU on border management issues – was selected for a 36 month project on introducing EU IBM in Lebanon, and the project came in on the tail end of a German-led Northern Border Pilot Project that had run during 2007-2008. Targeting LAF, General Security, Customs and the Internal Security Forces (the police), its story illustrates how a small reform-oriented project enters into, is localized, and eventually reverts back into basic train and equip modalities when confronted with a situation of hybrid sovereignty and geopolitical tension. Moreover, it demonstrates how successful domestic agencies tap into global discourses of sovereignty, terrorism and migration in order to attract funding and assistance from external donors.

EU normativities meet ‘statebuilding lite’

Its protagonists commonly present EU IBM as a package of technical standards that enhance the flow of legal goods and people, while introducing techniques and equipment that enforce stringent border control of the illegal. However, as indicated above, it also touches on the political, and especially so in contexts of ‘hybrid sovereignty’, in which the cohesion and legitimacy of the state apparatus is very


51 The EU IBM feasibility study was conducted in 2012 – after the outbreak of unrest in Syria, but before the major escalation and subsequent refugee crisis began to seriously put pressure on the Lebanese-Syrian border. Its budget from 2012-2018 is €14 million (“Programme - ICMPD Lebanon,” EU IBM Lebanon, accessed December 1, 2016, http://www.eu-ibmlebanon.com/en/programme.)
much contested. Border management, thus, is not merely about effectiveness, but concerns core issues of governance, authority and discourses of power. In the following I illustrate how technical dimensions of EU IBM are contested in Lebanon, and demonstrate how the global border management discourse of ‘integration’ has entered into and localized in the densely woven political fabric of Lebanon.

The main aim of the EU IBM project is to facilitate communication between the agencies involved in border control. The four security agencies that are designated as ‘beneficiaries’ under the EU IBM project are the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF); General Security (GS); Customs; and the Police, i.e. the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Of these four, LAF and GS have been most successful at using the EU IBM discourse to enhance their domestic standing. The Lebanese Armed Forces, operating under the Ministry of Defence, officially manage the border between the BCPs, and as we have seen above is the main agency for both external and internal threats in Lebanon. General Directorate of State Security (General Security – GS), reporting to the Ministry of Interior, is the intelligence agency responsible for the control of people on Lebanese territory, although their website indicates ambiguity: “Fight against anything that can jeopardize security: by closely investigating all sabotage acts and chasing after anarchy militants, and rumour spreaders, that attempt to endanger national security.”

Their ranks are akin to military ranks, and their recruits train in the same Academy as LAF soldiers. GS are in control of people movement across the five official land crossing points with Syria (Arida, Aboudieh, Boukayaa, Kaa, Masnaa), as well as on the only International Airport in Beirut as well as the Seaports. GS has a good reputation among the ‘internationals’ for being professional and committed, and has a neatly structured internal organisation, which makes it “easier to cooperate with than some of the other agencies”. Contrary to the multi-sect LAF, the head of GS is according to the Lebanese constitution a Shia Muslim, and the agency is as such seen as affiliated with Hezbollah - although the actual practical links between the two are not straightforward. The current head of GS, Abbas Ibrahim, is seen as a figure that seeks to depoliticize GS, making it into an agency with influence beyond a strictly sect-based role, which further enhances donors’ willingness to support it. The way donors are currently working with GS to strengthen its capacities – through training and equipment, particularly

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52 Lebanese Civil Defence was in 2015 included as a formal beneficiary, but has little relevance in terms of political influence and so is excluded from the present analysis.
54 Interview external consultant to the ICMPD EU IBM Lebanon project, Beirut 5 June 2015
55 The head of the GS was in June 2014 the target of a suicide attack by (presumably) Sunni armed groups at a checkpoint in the Bekaa valley along the Beirut-Damascus highway. Sunni Muslim armed groups are fighting to topple the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and have been targeting his key Lebanese ally, the Shia group Hezbollah. This goes to tell that the GS and Hezbollah are considered as overlapping by Shia adversaries. See http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/two-killed-suicide-blast-lebanon-201462084724664691.html
56 Interview analyst at Carnegie Middle East Centre, Beirut 11 November 2015
at BCPs and at the Airport, but also via sophisticated intelligence technology – may yield more influence to the primarily Shia agency in the medium term. In addition, Lebanese Customs, responsible for controlling and taxing goods crossing through land, sea and air crossing points, and the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the police agency responsible for counter-crime notably trafficking in drugs and people, are EU IBM ‘beneficiaries’. The Customs institution operates under the authority of the Ministry of Finance, whereas the ISF is under the Ministry of Interior. The EU IBM project was initially working closely with Customs, as they are seen as vital to the neoliberal notion of filtering desired goods, while prioritizing the fight against organised crime, but there is not much political support for Customs in Lebanon, and an internal conflict between the military and the civilian branches of the Customs department has hampered much of the agency’s ability to participate in EU IBM activities. While the internal fighting in the Customs services between the ‘civilians’ and the ‘brigades’ continues to hamper that agency’s fruition, the Customs brigades are closely working with their officer colleagues in LAF, GS and ISF, with whom they share education from the Military Academy as well as operational culture. ISF on the other hand has not so far participated much in EU IBM activities, partly due to it being trained and mentored by other international stakeholders. It is seen as a “Hariri creation”, meaning that its legacy of being supported by the Sunni political party ‘Future Movement’ of late Rafik Hariri (currently headed by his son, PM Saad Hariri) has rendered it too politically marginal to gain widespread support in society. ISF is in fact the institution that enjoys the least trust among Lebanese, with under half of the country’s citizens trusting the police, although it varies from over 90% in Rashaya to just 10% in Tyre according to perception surveys.

Sovereignty by stealth: IBM in contexts of hybrid security

Sovereignty processes implies a broader conceptualisation of governance than strictu sensu state governance. In the case of Lebanon, hybrid sovereignty has been used to describe the complex interaction of state and non-state political authority, and the ensuing hybrid security situation that most people live on a daily basis, including formal state security agencies, municipalities, tribal or unofficial community councils, private security companies, militias, and religious authorities. However, for the purpose of capturing how security assistance affects the composite system of security governance in Lebanon, the following demonstrates how EU normativites encounter hybridity even at the level of formal state institutions.

57 Interview Colonel in Lebanese Customs, Beirut Sea Port, 8 June 2015
58 Interview Colonel in Lebanese Customs, Beirut, 27 April 2016. The conflict between the civilian and military branches of Customs is essentially one over organisational culture and access to leadership positions. The conflict between the civilian leadership and the military brigades deteriorated throughout 2015 and 2016, to the point where the civilian authority no longer approved ICMPD training for the brigades
The creation of a Border Control Committee (BCC), in which representatives of the four above mentioned agencies as well as ICMPD, IOM and other international stakeholders meet weekly to discuss the border situation and divide labour in a coordinated manner is considered a major step towards opening up lines of communication between the four security agencies. It would have been unthinkable only a few years back, explains an external consultant to the project (a former general in Lebanon’s General Security), that representatives from the four agencies would come together and reveal information regarding their activities, let alone coordinate. The BCC has developed into an established framework of cooperation, and has created a modicum of communication between the agencies. This is attributed partly to the Head of the BCC, LAF General Samir Azi, who is seen as a strong figure supportive of the IBM idea, and which enjoys respect by all the involved agencies. The fact that it is headed by the Army means that the BCC enjoys importance and influence, but also what was shown above, that the LAF is keen to steer external initiatives in its favour. There is however a conspicuous missing link between the BCC and the political level, making the BCC appearing as a technical coordination mechanism, rather than integrating also the political level – which is very much in line with the ‘statebuilding lite’ perspective. The focal points for the four agencies are appointed by their respective Ministries and by now have an established working relationship. Yet so far, the coordination does not trickle down through the system: each agency has many departments, and the bureaucratic structures and ‘military mentality’ means that everything and everyone needs authorization - inevitably a very time consuming and complicated process.

Meanwhile, protectionism continues to define inter-institutional relations. In particular, the issue of a shared database, in which the four agencies would share intelligence on threats and operations, has been expressively refused, indicating the level of competition and mutual scepticism that exists. The issue of intelligence is particularly delicate in Lebanon. Until the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, Lebanese security agencies were largely inhibited from developing intelligence capabilities. The lack of good intelligence became obvious during the 2007 clashes between LAF and Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr Al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon, in which “they had no clue” what the situation on the ground was. Since then, all Lebanese security agencies have developed intelligence channels, and actively use grassroots informants particularly from troubled villages and towns. Yet they operate independently and in parallel, with each agency recruiting its own informants, and each agency cooperating with different external intelligence agencies. A joint intelligence sharing database

60 Interview external consultant to the ICMPD EU IBM Lebanon project, Beirut 5 June 2015  
61 Interview Head of ICMPD, Beirut 28 April 2016.  
62 Interview external consultant to the ICMPD EU IBM Lebanon project, Beirut 5 June 2015  
63 Interview Head of ICMPD, Beirut 28 April 2016  
64 Interview former UNIFIL spokesperson, Beirut 27 April 2016
is certainly an alien concept in such a hybrid security environment. Even if external intelligence agencies would very much like to tap into these localized networks, it continues to be resisted and traded for special relations rather than absorbed in a national structure. Having said that, information sharing and coordination of activities do take place, every day and between all agencies. However, it works on an informal, verbal, and non-linear logic. As any meeting with senior officers may illustrate, there is a consistent reliance on mobile phone communication, with each officer carrying at all times 2-4 phones, displayed on the table in front of him, continuously ringing. These unscripted lines of communication are the modus operandi of Lebanese security operations and cooperation, and evade any attempts at codification and formal procedure, much to the frustration of the EU and other donors.

Yet, they are to some extent functioning and effective for the purpose of Lebanon, and driven by interpersonal synergy and established patterns of coordination based on experience rather than formal mechanisms. As a Customs Colonel at Beirut Port explained: “I coordinate well with ISF, because I went to the Academy with the Captain in charge of the Beirut counter-drug division”.\footnote{Interview Colonel in Lebanese Customs, Beirut Sea Port, 8 June 2015}

Another example of how EU IBM ‘integration’ has been reinterpreted in Lebanon is the typical EU approach to Strategic doctrine. As a part of Phase 1 of the project, a National IBM Strategy was drafted in partnership between ICMPD and the four agencies, but this (as of early 2017) has not yet been formally approved by the Government, and is, according to EU IBM staff, “dusting away in the drawer of some minister”.\footnote{Interview ICMPD External expert, Masna’a Border Crossing Point, 11 November 2015} This is partly due to political crises that characterise Lebanese politics, and which has prevented cohesive governing for several years. From a presidential vacuum to the garbage crisis, the central government has effectively been unable to govern, and therefore also to take the lead in its security governance. However, the National IBM Strategy has been approved by the four relevant agencies, and sees backing at the institutional level. It is used as a reference for their joint activities, and must be seen as having some success in “integration from below”.\footnote{Interview Head of ICMPD, Beirut 28 April 2016} Here we may detect a form of localization of typical EU IBM approach to border management, in which the result is basic modes of cooperation between the agencies, yet without approval and engagement by the political level. As the Head of the ICMPD could testify to, there was considerable opposition in the beginning even to the use of the word ‘strategy’, as it was seen as requiring political involvement of a sort that often complicates matters significantly in Lebanon.\footnote{Interview Head of ICMPD, Beirut 28 April 2016} The fact that such a National IBM Strategy has been produced and agreed on by the four border agencies is a sort of Lebanese approach to effective governance, and it is observed that it is implemented by the agencies even without the political
sanctioning (and financing) originally foreseen.  

A final example of how IBM has entered Lebanon is the Masnaa BCP, which was recently refurbished according to a European model of design. However, as the agencies moved in, GS and Customs decided where they wanted to be stationed based on ideas of control and relative power relationships. It proved useless to try to refer to the efficient outline of the BCP – the agencies have clear ideas about where they should be stationed. For example, there are three border checks at Masnaa: at the first, GS checks the travel documents of passengers, at the second Customs check the goods, and at the third, GS checks again passengers. This third border check is due to mistrust in their personnel, according to an EU IBM external expert, and should be eliminated for enhanced efficiency at the BCP. Henceforth, even in the physical, we have a conflict between an external model of IBM, where the BCP serve as a facilitator of trade and flow of people, and the manning of the post which in practice follows internal principles of control and balance of power.

In conclusion, we may observe that ‘integration’ has been taken up by different Lebanese security agencies. Yet, it is clear that integration is such a far removed principle from the Lebanese reality, that much of the uptake has been discursive – successfully used to befriend external donors by the relevant security agencies. As an official in the planning department of GS described the situation: it is as “operating in two parallel universes” when working with the EU IBM, whereby, on the one hand, the daily survival of the GS goes on, with all the politics and daily negotiation that it implies, while on the other hand, one is attempting to think in terms of this “very mature concept” of IBM.

Integration as a core EU normative concept for governing borders is therefore met by a process of ‘sovereignty by stealth’, in which invisible fault lines of domestic governing principles are practiced without formal scripts or strategic doctrine. Typical of geopolitical hotspots and for the Lebanese sui generis case, security assistance will enable external actors to influence domestic politics on ill-defined terms, and domestic actors will take advantage of the opportunities provided in ad-hoc and instrumental ways.

**Conclusion: Borders and Sovereignty in an era of Statebuilding Lite**

This paper has described how International security assistance is channelled into a divided, complex and sectarian Lebanon that is deeply affected by the war in Syria. To put it crudely, we are confronted with a situation where the Lebanese security institutions operate in a jam-rocked space between ISIS

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69 Interview Head of ICMPD, Beirut 28 April 2016
70 Interview ICMPD external expert, Masna’a Border Crossing Point, 11 November 2015
71 Interview ICMPD external expert, Masna’a Border Crossing Point, 11 November 2015
72 Interview Brigadier General in General Security, Planning Department, Beirut 6 June 2015
on the one side, and IBM on the other. Observers might say it is a bad moment to be expecting integration, professionalism and compliance with IBM standards. Yet, research shows that the urgency of the situation is exactly what has prompted collaboration – if not integration – between the different institutions governing the border area between Lebanon and Syria. As such, Lebanon has undergone significant change in the way that the periphery relates to the core. Whereas the Eastern border has been historically porous and connecting two peoples that some claim were divided by colonial powers, it has increasingly come to be seen as a militarized buffer between the war in Syria and the relative calm of Lebanon. Masnaa Border Crossing used to be a buzzing node on the highway between Damascus and Beirut, connecting two centres through overlapping borderlands. Now, it is a node on a North-South running boundary that divides a ‘zone of war’ from a relatively stable Lebanon.

In this story, EU IBM and the broader security assistance ‘bonanza’ that is taking place has contributed to shifting the view of the external rim of Lebanon from a frontier to an emerging boundary. Frontiers and boundaries are significant elements of state formation, yet their relationship to the centres of power are different: where borders are inward oriented, defining that which lays within in opposition to that which remains outside, frontiers are outward oriented, connecting, extending and blurring territory and authority. The Lebanese-Syrian border has in this sense gone from constituting a frontier to a boundary over the course of a few years. Lebanon’s hybrid sovereignty architecture is key to unpacking how each security agency – Hezbollah in particular of course, but also the many formal Lebanese security agencies – is capable (or not) of profiting from the willingness of international donors to strengthen the Lebanese bulwark against expansion of the Syrian unrest. The effect is a militarised and securitised state, featuring empowered and competing security institutions that gain foothold throughout the state in the absence of political authority at the central state level. Such ‘statebuilding lite’, circumventing strategic and political channels, and relying on ad hoc and pragmatic coercive state power, is effectively deepening the hybrid security situation so characteristic of the Lebanese state. In an era of ‘statebuilding lite’, therefore, the effect is likely to be an enhanced military, whose expanded competences will prove hard to undo. In Lebanon, the rising importance of the Army might have a positive effect on sectarian politics in the short term, but a militarization of Lebanese politics is proving to have an adverse effect on governance and state-society relations at large.