

CRUMBLING STATES: SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN LIBYA AND YEMEN

YEZID SAYIGH

Already-weak states in Libya and Yemen crumbled as struggles for control over their security sectors became central to transitional politics after the popular uprisings of 2011. Instead of being reformed and upgraded to enhance the fragile legitimacy of interim governments, the security sectors collapsed by 2014. Libya and Yemen are now caught in a vicious circle: rebuilding effective central states and cohesive national identities requires a new consensus on the purpose and governance of security sectors, but reaching this agreement depends on resolving the deep political divisions and social fractures that led to civil war in both countries.

Failing to Meet the Challenge of Reform

- Control of the security sector became a key asset in Libya's highly competitive but poorly institutionalized political field. In Yemen, such control was important to those seeking to reproduce old elite politics.
- The struggle for control fragmented the security sectors in both countries, impeded them from fulfilling core missions, and blocked reform agendas.
- Both Libyan and Yemeni state institutions declined, executive and legislative bodies were incapacitated, and criminal justice systems became paralyzed.
- Amid the crumbling of state institutions, powerful revolutionary militias and other armed challengers sidelined or supplanted official security sectors.
- Restructuring national armed forces is necessary in countries in transition, like Libya and Yemen. But reforming and upgrading ministries of interior, the police, and criminal justice systems would address citizens' needs, help revive economic activity, and enhance government legitimacy, facilitating policy reforms in other areas.
- External actors were influential in security sector restructuring, but they pursued conflicting goals and were not invested enough politically or materially to transform local dynamics or alter outcomes.

Security Sector Reform Lessons From Libya and Yemen

Inclusiveness and transparency are essential. Legacies of political factionalism and societal penetration in the security sector make it imperative to include all parties and community representatives willing to engage peacefully in debates about reform policies and priorities. It is also essential to build trust by making information about security sector governance and decisionmaking processes, senior appointments, and budget allocations fully transparent.

Processes for reintegrating security sectors should be systematized. Establishing common professional standards and performance benchmarks, recruitment and promotion criteria, legal obligations and rights, and wage scales and service conditions is a sine qua non for transforming and merging official and alternative security structures.

Central and local security provision must be balanced. In highly fractured states and societies, centralizing approaches to security sector governance may be counterproductive and should be complemented by developing the role and capabilities of local governments.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yezid Sayigh is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where his work focuses on the Syrian crisis, the political role of Arab armies, security sector transformation in Arab transitions, the reinvention of authoritarianism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace process.

CONTACT

Tarek Zeidan
Director of Communications
tzeidan@carnegie-mec.org
+961 1 99 14 91

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