Shared Responsibility and Comprehensive Security in the MENA Region

Conclusions Based On the Participants’ Deliberations
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Insecurity in the MENA region has been growing significantly over the last two decades. Much was done to counter this trend, through direct military engagement, procurement of weapons or 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 gotten worse.

Violent extremism is evidence of this. US special forces executed Usama Ben Laden years ago, but al-Qaeda 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 bring about more security have failed – which is hard to accept, irrespective of the reasons for this failure. The current situation does not only have a tremendous negative impact on the MENA region and its future. It also has an increasingly adverse effect on the MENA neighbors, sub-Saharan Africa as well as Europe.

Obviously, “more of the same thing” is not the right 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. And the answers, so much is clear, can only lie in bold, unconventional, out of the box thinking and innovative approaches.

It is precisely this question that the Rome workshop put on the table. The most significant result of the debate was: before any new tools to counter security threats can be designed, 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, the shortcomings and the low effectiveness of existing security partnerships. So before investing into “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. But there seems to be no way around it. 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 vision for the security partnerships that encompass the two shores of the Mediterranean as well as for the regional ones. 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 – now they need to be fleshed out in a follow-up workshop.

2 The Arab Uprisings – 7 years on Growing Insecurity around the Mediterranean

The security situation in the MENA region\(^1\) has drastically deteriorated in recent years, with increasingly negative effects on Europe. The situation is even more alarming as insecurity is spreading throughout the Sahel zone, and large parts of what used to be Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya have been turned into wasteland after scorched-earth campaigns, 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 rising, too.

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 have indoctrinated their children.

In Europe, anti-Islamic, anti-Semitic 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 about their economic, social and political future. Many of them have left and those who stayed have been silenced. Anti-Western attitudes are widely spread.

In early 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.

Not that there have not been efforts, even enormous ones, to counter this negative trend through military campaigns and diplomatic crisis management. Military training partnerships were established, military and police hardware provided, and formal agreements made to conditioning development aid on retaining migrants on the African continent.

The sad truth is that the desired outcome in terms of more human, national and regional security has not been achieved by these measures. And, worse still, 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 towards the region. And on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, the EU is deeply divided over the refugee issue, and the only thing all member states seem to be able to agree upon are military engagements, like operation Sophia.

Obviously, the efforts to strengthen security have not achieved the desired results. So it seems the time has come to be brutally honest and admit that there is an incredible mismatch between the more and more numerous security measures taken and the ever increasing level of insecurity. What is needed now is a courageous, realistic situation analysis. To follow the beaten track and call for more and more of the same thing, 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. And a rigorous investigation into the reasons for the mismatch between investment and outcome. What is needed is the readiness to explore new avenues. A new and clear strategic vision to guide security policy.

Such an endeavor is definitely not an easy one to undertake, as it can be expected that there are many root causes for the security situation in the MENA region today. The Rome workshop focused on one main aspect of the thorough situation analysis required – on security partnerships. The rationale was that current measures fail not only because of lack or unwise spending of money and resources, but are due to the very nature of security partnerships: their composition, their internal modus operandi, and their aims. The Rome workshop came up with suggestions on 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.
3 Diagnosis: Dysfunctional partnerships

3.1 Lack of genuine dialogue

There have been – and currently are – many security partnerships bringing together both sides of the Mediterranean and countries beyond. And they have been an important tool in meeting the security challenges mentioned above. But there is also a new trend towards 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. Even worse: 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. The overall impression is that both sides are increasingly drifting apart, which leads to growing polarization. From the southern Mediterranean perspective, 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, a shared space of security, is not on today’s agenda. And the partnerships between Europe and MENA have not proven successful.

The Rome workshop discussed a number of reasons for this. 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, not at the national and not at 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 its quality.

The participants agreed that these partnerships leave much to be desired - talking past each other, finger pointing and blame-gaming are commonplace. While mutuality is emphasized in public statements, in reality relations are often characterized by 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, they fear that the intent is not to find joint solutions, but 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 on top of the agenda, instead of investing into shared solutions.

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

3.2 IMPOSED SOLUTIONS: FROM THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY TO SECURITY

In the MENA region the impression is widely shared that solutions to security problems are imposed from the outside, especially military solutions. 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 – with no improvement on the horizon and a negative impact on relations between Africa and Europe.

In the immediate aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring” there was hope that democracy would take hold, human development improve and that this would produce security. But when the Arab uprisings led to the breakdown of a whole region and instability spread to the Sahel zone, there came a shift in Western security paradigms: the rationale that development and democratization enhance security was abandoned in favor of a strong focus on security only, with funds and capacities being channeled into measures promoting first of 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 conditionality no longer means that aid is used for the development objective agreed upon. Now the condition 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 being increasingly securitized. From their perspective, Europe is turning the whole MENA region from a neighbor into an enemy, into a serious security threat.

The existing partnerships are to contain security threats in the MENA region and in Africa before they spill over to Europe. Ultimately such partnerships run a high risk of being
caught in the trap of the classical “security dilemma”: One-sided security measures might result in short-term benefits for Europe. But with devastating effects for the other side. The long-term consequences are clearly negative for both sides. In view of the unrelenting spread of radical extremism and the unsolved migration crisis, this becomes obvious. This is what we have on both sides of the Mediterranean today: more terrorist attacks, more irregular migration and IDPs, more instability and more hatred.

3.3 IN CONCLUSION: DYSFUNCTIONAL SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS TEND TO INCREASE SECURITY CHALLENGES

In an atmosphere of mistrust, where partners are not treated at equals and solutions 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 US (as well as other major players such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran) are seen today as 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 US questioned as security partners. Any influence, any cooperation risks to be put into question even by those who could be partners. So on both sides of the Mediterranean there are voices 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 argued that today’s security partnerships are seriously flawed: dysfunctional security partnerships will hardly 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, if extremely demanding task.

4 RETHINKING PARTNERSHIPS

Existing security partnerships have proven rather ineffective. This raises the question whether unilateral approaches might work better. But the Rome workshops participants agreed that turning away from each other will lead to even more insecurity. Partnerships are required, 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 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 the existing ones or new ones, to be guided by a clear strategic vision, a raison d’être.

The Rome workshop proposed as 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, that all partners accept their responsibility and work towards a common goal.

Shared Responsibility as a strategic vision can serve as a common platform to work from. It can promote identity.

4.1 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 and 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, or in Europe and the US.

The notion of sharing threats also takes into account that specific threats are occurring simultaneously. These threats reinforce each other, 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, artists, representatives from civil society already engage in security partnerships with the aim of confronting challenges. They often do so with only very little resources, and often without getting much notice from the general public.

Once it is generally agreed that Europe and the MENA countries share security, there is fertile ground for meaningful security cooperation. This acknowledgement is a first step
towards new partnerships and makes the strategic vision of shared responsibility convincing.

### 4.2 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, and the other with a positive connotation.

As already mentioned above, “responsibility” is a term frequently used when mutual accusations are made. But allocating responsibility for past mistakes is not what the Rome workshop intents to do in 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 sense, 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. For the Rome workshop, the notion of responsibility goes beyond this concept. For the Rome workshop, 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 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, for future generations. The actions taken by one neighbor inevitably impact all others. Acting responsibly means to be permanently aware of the implications, to admit mistakes and work towards solutions that are beneficial for all partners. In that sense, responsibility as understood by the Rome workshop has a chance to avoid the sovereignty issues linked with the “R2P” concept.

### 4.3 Towards a Strategic Vision for Security Partnerships

This is where the notions of “sharing” and of “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 therefore proposed the notion of “shared responsibility” as a strategic vision to guide security partnerships. Its strength lies in the awareness that all partners have valuable contributions to make. There is a lot of untapped potential.

So 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, hardly acted upon. The Rome workshop insisted that if we search for new paths to security in the globalized world of today, 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 another buzzword in declarations of intent with nothing to follow it up.

The workshop was fully aware that, largely due to narrow national interests, such a common vision is very difficult to achieve. But it is possible. And to make this happen, 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.

5 FUNDAMENTALS OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN PRACTICE

The international community has already proven that shared responsibility works, especially in the field of human security. Examples are the fight against pandemics, damage control for natural disasters or measures to combat climate change. So 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.

5.1 COMMITMENT TO INVEST INTO 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, about commitment. No more lip service, but transparency and accountability.

What follows are the Rome workshop’s main suggestions.

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 WPS agenda, but also the inclusion of young people and other civil society actors.
• Partners need to accept their counterparts as equal.

**Openness to New Solutions**

• Unfolding the positive power of Shared Responsibility starts with taking over 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 for different and new options and 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 concerning the principle of conditionality.
• It is clear that these principles of democracy, stability and conditionality need to be upheld, but they 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 more human security for their citizens.

**5.2 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 treat each other as equals. Or to assume that readiness to think outside the box and the acceptance of new negotiation partners will be easy. The fact is that political interests often represent the most serious obstacles to changes. 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 frameworks: political interests often seem to be irreconcilable, they create conflicts, conflicts of interest. But conflicts over diverging interests can be solved or at least be 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 will be talking at cross purposes.
• A number of questions are crucial here. For Europeans and the US: 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 / the US? 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 to make sure it is applied in a realistic, mutually respectful way.