MDRS Annual Workshop 2019
Migration and Security
Towards new Solutions for the Mediterranean Region

Considering the Migration Crisis from the MDRS’ Guiding Vision of

*Shared Responsibility for Security*

Why does the MDRS invite you to its third annual meeting? The MDRS, as a group of people from around the Mediterranean, is convinced that the deteriorating security situation in the region needs new and out-of-the-box solutions. The MDRS wants to discuss its ideas with you and wants to include you in generating fresh approaches.

The MDRS is convinced that in today’s globalized world, security challenges are shared. Therefore, the efforts towards increasing security also needs to be shared. New approaches must be based on a common vision, and MDRS proposes *Shared Responsibility for Security* as this vision. Migration will continue to be a multi-faceted security challenge for which courageous, dedicated, comprehensive solutions, inspired by shared values and the notion of shared responsibility are needed.

At this meeting, we will explore what the common vision of *Shared Responsibility for Security* means with regard to migration and discuss how this vision can be translated into practice. The notion of *sharing*, as MDRS understands it, means that responsibility for security is not strictly the business of the national government and its security professionals. The MDRS emphasizes the need for the collaboration of multiple partners with different experiences and capacities. Having them on board would bring a variety of expertise, capabilities, needs, and enthusiasm into play. For the Tunis meeting, MDRS has chosen to look at three such potential partners who are of special importance in this regard – youth, media, and local government.

By highlighting the notion of *responsibility*, we stress that the sharing of security threats calls for taking responsibility for security – the security of our own community, nation, and region, of future generations, and the responsibility to safeguard human rights and democracy. Sharing the responsibility for security threats refugees are facing, means sharing the responsibility to find solutions – for youth and for local communities at the sending and receiving end. In that sense, MDRS interprets the narrative of the “*refugee crisis*” in a positive, forward-looking way. As the chance to turn things to the better inheres in every crisis, we should have the courage to accept this challenge.

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1 Thanks to Elena Mandalenakis and Emna Ben Arab for their valuable comments to an earlier draft of this paper. As of 06/06/2019
In that sense, MDRS hopes that this annual meeting will suggest some new approaches, which if implemented, might bring positive results for migrants, communities, and the Mediterranean region as a whole. *Shared Responsibility for Security* is far more than an ethical imperative. It is also mere pragmatism, a way towards new solutions when all old approaches have failed.

**The Narrative of the Migration Crisis**

Millions of people in the MENA region have fled their homes over the past decade. Continuous wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, as well as gloomy prospects for the future in most—if not all other—Middle Eastern and North African countries, drove them to seek refuge in neighboring countries or in Europe. Communities on both sides of the Mediterranean, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, but also in Greece, Italy, and Germany, have been struggling to provide for their enormous human security needs.

With a record number of about one million new arrivals to Europe, the year 2015 will be long remembered as the year of Europe’s refugee crisis. In many ways the refugee crisis in 2015 was a game changer that led to a dramatically altered the political landscape with growing anti-immigrant populism and policies. The refugee crisis changed narratives of national and European identity and redefined EU policy towards its Southern and Eastern neighbors. The year 2015 will also stand for a narrative that puts immigrants, migrants, refugees, illegal migrants, and asylum seekers into one category.

A minority of voices argued that hosting a million asylum seekers in an affluent community as in Europe, with its population of about five hundred million might have been a difficult, but manageable task. However, there was no such political decision or buy-in. Since 2015, the

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2 In this paper, the term “migrants” is admittedly not clear-cut— it refers to many different categories, but most importantly to refugees and asylum seekers under international and national law. However, in this text it also comprises migrants who seek refuge outside their home country for other reasons, most importantly, for economic, political, or climater reasons—people who migrate because they think they have no future in their country. In reality and in the public discourse, clear-cut definitions are hard to find; one reason being that definitions are also changing with changing politics.

common understanding is that Europe is experiencing a continuous severe refugee crisis – even though numbers of new arrivals sharply declined after 2015.

In the public discourse, the media, and in politics, the term “migration crisis” or “refugee crisis” is interpreted as security threat. Aside from the pressure imposed on state institutions to control borders and to accommodate the mass numbers of newcomers, there is another side to the security threat narrative. National and the socio-economic concerns are paralleled by an understanding that national/European culture and identity is under siege. Cultural differences between the host population and the migrants are seen as highly problematic – if not outright dangerous. The image associated with this narrative is powerful; it is the image of groups of young Muslim males idly hanging around in inner city public spaces doing nothing but playing with their state-of-the-art mobile phones. This image fosters anger and hostility towards these men who apparently enjoy free-of-charge social services financed by their taxpaying and hardworking host societies. This image also supports the belief that these young men are a serious security threat because they are prone to violent extremist ideology – only steps away from joining a terrorist jihadist group fighting the West from within.

The narrative of young Muslim migrants as a serious security threat has been widely propagated by populist parties in Europe, instilling even more fear and rejection in ever-widening circles of the European population. In an effort to address these fears, national and EU policies have put great effort into regaining control over borders and strengthening the rule of law. Hence, national policies, as well as EU neighborhood policy, are increasingly dominated by the quest to make new arrivals impossible, to deport as many illicit migrants as possible, and to pressure governments in the MENA region to bar potential migrants from departing for Europe. Policies promoting security through development that had been guiding European politics towards the MENA region since the “Arab Uprisings” in 2011 have been largely abandoned in favor of a revised understanding of security. All of this comes with the risk of adverse effects on humanitarian assistance provision and neighborhood relationships around the Mediterranean. This transactional approach has led to an increasing rift and distancing in security partnerships.

Questions to think about:

- Do you agree with this short outline of the narrative of the migration crisis in Europe?

As of 06/06/2019
• If this is the situation in Europe – are there similar developments of increasingly hostile sentiments and policies observable in the MENA region and in your own country?
• What is the role of the media (mainstream media and social media) in dealing with the migration crisis?
• What is the impact on neighborhood relations in the Mediterranean region?

Migration and Security

Migration in its many variations is linked to security. As discussed above, security can be defined in multiple ways. To people working in the security sector, “security” means national security – the defense of national (or European, in the case of the EU) borders, the protection of government institutions and critical infrastructure. National security threats are primarily countered by hard security measures. This understanding of security has increasingly dominated EU and national migration politics since 2015.

Others, especially in academia and among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with refugees, do not view refugee migration in the same manner as the security sector and do not believe such hardline measures are warranted.

In recent decades, a new more encompassing understanding of security has emerged. Today, security is seen as having a human dimension – “freedom from want” (of nutrition, health care, shelter, a future) and “freedom from fear” (for life and physical safety). With regard to the people, it is the gross deficit in human security in the MENA region’s civil wars that drives them to flee their homes and seek refuge inside or outside their countries. Furthermore, people in MENA countries not afflicted by the total breakdown of order also leave their homes because they feel that they lack a minimum of “freedom from want,” due to economic hardships, defunct social contracts between the ruling elites and the citizens, and a climate of “politics of fear.”

These are indications that migration – and especially refugee migration – is linked to security and to the notion of a security threat. Sometimes the close relationship between migration and security is a reality. In other cases, it seems to be more of a bias, a perception, a source of fear, and labeling.

Questions to think about:

As of 06/06/2019
Would you agree with this illustration of the security-migration nexus?
How do you experience this nexus considering your national, professional, or gender background?
In your opinion, what are the most important issues when it comes to the migration-security nexus?
Should we re-center the narrative of (refugee) migration as a serious security threat to Europe? If yes, how should we do it?

**Migration and the Youth**

The young unmarried Muslim male from the MENA region has become the most powerful narrative of the security threat societies on both sides of the Mediterranean, and it is fueled by the demographics of the countries of origin. The young generation under thirty-five form the majority in all the MENA countries and each one of them is in search of education, employment, and a decent future. These are needs that their governments are unable to provide for. This “youth bulge” conjures up fear of a mass migration about to flood Europe if borders are not fortified.

Many young people indeed dream of a life abroad because they feel there is no economic, social, and political future in their countries. They believe, as do their peers in Europe, that politics is dominated by the interests of the older generation, which robs them of their own future.

On both sides of the Mediterranean, security measures in terms of domination, defense, blockade, and silencing are meant to ward off the threat emanating from the youth. These narratives and policies prevent viewing the young generation in a positive and affirmative way, and supporting their right to human security. It also stands in the way of welcoming and considering young people as able and willing partners ready to serve their host societies and to share their suggestions of sustainable solutions to the migration crisis.

**Questions to think about:**

As of 06/06/2019
How do you make sense of the topic of youth and migration? How is it discussed/experienced/dealt with in your country?

Is migration of the young generation seen as a loss or an advantage in your country?

How is the young generation presented in the traditional and social media?

What is needed for the MENA youth to remain in their countries of origin?

How can young (refugee) migrants be positive role models in their host societies?

What can be done to permit youth to play a positive role in their own societies so that they do not feel a need to leave their countries?

How can youth be empowered to contribute to sustainable solutions?

How can youth migration be turned into a win-win?

What are the most important issues to be addressed?

**Migration and Local Governance**

The migration-security nexus is usually addressed within a national framework. However, migration takes place at the *local level* – in the community, city, village, and neighborhood. It is the local environment in the MENA region from which the push factors of migration emerge. It is the local communities, municipalities, and civil society that have to integrate refugees, oftentimes without the necessary resources being provided by the nation-state. Refugees are administered and processed, but hardly ever welcomed as a strategic asset for community development in the host society. It is in the locality that the narrative of the young migrant as a security threat is acted out.

Although, it is accurate that large numbers of migrants compete with the local population for scarce resources, local communities, and their governments will have to accept that the challenge will grow, as migration will continue for the foreseeable future. As violent conflicts and economic hardship remain a reality in most MENA countries, migrants will continue to arrive in local communities in spite of all the national and regional security measures taken. Consequently, it is imperative to be pragmatic and think creatively as to how to turn this challenge into an opportunity for everyone involved. At the local level, strengthening local governance may be the right direction to take, as it has the potential to bring the municipality, civil society, schools, employers, and volunteers together. On the national and regional level, networks between communities and municipalities from both sides of the Mediterranean that jointly address the issue are slowly emerging and need to be strengthened.

As of 06/06/2019
Questions to think about:

- How is migration experienced in your local environment, your community, or local government?
- How is migration presented in the media?
- How would you define the links among local, national, and international levels regarding migration?
- What network initiatives exist between mayors and municipalities? What is their focus? How can they learn from each other, how can they support each other?
- How should national authorities support local initiatives?
- What is the role of the security sector in the local environment, if any?
- What are the most important issues to be addressed?