An introduction to ‘Human Security’ as a shared responsibility in Mediterranean security partnerships (in regard to youth and governance)

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Overview

The Arab Uprisings in some of the Middle East and North African states dramatically altered the security situation on the ground. Increasing have been the numbers of fragile or failed states, their spill-over effects coupled with economic and environmental threats. These changes have altered not only the national security of individual MENA states, but increasingly also affected the wellbeing of people and communities. Insecurity exists even in the places where large scale violence is absent.

Despite this, the “human” is largely absent from the security partnerships, urging academics and some security practitioners to argue for the need to involve human security. This concept, understood as “the freedom from fear and freedom from want”, but is still largely unexplored, perhaps due to the vary vague nature and definition (as per UN Development Report 1994). Maybe this has hindered its applicability? If so, should the definition be changed, altered or elaborated upon, for further use?

Some call for the need to “developmentalize” security while others advise to take a step further and “securitize” development. At the same time, the state is the foremost ‘instance’ which is to secure human security before any responsibility can be placed unto the international community. This has raised questions of “shared responsibility” as a concept and its use in the wider security debates. However, while in some senses the notion of “shared responsibility” already exists and is spoken about, it lacks both concrete definition and is also not practically applied. How could the principle of “shared responsibility” increase not only in discourse prominence but also become a widely understood and defined term that could then be practically used?

The following summary of the research paper intends to provide a very broad evaluation of the current projects and discourse undertaken by three security partnerships that focus on southern Mediterranean. Those are NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, European Union Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and OSCE’s Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. Given the Larnaca conference’s focus on youth and governance as two large issues, the paper focuses on human security within those areas in particular.

Security Partnerships

The Mediterranean Dialogue by NATO was launched in 1994 and connects Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. The partnership can be best described as security outsourcing where NATO contributes expertise and some funding for security maximization projects in the Mediterranean states. This is perhaps one of the biggest downsides of the MD, rather than functioning as a true dialogue or partnership, the partners tend to be mere receivers. This also characterizes the other two partnerships discussed and reveals a significant challenge, important for further discussions during Larnaca workshop.

Youth as an insecure economic and social group is largely absent from any practical partnerships and only appear in conjunction with the gender-related projects. Significantly,
gender plays a large role within the aims and projects pursued by NATO and NATO MD furthermore. Could youth as a human security challenge also be raised to the same/similar significance as gender?

Governance, despite being mentioned as one of the main aims of the MD itself, is only in passing mentioned as the “continuity of governance” within projects that focus on military training. Without a doubt NATO also has a political dimension, and some governance aims are present in the goals of the organization, for example the aim of “democratic control of the armed forces” being built into the projects. It is, however, significant to remember that NATO is foremost a military alliance, so is NATO as an organization best suited to address the issues of governance?

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of the European Union dates back to the Barcelona Process in 1995 and involves 10 southern Mediterranean partners – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Turkey. In 2002 it was reformulated as part of the wider European Neighborhood Policy, which permits cooperation with partners on three levels – political, economic, and social, human & cultural. Here the partnership is primarily an outside funding source where economic support is allocated to various programs that support the perceived EU’s goals towards the region. It can be seen that within these goals security is perceived as the lack of violence. Therefore, mere perception of stability is prioritized over long-term developments. Such perceptions have been guiding the goals of the EU towards Mediterranean partners for over 20 years. Is the problem then the way that the organization sees the region? How can these perceptions be changed?

In their projects, youth is an active “participant” in the overall security discourse, multiple varied projects have also been funded in order to improve the employment and political participation of the young through the ENP or the Union of Mediterranean that receives 55% of their funds from the EU (NetMed, Med4Jobs). In addressing governance, “more for more” (positive conditionality principle) is used in interaction with the existing state elites. At the same time, democracy promotion is seen as one of the main regional considerations. Can democracy be promoted while the partnerships remain state-to-state level with the partner state being represented by often un-democratic elites? At the same time, money for democracy-promotion activities is mostly dedicated towards narrow groups, such as NGOs, as the main representatives of civil society. Could the partnerships, including the EU, benefit from broadening their understanding of civil society – to include other prominent local actors like religious leaders, doctors, teachers, elderly? How could this be fostered?

The Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation of OSCE was officially enacted during the 1993 Rome Ministerial Council with countries like Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. Jordan has since joined as well, with Libya and PA expressing interest. It primarily acts as a dialogue platform, with very little practical projects being enacted. This is both due to the mandate of the OSCE itself as well as the procedure through which any OSCE involvement could be activated. Funding may only be raised for well-defined projects at the request of the partner state. Does such a structure minimize the OSCE engagement with the Mediterranean Partners?

Here youth is largely absent from the Strategy for the 21st Century document, despite being mentioned in the 2016 Mediterranean Conference. Given the way that any issues are raised at the OSCE. Does this lack of focus on youth mean that it is not perceived as a problem for the
partner states? When looking at governance the OSCE primarily approaches governance from the position of democracy promotion, in particular, election promotion. This is a very narrow and unfruitful perception not only of democracy but also governance. Could it be explained by the lack of organizational interaction with the academic research in the field? Or maybe lack of resources?

2. Concluding Remarks and Further Guidance

All three of the partnerships agree that European security is closely linked with the Mediterranean security. This security link, however, is primarily advanced through the understanding of hard security threats. Even when looking at youth and governance in particular, the security partnerships prioritize immediate threats like radicalization, migration, violence. To some degree this is understandable, but at what point the organizations jeopardize the future security by ignoring the long-term threats? Can this approach be explained by the lack of “human” focus – unemployment, unsafe environment, decreasing health and other long-term insecurity creating aspects? Can we expect any changes without the change of the employed “security-provider” top-down approach which mirrors a core-periphery relationship?

The above discussed are only few of the questions and considerations to think about in regard to the wider research conducted on human security in the security partnerships. Undoubtedly this is a very complex academic subject which connects both theoretical debates and practical challenges. All of this and many more in-depth questions can guide the further discussions when considering human security during the Larnaca workshop.