

ISSUES

- A sustainable and reliable U.S. system for security cooperation that can more effectively leverage America's extensive web of alliances and partnerships in the Middle East and around the globe does not yet exist.
- Unspecified U.S. objectives and a confused process represent the two main problems of U.S. security cooperation. Often, the U.S. pursues security cooperation with no coherent policy toward the partner or a clear end-state. It also practically approaches security cooperation as an exercise in supplying hardware to its partners, failing to invest in defense institution building, which is crucial for the partner's ability to optimize and sustain the defense of its people and territory, and ultimately graduate from U.S. help.

US INTERESTS

- U.S. partners in the Middle East with more developed defense institutional capacities — not just military capabilities — are able to responsibly share security burdens and sustain U.S. security investments in the region during challenging fiscal times in Washington.
- Defense institutional reform is inextricably linked to political reform, which is a key ingredient of long-term regional stability, and thus a core U.S. interest.
- Effective U.S. security cooperation in the Middle East affords the United States greater strategic flexibility to pursue its new priority of great power competition.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- U.S. senior leadership should appreciate the history of U.S. security cooperation in the Middle East, its failures, and the lessons it offers, and understand that defense institution building in conjunction with train-and-equip programs is neither a charity nor a luxury — it is a necessity.
- The U.S. secretary of defense must communicate his strong endorsement of Congress's security cooperation reforms in the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (FY17 NDAA) and press all stakeholders, including his own immediate subordinates, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), and CENTCOM, to fully implement the reforms.
- Congress should perform consistent oversight of security cooperation and insist on accountability by more frequently holding public and closed hearings.

- Bilal Saab