

BORDERLINE CHAOS? STABILIZING LIBYA'S PERIPHERY

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Libya's borders remain largely ungoverned, and securing the periphery is among the country's greatest challenges. Weak border control allows markets in arms, people, and narcotics to thrive alongside everyday trafficking in fuel and goods, with profound consequences for the region as a whole. For Libya to create a truly effective border security strategy it must do what no Libyan government before it has done—disentangle the web of economic and local interests that fuel Libya's border insecurity.

Key Themes

- The government faces two profound legacy issues: an economically and socially neglected southern region whose inhabitants in large part rely on cross-border trade for their livelihoods, and a fragmented security sector with little apparent central coordination, equipment, or morale.
- The country's Arab, Berber, and sub-Saharan communities are one source of border insecurity. Long marginalized by the state, these cross-border communities have created webs of dependency with kin in neighboring countries that facilitate illicit trafficking.
- For many armed groups operating in border areas, communal ties are stronger than their trust of or loyalty to the new government.
- Uncoordinated government departments and private brigades acting in the name of the state have forged uneasy compromises in an attempt to govern Libya's border towns and posts, but they are often competing with each other, not cooperating.

Policy Recommendations

Ensuring better coordination within state institutions is a crucial first step. Departments within the Interior and Defense Ministries must work together to secure Libya's borders. Clear lines of authority within and between departments should be established and government ministers should begin to collaborate at the executive level. Policies and practices must also be better coordinated between towns and border posts.

The state must overcome the independence of brigades on the borders. This is a substantive political problem that requires more than cracking down on the brigades. The state must also genuinely reform and develop its security institutions to regain the brigades' trust and respect.

The government must take bold steps to integrate marginalized communities into Libyan society. The economic incentives for local communities to seek income from cross-border trade must be swept away by spurring local development and tackling social grievances. This will require, in particular, the establishment of more robust government institutions in Libya's south and east.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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