

Masaryk University
Faculty of Social Studies

**International Security and the
Social Sphere: Studies from the
Middle East and Central Europe**

Habilitation Thesis:

A Collection of Previously Published Works with Commentary

I hereby declare that I have written this habilitation thesis independently using only the referenced literature and sources and that this thesis has not been submitted for the award of any previous or other title. All the co-authored chapters are indicated as such.

In Prague, August 27, 2026

Author's signature

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Abstract

This habilitation thesis is composed of six manuscripts that, in their own ways, examine the social dimension of security and how security actors perceive, construct, and respond to security threats emerging in the societal sphere. Drawing on the disciplines of Critical Security Studies, International Political Sociology, and Peace and Conflict Studies, the thesis investigates the interplay between international security discourses and local practices, specifically focusing on the politics of security and politics of knowledge and expertise that make security threats and interventions meaningful and actionable.

The research compiled in this habilitation thesis is anchored in two empirical contexts. In Lebanon, the chapters trace the diverse forms of international intervention from UN peacekeeping and statebuilding efforts aimed at "strengthening state authority" and localised practices of military outreach to the civilian sphere, to the more recent agenda of Preventing Violent Extremism, which reframes the country's problems around the language of vulnerability and social cohesion. In the Czech Republic, the chapters analyse the emergence of the "hybrid warfare" following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, tracing both the assemblage of actors that gave a particular shape to this new security concern and the competing public narratives—defence, counterinfluence, and education—through which it was understood and debated. In theoretical terms, the thesis investigates how security is socially constructed and practised by heterogeneous actors—bureaucrats, military personnel, NGO workers, and experts—across a variety of social contexts and at multiple levels. Methodologically, it relies on interpretive approaches that combine discourse and narrative analysis with fieldwork, including semi-structured and ethnographic interviews conducted in Lebanon and Czechia, as well as among UN bureaucrats.

The thesis demonstrates a recurring gap between international framings of security threats unfolding in the social sphere and the proposed and realised responses, as well as the more complex, locally embedded politics and social practices that shape security on the ground. In doing so, the various studies compiled in this habilitation expose, in their own right, the blind spots of dominant security agendas and underscore the security knowledge within their specific social and political contexts.

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Introduction

This introductory commentary outlines common threads of research compiled in the subsequent chapters of this habilitation thesis. These chapters, in their own divergent ways, explore **how security actors perceive and respond to international security threats emerging in the societal sphere**.

International security agendas aimed at addressing these security concerns have taken various forms over the past few decades. In the civil wars of the 1990s and during the onset of the War on Terror era, the issue of **state failure** and the inability of states to control their territories, rein in non-state armed actors, and provide basic governance services led to multiple forms of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, counterinsurgency, and statebuilding engagements (Richmond, 2005; Chandler, 2006; Kilcullen, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2011; Holmqvist, 2014; Muggah, 2014; Müller and Moe, 2017; Woodward, 2017). These operations tasked **international missions** with civilian and/or military components with **outreach to the civilian sphere**. In many cases, this has also meant some level of involvement in governance and social affairs in the spirit of fighting for the hearts and minds of the population and merging the agendas of security and development (Duffield, 2007; Jackson, 2015; Owens, 2015). The labels given to these interventions and their specific designs have gradually changed as the focus on building institutions was, throughout the 2010s, joined by an emphasis on supporting resilient societies, communities, and individuals that underpin the state and who have a security role to play themselves. However, these interventions shared a guiding logic, which emphasised the need to engage with the civilian population and administration and focus on the development of both social and economic realms (Müller and Moe, 2017; Joseph, 2018; Lemay-Hébert, 2019). The Middle East has been one of the prominent sites of multiple forms of these interventions (Mac Ginty, 2007; Costantini, 2018; Kosmatopoulos, 2024).

On the other hand, concerns about international terrorism brought **transnational terrorist networks**, alongside their propaganda and recruitment efforts, into the focus of domestic security agencies and international organisations (Bureš, 2006; Bigo and Tsukala, 2008; Neumann, 2016; Abbas, 2021; Martini, 2021). The focus on radicalisation and the need to spot potential violent actors before they engage in violent attacks has led in many European countries to the increasing **involvement of security actors** in previously non-securitised **social and communal affairs**. As such, it spurred a distinct focus on domestic vulnerabilities towards the influence of foreign and domestic recruiters. This agenda, preventing violent extremism, was throughout the 2010s internationalised as many international organisations fused it with their peacebuilding, development and youth efforts (Baker-Beall, Heath-Kelly and Jarvis, 2016; Kundnani and Hayes, 2018; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2018; Heath-Kelly and Shanaah, 2025). Complicating the dichotomy between **international and domestic** threats and the **security role of society** even further, new security issues brought by the transformation

of the media environment and cyberspace, such as **disinformation campaigns and a range of hybrid threats**, have brought society and its beliefs right into the centre of geopolitical confrontation as the security agencies struggled to find an appropriate reactions to such threats (Fridman, 2018; Ördén, 2019, 2024; Eberle and Daniel, 2023; Ljungkvist, 2024; Daniel and O’Sullivan, 2026).

While the agenda of broadening and deepening security as an object of research and practice has been well underway since the 1970s (Buzan and Hansen, 2009), the post-Cold War international environment has witnessed a further convergence of international and domestic security threats and blurring of boundaries delimiting areas of international security concerns (Duffield, 2001; Holmqvist, 2014; Owens, 2015). Among many others, the abovementioned security issues have merged the international and domestic arenas and brought actors entrusted with keeping security in them together in what Didier Bigo described in the early 2000s as the ‘Möbius Ribbon of domestic and international security’ (Bigo, 2001).

The subsequent chapters, in their own distinctive ways, respond to the merger of internal and external security and to the security focus on the social realm. They concentrate on how security actors understand international security threats, which, in different ways, unfold in the social sphere, and how they think about and practice appropriate responses to them. Investigating the **interplay between international security discourses and local practice**, this research examines the **politics of knowledge and expertise** employed by various actors to make sense of security issues. As such, this research goes beyond the original securitisation theory and builds on the inquiry done in the fields of Critical Security Studies and International Political Sociology (Daniel and Rychnovská, 2015; Salter, Mutlu and Frowd, 2023; Auchter *et al.*, 2026; Böhm and Kessler, 2026) to shed new light on the practice of security interventions into society, their international and local politics, and (often unacknowledged) impact on the ground. Additionally, a significant part of this research also engages with the discipline of Middle East Studies, specifically the debates on the shape and form of interventions in the region and the nature of the Lebanese state and society. In this respect, it focuses on the interaction between international security discourses and programs with the hybrid political and sectarian order that defines the governance of security in Lebanon (Fregonese, 2012; Hazbun, 2016; Tholens, 2017; Stel, 2021).

The specific research in this habilitation thesis is primarily based on two broader empirical contexts: Lebanon and the Czech Republic. Whereas Lebanese studies explore diverse forms of international interventions, ranging from peacekeeping operations in southern Lebanon to various projects aimed at preventing violent extremism throughout the country, Czech studies unpack the narrative and practice of countering hybrid warfare. Both strands, however, address the same broader topics: the interactions between security actors and the social realm.

This introduction proceeds as follows. First, I outline the composition of this habilitation thesis and explain the rationale for selecting the published works that form the basis of the following chapters. Second, I shift the focus to the key themes – the interaction between international and local understandings and practices of security, and the social dimension of security more broadly. In the third step, I introduce the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the following chapters, particularly highlighting the social construction of security, practice approaches to security, the politics of knowledge and expertise, and the concepts of assemblage, discourse, and narrative. The following section then introduces the main methodologies used in this habilitation, in particular, discussing the interpretive approaches and the specific discursive, narrative, and fieldwork methodologies used in the respective chapters. The fifth section discusses the content of the chapters, and the last, sixth section, outlines the key contributions of the chapters across the three main disciplinary fields this habilitation addresses.

Composition of the habilitation thesis and the selection criteria

This habilitation comprises six research works published between 2017 and 2025. Five of these were published as single or co-authored original articles, and one of the texts was published as a chapter in an edited volume published by an international university press. The texts included in this habilitation were chosen on the basis of their (1) *representativeness* of my post-doctoral research and its trajectory in terms of both theoretical background and empirical focus, and its distinctiveness from my previous research, (2) *theoretical and methodological coherence*, and (3) *empirical coherence*. The complete list with the full references is provided below:

Complete list of research works included in the habilitation thesis and authors' share

[1] Daniel, J. (2017). Building sovereigns? The UN peacekeeping and strengthening the authority of the state in Lebanon and Mali. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 29(3), 229–247.

Experimental work (%) ¹	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
100	100	100	100

¹ Experimental work is treated in the cases of the included research as empirical research, whether in the form of fieldwork, g or textual analysis.

[2] Daniel, J., & Wittichová, M. (2020). Forging Civil–Military Cooperation: Domestic and International Laboratories of CIMIC Knowledge and Practice. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14(5), 596–614.

Experimental work (%)	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
80	100	95	100

[3] Daniel, J., & Eberle, J. (2018). Hybrid Warriors: Transforming Czech Security through the ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ Assemblage. *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 54(6), 907–932.

Experimental work (%)	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
50	50	50	50

[4] Daniel, J., & Eberle, J. (2021). Speaking of hybrid warfare: Multiple narratives and differing expertise in the ‘hybrid warfare’ debate in Czechia. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 56(4), 432–453.

Experimental work (%)	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
50	50	50	50

[5] Daniel, J. (2023). The ‘vulnerability’ of Lebanon: Reimagining the ‘failing state’ problem through the international PVE agenda. In *Vulnerability*, eds. Heath-Kelly, Ch., & Gruber, B. (pp. 165–182). Manchester University Press.

Experimental work (%)	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
100	100	100	100

[6] Daniel, J. (2025). The Threat of (the Lack of) Social Cohesion: Preventing Violent Extremism in Lebanon. *Middle East Critique*, 34(1), 121–139.

Experimental work (%)	Supervision (%)	Manuscript (%)	Research direction (%)
100	100	100	100

In terms of **representativeness**, the chapters cover two of my main research foci and the corresponding research projects I conducted after completing my doctoral degree.

First, these works document my ongoing research on various modalities of international intervention in the Middle East (and elsewhere), with a more specific focus on Lebanon. In this respect, Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6 demonstrate the evolution of my focus from research on the practices of peacekeeping in the country and international discourses

that underpin it, to a focus on the agenda of preventing violent extremism as a new modality of international intervention and statebuilding. I document this shift in both international attention and my own research focus in Chapter 5 and in other works not included in this habilitation that originated from the research project on the impact of the Islamic State on international security politics (Ditrych, Záhora and Daniel, 2023).

Second, Chapters 3 and 4 document the research project on the international discourse on hybrid warfare and the shifts it brought to the understanding of security in the Czech Republic, as well as the role society plays in that understanding. While other outputs were published in the framework of this project (Eberle and Daniel, 2022, 2023), these two reflect my interest in understanding both the social processes behind the establishment of new security practices (Chapter 3) and the role that a particular form of expertise plays in them (Chapter 4).

Finally, the selected works also highlight the departure from my doctoral research. While some of the studies (e.g., Chapters 1, 2, and, to a certain extent, Chapter 5) represent a continuation of my previous research on peacekeeping, they differ from my doctoral research in their original arguments, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks applied, and the majority of the empirical data used. The research project on the politics of countering hybrid warfare in the Czech Republic, as well as research on the practices of preventing violent extremism, both represent a completely novel direction in my research.

In terms of ***theoretical and methodological coherence***, all the research works compiled in this habilitation are informed by the theoretical traditions of Critical Security Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and International Political Sociology. This primarily means an interpretative focus on security as socially constructed at both the discursive and practical levels through the interactions of multiple actors. In this respect, my research benefits from the mutual conversation between the disciplines of Peace and Conflict Studies, with its focus on the interactions between global discourses and local practice (Mac Ginty, 2011; Bliesemann de Guevara, 2012; Autesserre, 2014; Richmond, 2014; Koddenbrock, 2016), and key works in Critical Security Studies and International Political Sociology that engage in explorations of the practices of security and global governance professionals and the effects these practices have (Bigo and Tsukala, 2008; Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Sending, 2015; Kortendiek, 2024). While Chapters 1 and 5 primarily focus on how international security discourses and understandings of security threats inform particular forms of corrective international interventions, Chapters 3 and 6 approach the construction of security through the notion of assemblage, thereby privileging an actor-centric focus on shaping security interventions (Acuto and Curtis, 2014b; Bachmann, Bell and Holmqvist, 2015). Chapters 2 and 4 then combine these two perspectives, showing how the construction of security, both on a discursive (Chapter 4) and a more practical (Chapter 2) level, relies on specific forms of expertise that frame security threats and responses to them in particular ways

(Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). All of these works, in their own ways, rely on the combination of discourse and narrative analysis with mapping and fieldwork methodologies, particularly interviews.

In terms of **empirical coherence**, these works are connected by the distinct interest in the social dimension of security interventions. I introduce this theme in more detail below; however, it points to an interest in how different security agendas understand, construct, and attempt to address threats in the social realm. At the same time, it also means a focus on the wider social context in which different security agendas are constructed, and which helps to give them a particular shape and form. More specifically, the studies compiled in this habilitation cover security agendas of peacekeeping and counterinsurgency (Chapters 1, 2, 5), countering hybrid warfare (Chapters 3, 4), and preventing violent extremism (Chapters 5, 6) with focus on empirical contexts of Lebanon (Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6) and the Czech Republic (Chapters 2, 3, 4).

Key themes of the habilitation

The research presented in the following chapters centres on two key themes, explored in different contexts and with varying foci. First, it examines the **social nature of security interventions and policies**. This is achieved both by focusing on how security is socially constructed by a range of different actors (in particular in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6) and by paying attention to how security discourses and practices carry a specific idea of a secure state and society (in particular in Chapters 1, 4, 5 and 6). Second, this habilitation highlights the construction of security through **the interaction of international security discourses with local practices and contexts** (in particular in Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6).

In engaging with these topics, my research aims to identify the blind spots in dominant security policies and ideas about security and show which policies and reactions to security threats might have been missed and overlooked by the dominant framing (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998; Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006). In doing so, it emphasises the importance of different types of knowledge and expertise that address complex security issues and which require attention to specific environments and local contexts. This enables a critical reflection on current security discourses and practices and their impacts with the overarching aim to provide a space for democratic discussion on security. By connecting broader theoretical insights on security with particular contexts, this research also bridges the disciplines of Critical Security Studies and International Political Sociology with the context-rich approach of area studies, specifically represented by Middle Eastern Studies.

The focus on the **social dimension of security** emphasises that security interventions are grounded in a socially constructed understanding of security threats and the necessary responses. Moreover, they are carried out through practices informed by a

particular understanding of security and insecurity (Balzacq, 2011; Holland, 2012; Bigo, 2014; Stritzel, 2014). This means that the processes of identifying and interpreting security threats (the processes of *securitisation*) are context-specific and shaped by the understandings held by particular actors. Inquiring into how security interventions are actually practised and which knowledge and expertise play a role in them involves exploring the situated understanding of threats and desired responses among the actors. Moreover, it requires studying the broader social positions of the involved actors and their mutual relations (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Autesserre, 2014; Koddenbrock, 2016; Goetze, 2017; Leander and Wæver, 2019).

As Chapter 2 highlights, it matters whether soldiers deployed in a peacekeeping mission understand their role in terms of protecting civilians, or whether they approach it through the prism of counterinsurgency and view the civilian population as one of the sites of struggle against an adversary. Alternatively, as shown in Chapter 4, it matters if we understand the threat of disinformation as an ideological struggle or a problem of media literacy. Furthermore, such a focus also necessitates studying the social processes surrounding the implementation of security policies and practices through which the ideas about security are realised (see below). This concerns not only multiple types of actors who shape the securitisation agenda at the national level, as discussed in Chapter 3, but also those who operate between international and local political spheres, on whom Chapter 6 is focused.

At the same time, security discourses and practices play a role in the production of social order by conveying a vision of a safe, secure, and orderly state and society (Neocleous, 2000; Holmqvist, 2014; Owens, 2015; Martin, 2019; Heath-Kelly and Shanaah, 2025). Put simply, securing a society also means creating and shaping it in certain ways (Foucault, 2007; see also Rose, 1996). This might mean constructing state institutions that suppress non-state armed actors operating on Lebanese territory, so that Lebanon conforms to Westphalian standards of statehood and international security, as explored in Chapters 1 and 5. However, it also means fostering stronger social bonds and a sense of belonging that should make particular communities more resilient to radicalisation, unpacked on the Lebanese case in Chapter 6. However, it also means cultivating educated and responsible citizens as an antidote to foreign information manipulation, as shown in Chapter 4. In short, security discourses and practices not only identify threats, but they also provide a normative assessment of what needs to be done and what the secure future state and society should look like.

Studied in various contexts, this focus helps make visible the political and social dimensions of security interventions, and in doing so, provides a space for reflection on the often-overlooked assumptions and impacts of these interventions. In this respect, research on the Lebanese case highlights the mismatch between Western conceptions of state and society and the social and political order, and the practice of rule on the

ground (Chapters 1, 5, 6). Highlighting the theme of the close interconnection between thinking about society and thinking about security, the strand of research focusing on hybrid warfare sought to make visible how different conceptions of society and its role inform different narratives about what kind of threat disinformation precisely is and how best to counter it (Chapter 4).

Finally, the research also addresses the tensions between international and local understandings of security and how they are shaped through interactions between international security discourses and local practices. While international security discourses, created and backed by dominant international actors and organisations, often set the agenda for identifying the dominant security threats and provide guidance on how they should be understood (Zanotti, 2011; Martini, 2021; Lemay-Hébert and Visoka, 2022), these are often reinterpreted or adapted when implemented in particular contexts. This is most clearly demonstrated in the Lebanese case in Chapter 5, which shows how different international security discourses have interpreted the dominant problem Lebanon faces.

In general, this focus highlights a frequent discrepancy between the international understanding of security threats and the required responses, and the more complex on-the-ground politics that shape the resulting security practices meant to respond to these threats (Campbell, Chandler and Sabaratnam, 2011; Hughes, Scarpello and Hameiri, 2017; Kosmatopoulos, 2024). This demonstrates the limitations of external security initiatives and instead suggests that these interventions should be viewed as part of local politics, as illustrated in Chapters 1, 5, and 6. Nevertheless, this topic is also reflected in the strand of research on hybrid warfare, which shows how an international concept of hybrid warfare has been localised and variously interpreted in the Czech context to make sense of the post-2014 security environment (Chapters 3 and 4). In both cases, the broader goal is to demonstrate the need for understanding security in its social and political contexts, rather than adopting decontextualised security discourses and general concepts.

Theoretical and conceptual background

The following chapters employ a range of concepts rooted in Critical Security Studies, International Political Sociology, and, more broadly, constructivist and post-structuralist approaches to International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies. These disciplines have, in their own ways, drawn the attention of scholars to how the meaning of political issues is socially constructed and how such meaning matters for action (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998; Campbell, 1998; Weldes *et al.*, 1999; Bigo, 2002; Hansen, 2006; Mälksoo, 2010; Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016; Edkins, 2019). The focus on discourse has, in the past decade, been complemented by attention to the practices through which international politics and security are performed (Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Bueger and

Gadinger, 2018; McCourt, 2022). The research compiled in this habilitation thesis is based on these debates and their social theory-informed approach, while focusing on both discursive and practical aspects of security interventions. Moreover, Middle East Studies provide a conceptual apparatus for understanding the specific features of the Lebanese political order and the politics of international involvement in the region.

A significant part of this habilitation thesis (in particular Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6) builds on the broader debate on the **social construction of security** as it has developed in the fields of Critical Security Studies and International Political Sociology. The original formulation of the theory of securitisation in the 1990s emphasised the discursive dimensions of the securitisation process and the role of the state authorities in declaring the state of exception (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998). However, the more recent approaches shifted the attention to the different dimensions of construction of security in practice as well as on the structural conditions of (in)security ingrained in particular political orders (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2011; Howell, 2014; Salter, 2019; Martini and Kaleem, 2024).

This habilitation draws mainly on the former strand, focusing on the diverse actors involved in constructing **security in practice** and the **background knowledge and expertise** they draw on (Bigo, 2014; Berling and Bueger, 2015; Kustermans, 2016; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). This strand of research has focused on the practices of actors ranging from security bureaucrats and think tankers to data analysts, military officers, private security contractors, and NGO workers tasked with security roles, foregrounding the interactions among different methods of constructing and performing security and their impact on the ground (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Bigo, 2014; Koddenbrock, 2016). In this perspective, security is not constructed solely by *securitisation discourses*, but takes shape through *multiple social processes* occurring in diverse sites, where security officers and other actors interact with subjects of security, or where security threats are identified, and security policies are devised (Huysmans, 2011; Fawaz, Harb and Gharbieh, 2012; Schouten, 2014; Bueger, 2015; Bueger and Edmunds, 2021; Gunning and Smaira, 2022). Unpacking this more complex process allows for understanding how security is actually carried out and what its impacts on its subjects are. Moreover, it enables understanding which actors and types of security knowledge are privileged and drawn upon, and which are marginalised or sidelined.

Attention to the practices of international politics has been present beyond the debate on security. The disciplines of International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies have adopted diverse strands of **practice theory** based on the work of continental social theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour, as well as a particular interpretation of Michel Foucault (Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018; McCourt, 2022). Focusing on *background knowledge* and *situated practices* of diplomats, international organisations' staff, or peacekeepers, practice-based research has shown how some of

the major topics of International Relations, such as stability, change, order, power, or global governance, play out and are performed in particular contexts. This might concern diplomatic skills and a feel for the game that make some diplomatic missions punch above their weight, or normative structures that, in practice, inform particular forms of global governance (Neumann, 2002; Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Niemann, 2018). Alternatively, it might highlight background knowledge of peacekeepers, peacebuilders, and diplomats and practices of knowledge generation, which make certain readings of events and subsequent actions more likely than others (Autesserre, 2014; Cornut, 2015; Goetze, 2017; Campbell, 2018), or simply informal practices that keep the global governance going in the face of unpredictable local politics (Pouligny, 2006; Koddenbrock, 2016; Cornut, 2018; Pouliot and Thérien, 2023; Kortendiek, 2024).

The range of applications of practice theory in International Relations defies a simple summary, but it highlights the merit of opening international institutions and focusing on actors and their situated understanding of their roles and tasks. It allows unpacking how international politics are performed in practice, on the basis of which knowledge and with what consequences. Elements of practice theory, especially its focus on situated agency and actors' background knowledge, inform several chapters of this habilitation thesis. In particular, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6 foreground local agency in either adapting global governance to particular places or in shaping security agendas. Chapters 2, 4, and 6 then attend to the role of background knowledge in how different security agendas are practised.

More specifically, to account for the multiplicity of actors who are involved in the construction of security, several chapters of this habilitation employ the concept of **assemblage**. Originally developed in French social theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Latour, 2007) and adopted in the study of International Relations and security over the past two decades, assemblage has been generally defined as a diverse set of actors, discourses, and practices coalescing at a particular moment around a particular issue (de Goede and Simon, 2013; Müller, 2015; Salter, 2019). The assemblage perspective assumes a 'flat ontology' in which all involved parts, whether human or non-human, possess the agency to shape the impact of the assemblage (Acuto and Curtis, 2014a). Security and insecurity are thus not the result of a single actor's actions, but rather the outcome of a combination of actors, material objects, technologies, discourses, and narratives that together co-produce particular outcomes (for other uses of the concept in my work see Ditrych, Záhora and Daniel, 2023; Vorlíček and Daniel, forthcoming).

Specifically, in the research on international interventions, the concept has been employed to highlight the range of actors and tools they use to respond to the particular problem an intervention aims to address, a process labelled in the Foucauldian tradition of inquiry as *problematization* (Bacchi, 2015; Bachmann, Bell and Holmqvist, 2015; Bueger and Edmunds, 2021; Hochmüller, 2023). In the studies on Middle Eastern security

and politics, assemblage has been employed to highlight the connections between non-state actors, state, and foreign actors in the so-called hybrid security orders (Hazbun, 2016; Tholens, 2017), or a wider grouping of different actors and changing visions of political order that they engender (Farquhar, 2025). As such, the assemblage perspective allows for the transcending of rigid boundaries between different levels of analysis, and for pointing out unexpected connections and the roles that different parts of the assemblage play (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; de Goede and Simon, 2013; Acuto and Curtis, 2014a; Ditych, Záhora and Daniel, 2023; Lopez-Lucia and Martín de Almagro, 2024). In this habilitation, the concept of assemblage is employed in particular in Chapters 3 and 6, and to a certain extent in Chapter 4. In the former two, assemblage is used to capture the uncoordinated yet directed actions of diverse actors, which together set a particular security agenda. In the latter, the notion of assemblage helps to capture the broader discourse of hybrid warfare composed of a multiplicity of distinct security narratives.

To account for the ideational aspects of security and intervention and their interplay with practice, several chapters employ concepts of discourse or narrative. Discourses and narratives are treated as integral parts of a wider assemblage, giving it meaning and rationale (Li, 2007; Bueger and Edmunds, 2021). **Discourse** is understood in this habilitation, particularly in Chapters 2, 3, and 6, following a Foucauldian tradition and its interpretation in the governmentality research and research on knowledge and expertise, as a broader framework for meaning-making that delineates the kinds of knowledge and language used in relation to a particular issue (Alejandro and Zhao, 2024). Discourse assigns particular subject positions and, as such, produces relations of hierarchy and power (Foucault, 1980; Hansen, 2006). In this respect, the habilitation builds on a longer tradition of post-structuralist research on security, which sheds a new light on the productive role of security knowledge and its codification in institutional discourses when it comes to, e.g., terrorism, or particular readings of conflict (Doty, 1996; Weldes *et al.*, 1999; Hansen, 2006; Stampnitzky, 2014; Martini, 2021).

A **narrative**, a concept used extensively in Chapter 4, is a story with a plot, a beginning, an end, and a clear meaning the narrator wants to convey. As narratives are, in practice, constructed on the basis of background knowledge and broader discursive frameworks available to actors, the concept is closely connected to the rest of the conceptual apparatus. A narrative, thus, like the concept of assemblage, serves as a bridge that ties different concepts together (Bueger and Gadinger, 2018; Subotic, 2019). The notion of narrative has been used frequently in constructivist and critical research on security to highlight the communicative and strategic aspects of security rhetoric (Holland, 2012; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle, 2014; Krebs, 2015; Holland and Mathieu, 2023) as well as connections between certain security stories and a reconstruction of ontological security and a sense of self (Subotić, 2016; Eberle and Daniel, 2022). In this habilitation, the concept of narrative is used to explore the diverse and mismatched interpretations of

broader issues of disinformation and hybrid warfare that circulated in the Czech public sphere in the late 2010s, yielding widely divergent readings of the main societal challenges and needed responses.

Finally, several chapters of this habilitation draw on two broader areas of research connected with the discipline of **Middle East Studies**. Building on *postcolonial reflections on security politics* and Middle Eastern security more specifically (Said, 2003; Barkawi and Laffey, 2006; Hönke and Müller, 2012; Bilgin, 2017; Abboud *et al.*, 2018), the first line of inquiry identifies tensions and mismatches between different conceptions of security at the international, regional, and local levels. This line of research thus shows how security is understood, experienced and practised locally and regionally, and how these readings and corresponding practices might contradict Western knowledge production and policy practice (Makdisi, 2011; Bilgin, 2017; Hazbun, 2017; Tholens, 2017). In this habilitation, this approach provides particular inspiration for Chapters 1 and 5, which focus on the interactions between international security discourses and local practices, and on the specific ways in which the War on Terror manifested in the Middle East. The second area of research in Middle East Studies relevant to this habilitation is a longstanding debate over the *nature of the Lebanese state and political order* (Salloukh, 2015; Mouawad and Baumann, 2017). Noting its complicated sectarian composition, with a strong role of non-state actors, informal rules of the political field and a significant influence of external actors, various authors have attempted to theorise it as an area of limited statehood, a hybrid political order, or a case of hybrid sovereignty (Fregonese, 2012; Tholens, 2017; Stel, 2021; Gunning and Smaira, 2022; Gade, Selvik and Zaza Dit Yafawi, 2025). This habilitation addresses this issue in Chapters 1, 5, and 6, exploring how external actors approach the hybridity of the Lebanese political order and how their attempts to transform and correct it lead to different forms of intervention.

Note on methodology

While addressing common themes, the following chapters do not share a unified research design. The research design and methods are described in detail in each chapter. Generally speaking, the research in this habilitation follows an interpretive approach common to the disciplines of Critical Security Studies, international political sociology, and others it draws on (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara, 2020). Such an approach is focused on understanding the meanings that different actors ascribe to particular security issues, the broader social context through which these meanings come to matter, and the politics involved in the construction and execution of security interventions (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Aradau *et al.*, 2015; Salter, Mutlu and Frowd, 2023).

Correspondingly, the following chapters rely, more or less explicitly, on a combination of qualitative methods aimed at reconstructing broader discursive structures that provide meaning to a particular situation, more specific security narratives circulating around a particular issue and the practices performed on the ground. Following the key guidelines of interpretivist social science and, more specifically, approaches to research methods in Critical Security Studies, the chapters do not work with testable causal links and formal models. Rather, the emphasis is on the clarity of the concepts and research design, the fit of the research objectives, methods, and available data, and the transparency of the research process, alongside the researcher's reflexivity (Salter, 2023; see also Daniel, 2020; Amoureux and Steele, 2016).

The methods are most explicitly spelt out in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6. Chapter 2 relies on a Foucauldian method of **archaeology** to reconstruct the conflicting discursive formations and corresponding bodies of knowledge that inform the roles peacekeepers are supposed to perform vis-à-vis the civilian population in their area of deployment. The chapter specifically focuses on how such discursive formations are stabilised in training materials and practical exercises, which also enable their travel across different operations (Foucault, 1982; see also Pantzerhielm, 2025). Chapters 3 and 6 rely on the combination of **assemblage mapping and tracing of practices** through which the assemblage is performed and held together (Bueger, 2014; Loughlan, Olsson and Schouten, 2015). This entails identifying the key discursive frameworks through which the security issue that defines the assemblage is constructed and, at the same time, following the actors, their practices, and their reasoning concerning the issue under study (Bueger and Edmunds, 2021). In the two chapters, this is done by reconstructing the broader discourse on countering hybrid warfare and preventing violent extremism, and then mapping the actors who act in the name of that discourse in a particular context. Finally, Chapter 4 employs narrative analysis to recover different stories that interpret the problem of hybrid warfare in the Czech public sphere. Based on research into an extensive archive of media, popular science books, and government documents on hybrid warfare, the analysis reconstructs multiple plotlines that connect the causes of disinformation proliferation to its consequences (Edkins, 2019; Homolar and Rodríguez-Merino, 2019). The methods are less explicitly discussed in the remaining two chapters (1 and 5). These are based on a combination of analysis of international discourses on particular security issues and their reflection in key UN SC resolutions, and, on the other hand, how these resolutions were reflected in practices on the ground (Alejandro, Laurence and Maertens, 2023).

Regarding data collection, most research relies on a combination of **textual analysis**, which helps identify key discourses and narratives, and **fieldwork methods**. The chapters work with different textual archives, from UN Resolutions and policy literature to broader media and popular debates (see Hansen, 2006, on archive-construction strategies). While participant observations were used to a certain extent for Chapters 2

and 3 (Seim, 2021; see also Daniel, 2020; Eberle and Daniel, 2023 on discussion of fieldwork experiences), semistructured and ethnographic interviews played an essential role in researching the formation, structures and internal logics of the respective assemblages in Chapters 3 and 6. Moreover, interviews, held at the UN headquarters in New York and at various sites in Lebanon, were a key source for exploring peacekeeping training and practice, as well as the logic of the UN approach to preventing violent extremism (see in particular Chapters 2 and 6).

Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1 (Daniel, 2017) explores a set of practices through which the UN intended, throughout the 2000s and 2010s, to ‘strengthen the authority of the state’ and build governing institutions and how these practices interacted with the local politics in the respective countries. Drawing on the notion of sovereignty-building as an approach to statebuilding associated with the so-called stabilisation peacekeeping missions, the chapter analyses support for state authority and sovereignty in two types of contemporary UN peace operations – UNIFIL II (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) in Lebanon and MINUSMA in Mali. While the two missions differ significantly in the scope of their tasks and the rules governing the use of force, they both highlight the importance of local politics and local agency in implementing their mandates based on the international understanding of the role of state and society in the given countries. As the chapter highlights, the experiences of both missions also show the need to strike a balance between the contending visions of which form of sovereignty to support. Following the general argument of this habilitation, the chapter argues for the importance of ‘local’ and contextual practices of sovereignty-building that stem from the interaction between the international and local.

Chapter 2 (Daniel and Wittichová, 2020) shifts the focus to a different issue concerning the practice of international interventions in the Middle East (and beyond). It examines how militaries approach civilian populations in the context of international peacekeeping, stabilisation, and counterinsurgency operations. The chapter explores the development and circulation of knowledge on civil–military co-operation (CIMIC) and various contexts in which understandings of military personnel’s own role vis-à-vis the civilian population, and of CIMIC more generally, are created. Based on interviews with CIMIC officers in UNIFIL and members of the CIMIC unit of the Czech Armed Forces, this chapter shows how training practices support the formation of roles that treat the civilian population as an enabler of military goals. As such, the civilian population is treated as one of the sites of struggle between the peacekeepers and the potential adversaries. This understanding of the civilian population, closely linked to counterinsurgency thinking, also enables the circulation of specific CIMIC practices and knowledge across different types of missions. In sum, the chapter shows the social processes through which a particular type of

security practice is developed and how it further proliferates across different intervention sites.

Moving to a different empirical topic, **Chapter 3** (Daniel and Eberle, 2018) traces the social processes that led to the ascent of the notion of 'Russian hybrid warfare' (RHW). It argues that the emergence of RHW as a specifically understood prime security threat transformed the understanding of national security in the Czech Republic during the period of 2014-2016. The chapter specifically shows how the ascent of a particular understanding of this threat resulted from contingent and often unruly social interactions across different settings, rather than from a linear and centralised response to Russia's actions. To capture this process, it uses the concept of assemblage as a temporary constellation of various actors, both public and private, who came together to face the challenge and frame it in a particular way. Building on research interviews and documents produced in the RHW field, the chapter proceeds in three stages. First, it traces the gradual emergence of the Czech RHW assemblage from a variety of different actors - bureaucrats, NGOs, academics, journalists - after Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014. Second, it unpacks the assemblage's inner workings by identifying the key actors and asking who assembled it and by which processes. Third, it focuses on how different actors were able to reinforce and/or transform their identities by being part of the assemblage, with an emphasis on the effects this had on the distinction between the public and the private.

Continuing with the empirical focus of the preceding chapter, **Chapter 4** (Daniel and Eberle, 2021) unpacks different narratives of 'hybrid warfare' that circulated in the Czech public sphere in the late 2010s. Analysing the wider public debate and a range of different sources from governmental policies to non-fiction popular books, the chapter shows that, while talking and writing about what is supposedly the same thing, participants in the hybrid warfare debate often suggest markedly different ideas about the precise nature and target of the threat, offer different responses, and draw upon different expertise. Grounding the argument in critical scholarship on narratives, security knowledge, and hybrid warfare, the chapter builds a framework for studying security narratives around the four elements: threat, threatened value, response, and underlying knowledge. This framework is utilised in a case study of Czechia, a country that has played a pioneering and outsized role in European debates on hybrid warfare. Three narratives of hybrid warfare are identified – defence, counterinfluence and education – which present markedly different understandings of 'hybrid warfare', and ways to defend against it. In general, the aim of the chapter is to contribute to disentangling the contradictions in the hybrid warfare discourse, which is itself a necessary precondition for both sound state policy and an informed public debate. In this habilitation, the chapter highlights the importance of engaging with the broader popular and expert debate in shaping security practices and points out the role of different types of expertise in developing an understanding of novel and complex security issues.

While staying with the topic of the social construction of threats and responses, **Chapter 5** (Daniel, 2023) explores how the international agenda and the local implementation of preventing violent extremism (PVE) identify vulnerabilities in a target country, thereby transforming the framing of what is wrong and what needs to be done. Drawing on interviews with UN officers, Western diplomats and non-governmental organisation workers – alongside documentary analysis - it specifically focuses on shifting problematisations of the Lebanese state and society in two distinct eras. First, it focuses on concerns about failing states in the mid-2000s (see *Chapter 1*), then the transformation of these discourses into worries about radicalisation and violent extremism in the mid-2010s (see *Chapter 6*). While the PVE agenda identified new forms of potential risk and danger, it also gave new meaning to some previously identified deficiencies, reinterpreting them in line with the PVE discourse. The chapter highlights how the PVE agenda elevated a set of new problems in Lebanon to the international community's attention, yet reactions to these problems still ignore the wider structural issues Lebanon faces.

Chapter 6 (Daniel, 2025) further explores Lebanon's adoption of the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda in the second half of the 2010s and the consequences of the agenda's focus on weak social cohesion. Employing the concepts of problematization and the assemblage perspective on international intervention, the chapter analyses the formation of the PVE agenda in Lebanon, as well as the heterogeneous group that contributed to its shaping. It builds on a critical reading of PVE programmatic documents and interviews with actors responsible for designing the Lebanese National PVE Strategy and subsequent PVE projects. It argues that the concentration of the Lebanese PVE agenda on the country's lack of social cohesion provided a language adoptable by both Lebanese and international actors and a tool to reach out to the 'risky' and 'at risk' communities alienated from the Lebanese state and sectarian elites in the years preceding the Lebanese uprising of 2019. In conclusion, the chapter highlights the broader political effects of PVE programs oriented toward strengthening social cohesion and shows how these programs lump together a wide range of social issues while brushing aside the underlying causes of popular discontent. In this respect, the chapter underscores one of the main arguments of the habilitation, namely, the blind spots of dominant security agendas, which it identifies by carefully examining the processes of their crafting and implementation.

Key contributions

The research presented in this habilitation contributes to debates across the diverse fields of study outlined above. In general, and at the theoretical and conceptual levels, several chapters (2, 3, 4, 6) subscribe, in their own ways, to the research agenda of

International Political Sociology. As such, they adapt and combine concepts from different strands of social theory with an empirical focus on (international) security issues to make the social processes of negotiating and defining security, which are often taken for granted in traditional security studies, visible and open to debate (Lundborg, 2026). In Chapter 2, this is manifested through a combination of the Foucauldian approach and distinct discussions of the military roles that enable the dissection of how certain practices come into being, circulate across different theatres, and of the consequences of such circulation. In Chapter 4, I develop a novel conceptual framework that combines research on security narratives with research on the role of background knowledge in their formation and legitimation. Chapters 3 and 6, then, in their own ways, contribute to research on how certain security agendas emerge and take root through distinct social processes and provide a novel combination of conceptual and methodological tools for understanding them. Chapters 1 and 5 then contribute to understanding how international security agendas define certain problems to be fixed by external interventions, and how these interventions interact in practice with local politics.

In the area of *peace and conflict studies*, the two key contributions lie in the novel explanation of the intersections of different types of international interventions (peacekeeping and counterinsurgency) through a focus on practical knowledge of the deployed military personnel (Chapter 2) and highlighting the inseparability of the politics of international interventions on the international and local level (Chapters 1, 5, 6). The latter contribution has been developed primarily on the Lebanese cases (more on that below); however, the assemblage approach used in Chapter 6 and the close attention to local politics and local practices of security highlight the inseparability of social processes of negotiating peace and security on both levels and their mutual influence (Chapters 1 and 5).

In the area of *critical security studies*, the key contribution of this dissertation is one of the first dissections of the emerging agenda for countering hybrid warfare and disinformation and the forces shaping it (Chapters 3 and 4). The attention to the different actors involved in the agenda and the way they interact in shaping security allowed new approaches not only to differing understandings of this security problem and how it should be countered, but also to new frameworks for researching and understanding the formation of security policies. In this respect, Chapter 3 highlights the interactions among the different branches of government and security agencies, and with private actors and civil society, which together help shape the security agenda. As such, it shows that attention to the discursive securitisation of particular threats cannot account for the nuances, different understandings of the security problem, and potential alternative approaches to tackling them that do not reach the level of public political discussion. The concept of assemblage, fieldwork methodologies, and careful mapping of different actors and narratives, however, can provide the necessary nuance and contribute to a better understanding of the problem at hand, both theoretically and empirically. A similar ethos

drives the main contribution of Chapter 4. It develops a new framework for dissecting security narratives and expertise circulating in the public debate and thus also creates conceptual tools for understanding how a particular form of security expertise provides a background for a wider security story. However, it also points out that there is a need for nuance and better conceptualisation of the vague and ambiguous concepts that proliferate in academic, policy and public debates on security (Janičatová and Mlejnková, 2021; Libiseller, 2023).

Finally, the research in the following chapters of this habilitation thesis contributes to several debates in the discipline of *Middle East Studies*, namely those on the nature of the Lebanese state and the international dimension of the Middle Eastern security. In this respect, Chapters 5 and 6 provide novel insights into how certain aspects of the Lebanese state and state-society relations are framed as international security concerns, how these concerns are shifting, and how the notion of the Lebanese state's weakness and the countermeasures needed to address it are evolving with them. As such, the chapters provide a reference on the international dimension of narratives of the Lebanese state's weakness and failure (Järvi, 2026). Building on this theme, Chapters 1, 5, and 6 also contribute to the wider conceptual debate on the nature of security in the Middle East and to research on it by highlighting the importance of local agency in shaping the implementation of international security programmes on the ground. As such, they push back against some traditional and critical readings of Middle Eastern security politics that overemphasise the international capacity to shape security in the region, while also pointing out the entanglement of international, regional and national politics.

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