

SECURITY INSIGHTS



Crisis Response and Crisis Prevention on Europe's Southern Flank: Challenges and Opportunities

By Valentina Caracci and Ralf Roloff

Introduction

From 19-23 June 2017, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies gathered middle and senior level security practitioners from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States to participate in the European Security Seminar-South (ESS-S). The group's objective was to build a common understanding of the new dynamics on the European Southern flank in order to develop appropriate responses to regional security challenges.

Southern Europe has been severely affected by transnational terrorism, illicit trafficking, illegal migration, civil wars, and other threats emanating from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel belt. These multi-faceted issues demand a multilateral and whole-of-government response, which must be both short and long term, as well as preventive and reactive. Effective strategies must minimize negative spillovers and collateral damage to NATO and EU neighbors but also prevent regional destabilization, which would jeopardize resilience-building and stabilization measures. Military operations might create the conditions, but sustainable political solutions must be formulated to deal with root causes.

The concept of shared responsibility must be embraced in order to manage the crises effectively and sustainably. A discussion on shared responsibility and sustainable solutions is especially needed now that multilateralism and the Euro-Atlantic partnership are about to enter into a new phase. A general trend has emerged with some states opting for an overall disengagement, preferring nationally-oriented agendas over burden sharing. International organizations like NATO and the EU must reinvent themselves in light of this nationalistic turn.

The recurring refrain of the seminar was the concept of principled pragmatism. The term appeared in the 2016 "Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy,"¹ which is based on a "realistic assessment of the strategic environment [combined with] an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world."² European Security Seminar South course

¹ "The EU global strategy," European Union, accessed July 14, 2017, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en>.

² "A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe," European Union External Action, accessed July 15, 2017, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

participants tried to make sense of this concept throughout the whole conference by questioning it, shaping it, applying it to existing policies, and, in particular, linking it to the concept of shared responsibility.

A Tangle of Security Challenges

What makes the current security conditions in the Mediterranean countries so incredibly complex is an intricate tangle of different features which could be schematized by three C's: 1) overlapping concurrent threats, 2) convergence of different actors, mandates, priorities, and sensitivities, and 3) conflation of issues. In such scenario, policy-makers must combine a comprehensive approach while respecting the fundamental differences among the issues to be addressed as well as the affected regions. Although no silver bullet exists, tackling each problem in isolation is unlikely to achieve any sustainable outcome. The time constraints of this seminar meant that we addressed migration, maritime security, and transnational terrorism separately, however, the incompleteness of this list as well as the interdependence between different security challenges emerged from the beginning – as did the difficulties in treating these challenges as if they exist in watertight compartments.

Although a significant number of migrants lost their lives in 2013 and 2014, the true refugee crisis broke out for the first time in summer 2015. By April 2015, EU members had developed a proactive approach and a crisis discourse: they agreed on reinforcing border patrol operations; fighting traffickers in accordance with international law; preventing illegal migration flows; and reinforcing internal solidarity and responsibility by considering a relocation mechanism.³ Today, with the unstable situation in the Middle East, the number of applications is increasing at an exponential rate. According to the European Commission, a total of 4.7 million people emigrated from non-member countries to one of the twenty-eight EU member states in 2015 alone.⁴ Many had fled the conflicts and abuses in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea, but there were and continue to be many economic migrants fleeing poverty in the Balkans and countries like Nigeria and Pakistan, as well. In terms of principled pragmatism, migration poses a trade-off between security and ethics on Western countries. Making agreements with transit countries, such as the EU-Turkey deal or the one between Morocco and Spain, seemed to be relatively effective in containing the flow to Europe in the short term, but these deals are certainly not sustainable solutions that tackle the root causes of migration. It is tantamount to extending European borders and deferring the question to an unpredictable future.

The driving forces of migration flow are conflicts, poverty, demography, and climate change. In the case of Libya and Mali, people caught up in irregular migration pass through territories in which the central state's administration is either weak or non-existent. The first point to be emphasized before developing any sort of migration policy is that migration is not only a purely South-North phenomenon. In fact, only 20% of migrants eventually travel to Europe; most of the flow starts and ends within the African continent itself, as a form of circular and temporary

³ “Special meeting of the European Council” The European Council of the European Union, (April 23, 2015), accessed July 18, 2017, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/23-special-euco-statement/>. “Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council: Ten point action plan on migration” (April 20, 2015), accessed July 18, 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4813_en.htm.

⁴ “Migration and Migrant Population Statistics,” accessed July 20, 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics.

migration. Refusing to distinguish between different kinds of migrants leads to biased and ineffective crisis management. To date, the EU's policies have shown themselves to be misaligned with the reality of trans-Saharan migration.⁵

Secondly, the international community has so far treated migration as a humanitarian crisis, rather than as a structural problem. Migration should not be seen as a tsunami of nature, but as a consequence of a policy vacuum – and tackled accordingly. Smuggling is a result of a tight link between politics and criminality that has developed through a long chain of different criminal organizations. In cities like Algadez, there is an actual migration industry, playing a major role in the economic growth of the region. In Libya, the situation is exacerbated by the excessive violence in the region as well as by the failure of the central government to keep legitimate violence the monopoly of the state. There, human smuggling is not only about mobility, but it has also become a source of financial, political, and territorial power to be exploited. In such cases, human smuggling represents both a product and a cause of conflict. For those countries, human smuggling must be considered to be not only a security challenge, but also a source of revenue and thus, ironically, a stabilizer.

While irregular migration is an effect of state fragility and institutional voids in the MENA region and in the Sahel, Europe is affected by internal fragmentation and institutional weakness, which renders it less capable of effectively managing the migration flow. The countries that are geographically exposed suffer from a lack of burden-sharing within Europe. The Balkan route is now closed as an effect of the EU-Turkey deal, but an actual relocation mechanism within the EU failed to be implemented, while migrants are not sent back to Turkey because of the principle of non-refoulement.⁶ The lack of solidarity between EU member states constantly reemerges, with Eastern EU countries refusing to comply with the quota system. As a result, the EU faces a major crisis that is also an institutional crisis, because its institutional structure is being questioned, as is its legitimacy.

The link between migration and transnational terrorism seems to be straightforward, however, statistics show that only a small percentage of migrants in fact end up perpetrating terrorist attacks;⁷ moreover, research confirms that there is no positive correlation between migration and terrorism.⁸ Europe is currently facing an increased perception of the threat of terrorism, one that ultimately leads to paranoia and radicalization on both sides. Working on integration and inclusion would help reduce marginalization and this growing antagonism attributed to an alleged clash of civilizations.

⁵ Molenaar, F. and El-Kamouni-Jannsen, F., “Turning the Tide. The Politics of Irregular Migration in the Sahel and Libya,” CRU Report Clingendael Institute, accessed July 10, 2017, https://www.clingendael.nl/pub/2017/turning_the_tide/.

⁶ For more on the principle of non-refoulement, see Jenny Poon, “EU-Turkey Deal: Violation of, or Consistency with, International Law?,” *European Papers* (December 20, 2016), accessed July 20, 2017 <http://www.europeanpapers.eu/en/europeanforum/eu-turkey-deal-violation-or-consistency-with-international-law>.

⁷ AJ Willingham, Paul Martucci and Natalie Leung, “The Chances of a Refugee Killing you and Other Surprising Immigration Stats,” CNN Politics, (March 6, 2017), accessed 21 July 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/30/politics/immigration-stats-by-the-numbers-trnd/index.html>

⁸ Bowe, V. and Bohmelt, T., “Does Immigration Induce Terrorism?,” *The Journal of Politics* 78 (2016): 2.

The worldwide diffusion of transnational terrorism is a prime example of the relationship between internal and external security. The foreign fighters phenomenon as well as internal radicalization of citizens pose challenge to any country's security. Terrorism is an extremely powerful and globalized threat today because of the means at its disposal. Terrorists do not have to actually physically move themselves, as it is enough to move ideas through the internet. Confronting a phenomenon like cyber propaganda is not an easy job. In addition, Al Qaeda has been branching out in several connected spin-offs: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), in Iraq (AQI), in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), in Syria (known as *Hay'at Tahir al-Sham* or HTS) and eventually the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the boundaries between groups are often blurred. These several affiliations make the enemy difficult to identify and thus difficult to target.

As mentioned before, the complexity of security on the European southern flank is due to an overlap of time, actors, and issues (see the 3 C's). This is especially true for maritime security. As for time, the question is how long a crisis or emergency should last before it is accepted as a new status quo. This is also related to the dilemma of how to weigh short term mitigation strategies and long term strategic solutions, especially when the two contradict one another. As for actors, policy makers must explore how to leverage or limit the increasing involvement of NGOs operating at sea. At this very time, a debate has begun within Europe, with the EU asking Italy to prepare a code of conduct for NGOs working with migrants. This call came after Italy said it would instruct NGO rescue ships not to enter Libyan territorial waters and suggested barring non-Italian NGO ships from Italian ports.⁹ Issues often become conflated when it comes to migration, as the refugee crisis and economic migration commingle and sometimes become indistinguishable from one another. Migration and internal security are also interlinked when it comes to international terrorism, the increased popularity of xenophobic parties, and out-group hostility.

It is impossible to understand contemporary security issues in North Africa and the Sahel, particularly terrorism, without linking them to the global scene. Moreover, a historical and contextual understanding of these issues cannot be overlooked; we must not make the mistake of decoupling security from societal and political developments. The Maghreb is a *sui generis* space with multiple frames of reference, in which the North-African and Sahelian space is a composite picture. First, and at the heart of it, the religious vector is a necessary but not sufficient component to be taken into account. On its own, it is not sufficient as the Sunni Muslim identity encompasses a much wider group that spans far beyond the region. In the same vein, "Arabhood," i.e. the ethnic and cultural vector, constitutes another important but insufficient component. Third, and crucially, the regional identity within the context of MENA is an important yet often underestimated component. MENA is different, defined not only by religion or culture but rather by a regional identity. Linked with the region and an extension of it, is the Sahel, which is itself characterized by a variable geometry. Therefore, the wider region blends a number of different political and cultural ensembles.

⁹ "Prepare migrant NGO code of conduct, EU tells Italy," Ansa med, accessed 24 July, 2017, http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2017/07/04/prepare-migrant-ngo-code-of-conduct-eu-tells-italy_aa7d0c3c-5a9c-4891-a56d-07913746c633.html.

Over the last fifty years, there has been a trend toward a steady decline in nationalism just as a religious element has been on the rise. These key developments are markers of the current political situation and should inform what kind of (in)security the region will face. Furthermore, the region has experienced a crisis of representation as well as a rising sense of dispossession, which led to a widening perception of grievances on many fronts that in the end triggered the Arab Spring. It must be stressed that the Sahel is not endemically problematic, yet this is a crisis that could have been avoided if there had been more robust systems, better cooperation, and state building. The crisis accelerated over the last two decades has taken place in an already fragile social fabric; it is a product of the missed opportunities in the period of decolonization, including mismanagement of governments and failures in state-building. Finally, the Middle East and North Africa has been experiencing a unique concurrence of four long-lasting civil wars (Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq). This is an unprecedented phenomenon. Security must also be understood in terms of fragmentation, as in the case of Libya being a *de facto* federal system. Fragmentation implies that these newly arrived militias are able to claim territories and—even though they are not able to control them—then influence the equation. Fragmentation combines with movement, transnationality, extraterritoriality, and fluidity, creating an unstable political mosaic. The Libyan security vortex, in combination with the Mali crisis, triggered the fundamental crisis in the Sahel, while the Tuareg issue has added further complexity to the whole scenario.

When developing security policies, the linkages between different threats must be taken into consideration as well as the specificity of each region. Analysts and policy makers must be able to zoom out to see all the interconnections and the spillovers, without excluding any intervening variable. At the same time, they should narrow down the visual field in order to better understand where the threats come from and are generated and to provide customized responses on a case by case basis.

Joint Ownership: Between External and Tailored Solutions

Given the complexity of the situation, the responses that come through the building of walls, the “fortifications,” are at a minimum paradoxical. When facing difficult issues like transnationality, fluidity, and overflow, nations often build walls that can actually be easily bypassed. On the other hand, the spread of ungoverned spaces raises questions about management of these empty corridors that often attract terrorists and other criminal groups.

It must be recognized that EU countries are demonstrating an actual commitment to the development and security of Africa (taking into account the development-security nexus¹⁰), not only in terms of investment, education, and training, but also in terms of their vision. The relationship between Europe on one side and the countries of MENA and Sahel on the other is not one of a colonial kind, but instead has become a genuine partnership. The Union for the Mediterranean (UFM), an inter-governmental organization created in 2008 in an effort to strengthen the Barcelona process and consisting of EU, the Levant, and North African countries, is a tangible example of this partnership. The revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy

¹⁰ “World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development,” World Bank, (May 26, 2011), accessed July 13, 2017, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/966731468161352341/World-development-report-2011-conflict-security-and-development>.

(ENP) of 2015 is also heading in the same direction: Europe stopped dictating the terms of the game to its southern and eastern neighbors, instead starting a dialogue in the name of joint ownership, flexibility, and differentiated tools.¹¹

The conflict in Mali is one of the main challenges for the Sahel and also, because of its spill-over effect, for Europe. Mali has experienced several Tuareg rebellions since gaining independence in 1960. The Tuareg tribes are spread all over the country, but they represent the majority in the desert north. Poor institutions, the lack of involvement of minorities, environmental issues, and deteriorated armed forces are the overlapping root causes of the ongoing conflict in Mali. At the same time, Mali is a victim of the destabilization affecting the entire region, which is emanating from Libya, terror, ungoverned spaces, freedom of movement of criminality, and a stalled peace process. In 2013, French forces heeded the demand of Mali's government and launched Operation Serval. The EU and the UN also came to the aid of Mali during the same year, the former with the European Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) and the latter with a peacekeeping operation named MINUSMA. In 2014, the leaders of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso created the G5 Sahel, an international organization aimed at strengthening the cooperation on development and security in the region. The U.S. is supporting the G5 Sahel in the areas of counter-terrorism, education, military and security training, and law enforcement. The international community is thus working alongside the countries of the Sahel to cope with destabilization in the region. The goal is to formulate a "three D" solution, where diplomacy, defense, and development come together in a comprehensive approach.

The role of external partners is both crucial and problematic. The EU has been primarily engaged in the MENA and the Sahel through economic cooperation. The EU acted under its overarching political structure called joint Africa-EU Strategy¹² and was involved in both development programs and executive operations. The African Peace Facility,¹³ launched in 2004, has been aiming for increased dialogue and operationalization of peace as well as for the support of the G5 Sahel. In terms of aid, the EU funded an Emergency Trust Fund to support the countries most endangered by migration and is currently financing 80% of the program budget of the African Union. On the operational side, Operation Atlanta dealt with piracy in Somalia while Operation Sophia has been confronting human smuggling on the Libyan coasts. Alongside the EU, the African Union is dealing with crisis prevention, both through actual operations and through trust-building measures. The EU is also supported by NATO, which joined the anti-*Daesh* coalition and took part in several cooperation initiatives and operations on the ground. In this, NATO plays an auxiliary role, in particular given how the alliance's priorities have shifted since the Wales and Warsaw Summits in 2014 and 2016 towards protecting Europe from threats emanating from the east.

¹¹ "Revised European Neighbourhood Policy: supporting stabilisation, resilience, security," European Union Press Release, (May 18, 2017), accessed 18 July 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1334_en.htm.

¹² "Key facts on the Joint Africa-EU Strategy," European Union Press Release, (April 23, 2013), accessed July 23 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-367_en.htm.

¹³ "African Peace Facility," European Commission International Cooperation and Development, accessed 23 July 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/africa/continental-cooperation/african-peace-facility_en.

A certain degree of skepticism about the alliance's role in the MENA region has been growing among several Mediterranean countries, particularly after NATO's intervention in Libya. For months, Turkey has blocked all partnership programs within NATO because of its conflicts with Austria regarding the EU migration policy. These factors dramatically limit NATO cooperation with non-NATO members in the context of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The extent and quality of external partners' involvement must be assessed and challenged. Countries in destabilized regions often call for involvement of states and international organizations, however, when such influence is too intrusive, this could translate into a lack of responsibility on the shoulders of the targeted countries and could eventually lead to a sort of "infantilization effect." As has been already mentioned, 80% of the financial contribution to the African Union comes out of the EU's pockets, raising questions about political interference and ownership. Although external and internal efforts are undeniable, countries affected by internal conflicts complain of a mismatch between their needs and the solutions offered by the international community to meet those needs. An emblematic example is the already mentioned EUTM, under which the EU sustained the effort to modernize Mali's army. Although the mission was in principle honorable, it turned out to be less successful than hoped, as the country still lacks logistical tools to put this training into practice in case of need. Therefore, Mali would need to call for logistic support coming from the EU if it wanted to render the training valuable. In order to avoid such situations, the quality and frequency of communication must be improved in an effort to understand each other's necessities.

The Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, signed in Algiers in 2015 by Mali's government, the pro-government "Platform of Algiers" and the umbrella organization gathering the former separatist groups, is another example of a deal made without considering the characteristics of all of the parties. The politico-military movements, treated as a unique homogeneous group in the framework of the agreement, were in fact not internally coherent; this is the reason why implementing the pact turned out to be problematic. There needs to be more cultural diplomacy as part of an effort to show how the policy will be a win-win for both sides and to increase the level of transparency and mutual trust.

Toward Shared Responsibility

It is therefore clear that partners have neither shared perceptions of security challenges nor a common assessment of effective crisis response and crisis prevention. However, they share the responsibility to tackle such crises. Thus, the real challenge is working toward a common understanding and engaging regional partners to develop more sustainable solutions to resolve crises. Common understanding implies looking at the limitations and opportunities of our political systems, societies, and economies as well as our regional and global involvement. The greatest opportunity is that we share a sense of responsibility for effective crisis response. We only need to act accordingly.

In order to embrace shared responsibility, the following elements must be considered as pre-conditions to any successful partnership:

- **Get serious about the root causes**, as addressing the symptoms will only lead toward further iterations of the cycle of violence, state fragility, and radicalization. Moreover, understand the interplay of regional and transnational security challenges.
- **Develop a true sense of partnership** between enablers, owners, and allies. Involve all the actors, not only states, but also international organizations, NGOs, regional organizations, civil society, local partners, and individuals – and try to figure out their real intentions.
- **End the blame and shame game.** Focus on the problem rather than on processes and on improving the situation using fact-based lessons learned rather than concentrating on what went wrong and who is to blame.
- **Formulate smart objectives.** The international community must be able to formulate achievable, time-limited, and impact-oriented goals. Principled pragmatism also means being aware of our own capacity and influence as well as our limits, without promising over-ambitious achievements.
- **Assess, monitor, and evaluate.** Any solution must be followed up over time. Monitoring mechanisms and constant evaluation help make crisis management flexible, to the point, and up-to-date.
- **Focus on bottom up solutions** instead of top down approaches, as local expertise creates lasting solutions. An approach stemming from the grassroots promotes a better understanding of what is needed at the bottom and thus prevents a mismatch between the solutions that are needed and the solutions that are actually provided.
- **Work on trust, honesty, and confidence building** in order to reduce conflictual situations or stalemates. Reliability, confidence building, information, and data sharing form the basis of cooperation.

In terms of policy-making, the concept of shared responsibility translates into the following recommendations:

1. **Combine a differentiated strategy with a comprehensive approach.** Come up with tailored policies, but consider the nexus between security, development, and instability as core and employ it to find effective and sustainable solutions. Improve the relationships between military forces and civil actors.
2. **Focus on local ownership combined with auxiliary external support.** Local leadership must be encouraged, as well as with donors playing a supporting role. Ensuring local ownership of the solutions makes them sustainable in the long run as well as more tailored and responsive. It also enhances their legitimacy throughout the population and thus the level of acceptance and compliance. The international community should encourage African solutions for African problems, demonstrating greater reliance on regional or bilateral organization (like the G5 Sahel).

3. **Establish long term metrics** with strategic patience and pragmatism. While short-term crisis management tools might create the conditions for stability, root causes must also be addressed. Short-term crisis management should not interfere with, substitute, or undermine long-term political solutions, which are the only ones that will eventually solve these problems.
4. **Aim for solid statehood, good governance, capacity-building, and strong institutions.** Fragility of states must be tackled through institution building and good governance. Strengthening legitimate institutions and governance to provide citizens security, justice, and jobs is essential to breaking cycles of violence. Enabling and building resilience is key to reducing the spillover effects that result from state fragility and lead to crisis in the neighborhood. Regional efforts like the G5 Sahel are very promising; they must be encouraged and sustained by the international community. Good governance is not a matter of values, but rather of performance.
5. **Work on whole-of-government planning.** Solutions must be multi-agency and multi-nation. A holistic approach must be embraced. All the different stakeholders must be included in the process in order to enhance communication, inclusion and ownership. European Union support of long term capacity building must be continued with enhanced input from developing countries in terms of good governance, sustainable economic development, and judicial reform.¹⁴

Conclusions

The European southern flank has been experiencing multi-faceted and unprecedented security threats stemming from its neighboring regions. Within and outside Europe, joint efforts and a sense of solidarity alternate with waves of parochialism and fragmentation, which just add fuel to the fire and further stoke the crisis, preventing the resolution of external conflicts. Migration, terrorism, and illegal trafficking are complex phenomena that need to be unpacked, but also examined together in order to come up with overarching solutions. Moreover, the more tangled and cross-cutting the security threat, the higher the need to cooperate toward a common understanding and a joint approach to crisis. Especially in an era of increasing transnationality and globalization, a coordinated response is essential. Shared responsibility should not just be based upon pure solidarity; it also requires the acknowledgement that the security of our neighbor directly affects us and our own security. On the other hand, the needs of our neighbors are different from ours; this makes the whole process even more challenging and requires closer partnership and increased communication. The Euro-Atlantic community as well as the countries of MENA and Sahel should embrace principled pragmatism, combining realistic assessments and achievable aims with idealistic aspirations and sensitivity to each other's differences.

¹⁴ For more information, see "UN sustainable development goals," United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, accessed 24 July 2017, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

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