

Egypt's Paramilitary Forces

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Reforming security agencies in Egypt depends on understanding how the Security Forces Sector and the Central Security Forces Sector are established, armed, and trained.

The 2020 issue of [Military Balance](#), published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, classifies the Central Security Forces Sector (CSF) of Egypt's Ministry of Interior as a paramilitary force. CSF personnel receive military training, and police officers working in the CSF receive specialized training that involves sending them to the armed forces [for qualification](#). The CSF is thus an intermediate model between a heavily-armed military and civilian security forces.

Since its establishment in 1969, the CSF has played a prominent role in confronting mass protests and supporting the missions of other police agencies. Former Minister of Interior Major General Habib al-Adly [described](#) it as "the military wing and strike force of the police." However, [many studies](#) of [military spending in Egypt](#) or reform of security agencies do not distinguish between the CSF and the separate Security Forces Sector (SF), whether in terms of administration, tasking, armament, or size. The relationship between CSF and the armed forces on the one hand, and the

duplication of the tasks of CSF and the SF, on the other hand, show the importance of reforming these two agencies in a civil and professional manner. The lack of understanding of the difference between the two has focused demands for reforming security agencies solely on the CSF without taking into consideration SF reform, even though the latter is larger.

Differences Between the SF and the CSF

[CSF personnel](#) are recruited from citizens designated for military service in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 127 of 1980, on military and national service. [CSF personnel are also subject](#) to the Code of Military Justice. The founding of the SF and the CSF were comparable, but they differ operationally. The CSF was established in 1969 as a light, well-armed police force, specialized in controlling local unrest. It is headed by a police officer with the rank of assistant or first assistant to the minister of interior. According to Assistant Minister of Interior for the CSF Major General Ashraf Abdullah, in 2013 [CSF personnel](#) numbered 100,000 soldiers and 4,800 officers.

The SF, however, was established at the beginning of former President Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule to maintain internal security. It falls under the security director in every governorate, who in turn reports to the assistant minister of interior for public security. One exception to this is the Cairo Governorate, whose security director is first assistant to the minister of interior, and reports directly to the minister.

The arming of the SF differs from that of CSF. The SF does not possess armored vehicles or high-end weaponry, only light weapons. SF formations have three platoons, with a total of ninety recruits per formation. Thus, they are different from the CSF, which is made up of battalions, companies, and platoons, similar to the organizational structure of the armed forces.

Despite the aforementioned differences, the CSF and the SF are similar in their level of militarization. Their police officers hold military rank, personnel reside in police barracks and camps, and conscripts for military service are recruited in large numbers to serve in the police for the three years, during which they are subject to the Code of Military Justice. It is worth noting that the SF is bigger than the CSF. In 1986, [Minister of Interior Zaki Badr stated](#) that SF personnel numbered 176,000, while CSF personnel numbered 106,000.

After the January Revolution

Repressive security practices contributed to the outbreak of the January 2011 uprising. Dissolving the CSF was one of [the revolutionary demands](#) that human rights activists turned into lawsuits, but without success. The process of reforming security agencies requires political will to make legal changes and move away from a

militarized police. The fact that the police organizational structure contains paramilitary forces has contributed to the depletion of their human and financial resources and technical equipment, which has negatively affected the civilian and professional aspects of security work.

In practice, there is duplication in the tasks of the CSF and the SF. The SF can maintain internal public security alone. The system of recruiting soldiers to work for the Ministry of Interior should be abolished while establishing police formations tasked with riot control and rapid deployment. The CSF can be completely dissolved or reduced in size and can be affiliated with the Ministry of Defense. This would reduce the expense required to maintain and operate thousands of recruits. Paramilitary forces are not suitable to deal with citizens, since their behavior is shown to reinforce societal tension.

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