Shared Responsibility and Comprehensive Security in the MENA Region: Conclusions Based On Rome Workshop Deliberations

By Dr. Petra Weyland

Executive Summary

Insecurity in the MENA region has been growing significantly over the last two decades. Much has been done to counter this trend through direct military engagement, procurement of weapons, training, humanitarian and development aid, and engagement in security partnerships. In spite of these tremendous efforts, the regional, national, and especially the human security situation has worsened. Violent extremism is evidence of this. U.S. Special Forces executed Osama bin Laden years ago, but al-Qaida is changing its face and (re-)appearing in many different places. The Isis Caliphate was destroyed, but its survivors are gaining a foothold on both shores of the Mediterranean, conceiving new forms of violent radicalism.

Today we have to admit that by and large the efforts to improve security in the region have failed, a fact that is hard to accept, regardless of the reasons for this failure. The current situation not only has a tremendous negative impact on the MENA region and its future but also an increasingly adverse effect on neighboring countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Europe. Obviously, "more of the same thing" is not the correct strategy to apply. But how can the security policy approach to the region and the existing partnerships around the Mediterranean be recalibrated? This is the most crucial, the most pragmatic, and the most reasonable question to ask. The answers require bold, unconventional, out-of-the-box thinking and innovative approaches.

It is precisely this question that the Marshall Center's September 2017 Rome workshop put on the table. The most significant result of the debate was: before any new tools to counter security threats can be devised, efforts must focus on those who are (or should be) responsible for designing and implementing these tools: the security partnerships. The Rome workshop participants agreed that the main reason for the inefficiency of countermeasures lies in the very nature of existing security partnerships, which have many shortcomings and low effectiveness. Therefore, before investing in "more of the same thing," a serious effort must be made to revise and redesign these partnerships. This is going to be a long and difficult process, not least because of diverging geopolitical interests.

It is clear that any input that helps rebuild these partnerships is a contribution to a shared strategic vision. The Rome workshop proposed the concept of "shared responsibility" as a new strategic approach to security partnerships that encompasses the two shores of the Mediterranean

as well as for the regional partnerships. It goes without saying that such a strategic vision needs to be developed on the basis of a clear, realistic, and shared situation analysis. The strategic workshop in Rome carved out the contours of both, which now must be fleshed out in a follow-up workshop.

The Arab Uprisings: Seven Years On, Growing Insecurity around the Mediterranean

The security situation in the MENA region has drastically deteriorated in recent years, with increasingly negative effects on Europe.[1] The situation is even more alarming as insecurity is spreading throughout the Sahel zone while large parts of what used to be Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya have been turned into wasteland after scorched-earth campaigns, with the populations scattered in all directions. Unspeakable human suffering continues even in areas liberated from ISIS. As if this were not enough, regional tensions are also rising. ISIS suffered a military defeat, but now there is growing concern on both sides of the Mediterranean about the return of foreign fighters, men and women who adhere to hardline jihadist ideology and who have also indoctrinated their children. In Europe, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic sentiments and nationalism continue to spread. Migration problems have remained unsolved in both Europe and the MENA region.

In the war-torn regions of MENA, the young people expected to rebuild their countries have become a lost generation. There is widespread disillusionment among the activists of the Arab Uprisings their economic, social, and political future. Many of them have left and those who stayed have been silenced. Anti-Western attitudes are widespread.

In 2018, there is little reason to be optimistic about the near future. A return to a reasonable degree of stability in the MENA region appears to be wishful thinking. It is more likely that security—whether human, national, or regional—will deteriorate even further. It is not that there have been no efforts made, even enormous ones utilizing military campaigns and diplomatic crisis management, to counter this negative trend. Military training partnerships were established, military and police hardware provided, and formal agreements made that conditioned development aid on retaining migrants on the African continent.

The sad truth is that the desired outcome in terms of better human, national, and regional security has not been achieved through use of these measures. Even worse, the progress made in promising countries like Tunisia or Morocco is in danger of being undermined. The turmoil on the southern side of the Mediterranean has not led to a coherent policy toward the region. On the northern shore of the Mediterranean, the EU is deeply divided over the refugee issue. The only thing all member states seem to be able to agree upon are military engagements, such as Operation Sophia.[2]

Obviously, the efforts to strengthen security have not achieved the desired results. It appears that the time has come to be brutally honest and admit that there is an incredible mismatch between the increasing number of security measures taken and the ever-rising level of

---

[1] Perry Cammack, "Wars of the World," DIWAN, Middle East Insights from Carnegie, December 15, 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/74981?lang=en.
[2] "Operation Sophia," EUNAVFOR MED, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.operationsophia.eu/.

insecurity. What is needed now is a courageous, realistic analysis of the situation. To continue on the same well-worn track and to throw more money at the same type of security measures is neither pragmatic nor realistic.

What is needed instead is to seriously rethink security, security policy, and security partnerships in the region, including a rigorous investigation into the reasons for the mismatch between investment and outcome. Readiness to explore new avenues leading to a new and clear strategic vision to guide security policy is also required.

Such an endeavor is definitely not an easy one to undertake, as there are many root causes for the security situation in the MENA region today. The Rome workshop focused on security partnerships, one of the main aspects of the situation that requires analysis. The rationale was that current measures fail not only because of a lack of or unwise spending of money and resources, but because of the very nature of security partnerships: their composition, their internal *modus operandi*, and their aims. The Rome workshop came up with suggestions about how to reform and reinvigorate partnerships to make them meet the expectations of the people in the MENA region and in Europe. The suggestions made were very valuable, but due to time constraints could not be worked out in detail. This will be the aim of the follow-up workshop.

Diagnosis: Dysfunctional Partnerships
Lack of Genuine Dialogue

There have been—and currently are— many security partnerships bringing together both sides of the Mediterranean as well as other countries beyond this region. They have been an important tool in meeting the security challenges mentioned above. However, there is also a new trend toward more individual approaches to security, probably as a result of the disillusionment with the poor results described above. Recent approaches and existing partnerships have obviously not been able to counter traditional and newly-emerging threats. Whether focusing on human or more traditional forms of security, those partnerships have not been able to create a positive climate between both shores of the Mediterranean, making the situation worse. The overall impression is that both sides are increasingly drifting apart, leading to growing polarization. From the perspective of the southern Mediterranean, Europe has become a fortress. Long past are the days when young people could visit Morocco with an InterRail ticket, while young Moroccans could spend a holiday in Europe. Clearly, the notion of a shared Mare Nostrum and a shared space of security is not on today's agenda, demonstrating that the partnerships between Europe and MENA have not proven successful.

The Rome workshop discussed a number of reasons for this situation. Two things were clear from the start: security problems cannot be solved as long as the two shores drift further and further apart and sustainable solutions cannot be reached unilaterally, neither at the national nor the regional level. The very nature of today's conflicts and crises makes such approaches obsolete. The workshop participants agreed that only partnerships can provide solutions. However, to be effective, partnerships require strength, commitment, and drive. What matters is not the partnership per se, but their quality.

The participants agreed that these partnerships leave much to be desired; talking past one another, finger pointing, and blame-gaming are commonplace. While mutuality is emphasized in public statements, in reality relations are often characterized by a lack of respect. Instead of trying to eliminate the root causes for insecurity, each side accuses the other of causing them. Each side suspects the other of utilizing the security partnership to pursue its own strategic goals. Participants from the Southern Mediterranean and beyond and also from southern Europe stated that in their countries there is little trust in Europe's / the West's motivation when it comes to partnerships and fear that the intent is not to find joint solutions, but rather to defend national or EU interests. Participants thought that this is very similar in the MENA region, where regional powers also put their own goals at the top of the agenda instead of investing in shared solutions.

In the MENA region as in the EU, there is no coherent approach to security challenges, because national interests prevail. Additionally, rising populist pressure in some EU countries prevents governments from seeking courageous, sustainable solutions to problems. In the MENA countries, on the other hand, governments do not invest seriously enough in security dialogues and shared security management.

Another problem which makes partnerships dysfunctional is their composition. On both sides of the Mediterranean, they are essentially "old men's clubs," usually consisting of politicians or members of the security establishment who, inevitably, represent their own or their organization's narrow interests, based on their experiences, capabilities, and security concerns. Though powerful, they all too often represent only a small minority. Conspicuously absent are women, young people, and community leaders such as religious authorities or representatives from rural areas. The security concerns of the vast majority of a society are therefore not at all or underrepresented, which is another reason for the failure of the existing security partnerships.

Imposed Solutions: From the Promotion of Democracy to Securitization

In the MENA region, the impression is widely shared that solutions to security problems, especially military solutions, are imposed from the outside. In this respect, the interventions in Iraq and in Libya have caused tremendous, long-term negative results for the MENA region and the whole of Africa. These massive military interventions have led to long-term instability and have increased the already precarious human security situation, with no improvement on the horizon and a negative impact on relations between Africa and Europe.

In the immediate aftermath of the "Arab Spring," there was hope that democracy would take hold, human development improve, and security strengthened, but when the Arab uprisings led to the breakdown of the whole region and instability spread to the Sahel zone, the result was a shift in Western security paradigms. The rationale that development and democratization enhance security was abandoned in favor of a strong, sole focus on security, with funds and capacities being channeled into measures promoting, above all, EU and national security interests. "Security emergencies" made it necessary to subordinate human security to more traditional security concerns. The focus on "democratization" was replaced by a focus on

"stability" and containing potential threats for Europe. This shift became even more pronounced with the "migrant crisis" of 2015, when another buzz word gained increasing prominence: "conditionality." Conditionality had always played a role in development aid, but it no longer means that aid is used for the agreed-upon development objective. The condition that is now imposed on partner countries is to either keep migrants away from Europe or to take them back.

People in the MENA region experience the relationships between both sides as increasingly securitized. From their perspective, Europe is transforming the whole MENA region from a neighbor into an enemy and a serious security threat.

The existing partnerships are designed to contain security threats in the MENA region and in Africa before they spill over into Europe. Ultimately, such partnerships run a high risk of being caught in the trap of the classical "security dilemma," in which one-sided security measures might result in short-term benefits for Europe, but in devastating effects for the other side. The long-term consequences are clearly negative for both sides. This becomes obvious, in light of the unrelenting spread of radical extremism and the unsolved migration crisis. This is what we currently have on both sides of the Mediterranean: more terrorist attacks, more irregular migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs), more instability, and more hatred.

Dysfunctional Security Partnerships Tend to Increase Security Challenges

In an atmosphere of mistrust, where partners are not treated at equals and solutions are perceived as imposed, it is simply impossible to achieve long-term comprehensive security in the wider MENA region. In such a setting, the partnership itself becomes a security risk once it is seen in a negative light. Such spillover effects are clearly reflected in public opinion. In Europe, anything to do with the Southern Mediterranean is regarded with suspicion. In MENA, the interventions in Iraq and Libya, and, more generally, great power geopolitics in the region, are a sore point. Europe and the U.S. (as well as other major players such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) are seen to be playing a major role in destabilizing MENA countries. As a result, outside attempts to impose security are increasingly rejected in the MENA region. Not only are Europe and the U.S. questioned as security partners but any influence or cooperation risks are put into question, even by those who could be partners. As a result, there are voices on both sides of the Mediterranean arguing in favor of withdrawal from partnerships and opting for individual approaches. In Africa, the "decoloniality" debate points in that direction.

In conclusion, the Rome workshop participants argued that today's security partnerships are seriously flawed: dysfunctional security partnerships are unlikely to find, agree upon, and implement sustainable solutions to security challenges. Dysfunctional security partnerships come with the potential risk of increasing security threats. To rethink security partnerships seriously and rigorously with the aim of rebuilding them is a necessary, albeit extremely demanding task.

Rethinking Partnerships

Existing security partnerships have proven rather ineffective. This raises the question whether unilateral approaches might work better. The Rome workshops participants, however, agreed that turning away from each other will lead to even more insecurity. Partnerships are required; indeed, there should be even more of them. The tasks ahead are too demanding and too complex for only a handful of partnerships to deal with, particularly as long as membership is largely restricted to security professionals and politicians.

What is needed are more diverse, more inclusive partnerships. What is needed today is a strong commitment to strong and healthy partnerships. But how can partnerships be rebuilt and made stronger so they can unfold their full potential in achieving more security for all? To begin with, it is essential for security partnerships, whether existing or new ones, to be guided by a clear strategic vision, a *raison d'être*. The Rome workshop proposed such a strategic vision: the concept of "shared responsibility" for security partnerships around the Mediterranean and beyond.

Why the motto "shared responsibility?" Because security/insecurity are shared in the globalized world. Because security/insecurity are the result of concerted action or the lack of it. Because a sense of responsibility is required to make partners acknowledge the situation and be ready to do something about it. "Shared responsibility" emphasizes that all partners are equally important in countering security threats and that all partners accept their responsibility and agree to work toward a common goal. Shared responsibility as a strategic vision can serve as a common platform and can promote identity.

Sharing

First of all, security threats in today's world are indeed shared, although not to equal degrees. They may manifest themselves differently in different places, with some societies being hit harder or earlier than others. Given a country's power and its society's strengths, the means to counter threats may differ. Some countries will be more vulnerable than others. We may not necessarily perceive threats in the same way; our knowledge and our assessments may vary. Sometimes we do not even pursue the same interests when we counter threats. But in spite of these differences, we are all confronted with enormous security challenges today as well as—increasingly so—in the years to come. Be it violent radicalism, organized crime, youth unemployment, climate change, cyber threats, or pandemics, we share those threats, whether we live in the MENA region, the Sahel, in Europe, or in the U.S.

The notion of sharing threats also takes into account that specific threats are occurring simultaneously. These threats reinforce one another. For example, terrorists cooperate with international crime. The longer insecurity persists, the more actors see opportunities to enrich themselves personally, be it in terms of money or power.

A third aspect of sharing builds on what has already been achieved. Whether countries, multilateral institutions, politicians, religious persons, or artists, representatives of civil society already engage in security partnerships with the aim of confronting challenges, often

doing so with only very meager resources and without getting much notice from the general public. Once it is generally agreed that Europe and the MENA countries share common security concerns and challenges, there is fertile ground for meaningful security cooperation. This acknowledgement is the first step toward new partnerships and mak the strategic vision of shared responsibility convincing.

Responsibility

Whenever the notion of responsibility comes up in the current security environment and in security partnerships, it usually does so in two contexts, one with a negative connotation and the other with a positive one. As already mentioned, "responsibility" is a term frequently used when mutual accusations are made. But allocating responsibility for past mistakes was not the intent of the Rome workshop with regard to its efforts to redefine security partnerships. Certainly, responsibility for past mistakes exists, but it should be seen as an obligation not to make the same mistakes again and try to find new solutions to security problems. In that respect, responsibility means finding common ground in understanding the root causes of security threats.

The second context in which "responsibility" has long been debated and then become a global commitment is the "responsibility to protect" (R2P), which was accepted at the 2005 UN summit and has been applied in cases of serious violations of human rights. As far as the Rome workshop is concerned, the notion of responsibility goes beyond this concept. Participants agreed that there is a general responsibility for national, regional, and human security that we all share. This applies especially to the Mediterranean region, because Europeans, Middle Easterners, North Africans, and Africans are all neighbors. They are linked by geographical proximity, a shared history, common security needs, and by strong cultural and economic ties. This translates into shared responsibility for security today, and, more importantly, for tomorrow and for future generations. The actions taken by one neighbor inevitably impact all others. Acting responsibly means to be constantly aware of the implications of one's actions, to admit mistakes, and work toward solutions that are beneficial for all partners. In that respect, the Rome workshop participants argued, responsibility has a chance to avoid the sovereignty issues linked with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept.[3]

---

[3] Responsibility to Protect," Responsibility to Protect in Theory and Practice Conference, April 11-12, 2013, http://www.r2pconference.com/uploads/1/6/7/5/16757814/abstracts.pdf.

Toward a Strategic Vision for Security Partnerships

This is where the notions of "sharing" and "responsibility" join forces. Shared responsibility is based on a realistic assessment of the security situation and the awareness that the way security threats are countered today has implications for future generations. The Rome workshop participants proposed that the strength of the notion of "shared responsibility" as a strategic vision to guide security partnerships lies in the awareness that all partners have valuable contributions to make. There is a lot of untapped potential.

Thus far, "shared responsibility" has not been put into practice in security partnerships. National and regional interests have prevented such a strategic vision from taking full effect. The notion of "shared responsibility" is sometimes mentioned in policy papers, especially when it comes to sustainability in Africa, but it is never clearly defined, never taken seriously, and hardly ever acted upon. The Rome workshop participants insisted that if we search for new paths to security in the globalized world of today and if we intend to rethink security partnerships, we should indeed insist on taking "shared responsibility" seriously and adopt it as a strategic vision to guide security partnerships. A strategic vision, of course, is only as good as its implementation. If not put into action, "shared responsibility" will be just be another buzzword in declarations of intent with nothing to follow it up.

Participants in the workshop were fully aware that, largely due to narrow national interests, such a common vision is very difficult to achieve, but it is possible. To make this happen, however, a definition of what "shared responsibility" means for security partnerships is required. It needs to be agreed upon by all partners. Given the short time available, the workshop put together the most crucial ingredients of such a definition, but further refinement will be part of a follow-up workshop.

Fundamentals of Shared Responsibility in Practice

The international community has already proven that shared responsibility works, especially in the field of human security. Some examples are the fight against pandemics, damage control for natural disasters, and measures to combat climate change. Therefore, putting the strategic vision of shared responsibility into practice when it comes to national or regional security is not impossible, although in those areas agreement will be much harder to achieve.

Commitment to Invest in the Quality of Security Partnerships
Every strategic vision remains inefficient as long as it is not implemented. The implementation of the strategic vision of shared responsibility is about proactive approaches; it is also about commitment, an end to lip service, and the promotion of transparency and accountability. The following pages are the main analytical findings and recommendations that came out of the Rome workshop.

COMMITMENT TO THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

- Mutual trust and respect must be built among all partners, especially with the young generation and women.
- Partnerships need to be based on honesty and frankness.
- All partners needs to practice what they preach.
- Partnerships need to be horizontal, not vertical.
- Partnerships must be based on complementarity, with each partner contributing what they do best.

- Cultural differences need to be openly addressed, but ultimately they need to be subordinated to what is common to all: the human need for security and peace.
- The inclusiveness of security and security partnerships needs to be taken seriously. This applies to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, but also the inclusion of young people and other civil society actors.
- Partners need to accept their counterparts as equals.

OPENNESS TO NEW SOLUTIONS

- Unfolding the positive power of shared responsibility starts with taking responsibility for past mistakes so as to avoid the same mistakes from happening again and to prevent a similar negative impact on security.
- There must be a commitment to action, otherwise security partnerships remain ineffective even if guided by the strategic vision of shared responsibility. Implementation should generally focus on improvements in human security, such as regional development or youth education.
- Alternative voices and channels need to be integrated into partnerships. Partners should be open to new and different options as well as different narratives.
- The priority should be to find win-win and shared solutions.
- There is considerable criticism concerning the attempts made to create democracy and stability in the MENA region and also concerning the principle of conditionality.
- It is clear that these principles of democracy, stability, and conditionality need to be upheld, but they also need to be given new meaning. This provides an opportunity for the West / the EU to encourage officials in the MENA region to continue serious reforms and achieve better human security for their citizens.

Putting the Hard Questions on the Table

It would be overly idealistic to assume that shared responsibility will emerge as the guiding principle if only all partners felt committed and treated one another as equals, or to assume that readiness to think outside the box and accept new negotiation partners will be easy. In fact, political interests often represent the most serious obstacles to change. The Rome workshop argued that sweeping these political interests under the rug, or simply accepting them as a given, is not an ideal solution. Instead, they should be openly addressed. Therefore, genuine commitment also includes dealing with seemingly irreconcilable political interests in a

mutually satisfactory way. This appears to be another precondition for functioning partnerships. It would constitute a major achievement if these interests were openly addressed in a conflict resolution framework. Political interests often seem to be irreconcilable, creating conflicts and conflicts of interest, however conflicts over diverging interests can be solved, or at least managed or mitigated. They do not necessarily have to develop into crises. Countless track 1, 2, or 3 negotiations have proven that diverging interests can eventually be turned into win-win solutions.

- Conflicts of interest must be dealt with. Without clarity about the goals and interests of each partner, both sides can be talking at cross purposes, not understanding one another because they have differing intentions.
- A number of questions are crucial here. For Europeans and the United States: What do you want in and for the MENA region and Africa? What do you want for yourself?
- For MENA and Africa: What do you want from Europe and the United States? What do you want for yourself?
- What are the security challenges partners want to solve through cooperation? Are they restricted to humanitarian issues or should political issues be addressed as well?
- Solutions need to be found for the complicated issues of interference vs. state sovereignty, and the degree to which partners can or should interfere in a state's internal affairs and infringe upon its sovereignty.
- The issue of conditionality needs to be addressed, as well as making sure it is applied in a realistic, mutually respectful way.

About the Author

Dr. Petra Weyland is responsible for the Marshall Center's courses on security in the Mediterranean Region. She is also the initiator of the Mediterranean Discourse on Regional Security with its focus on "Shared Responsibility and Comprehensive Security in the MENA Region." The group discussed this topic during a kick off workshop in Rome, 26-28 September 2017. For further information on this initiative as it develops, please see the Marshall Center website at www.marshallcenter.org.