

A New Security Architecture in the Mediterranean? What Role for the EU?

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The title of this contribution, echoing some of the discussions that were held in the context of the Euro-MeSCo Annual Conference in April 2016, is thought-provoking. Indeed, it seems to lean against the perceptions not only of a fragmented Mediterranean but also of a European Union whose footprint in the Mediterranean is weakened by external competition, shifting alliances and sometimes internal disunity.

The following definition of a regional security architecture is a useful starting point: “An overarching coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically defined area, which facilitates the resolution of that region’s policy concerns and achieves its security objectives” (Tow, Brendan; 2010). A quick review of the main components of this definition would be enough to conclude that there is no security architecture in the Mediterranean and that it will be difficult to establish one in the current circumstances. This contribution proposes a typology of security mechanisms in the Mediterranean, looks into sub-regional platforms, reflects on the role of the Union for the Mediterranean and proposes a few thoughts on the role of the European Union.

A Typology of Security Mechanisms in the Mediterranean: a Fragmented Security Landscape

There is a myriad of security initiatives and mechanisms in the Mediterranean. One could identify three categories. First, ad hoc security mechanisms are

initiatives that have been established in relation with a specific security issue or crisis upon the initiative of states or international organizations. Second, sub-regional security fora are intergovernmental mechanisms dealing with a wide range of security issues, with various degrees of institutionalization. The third category relates to broad security initiatives (i.e. unrelated to a specific crisis) taken in the framework of broader international organizations. The table below offers some illustrative examples.

While the proliferation of configurations can be partly explained by the diversity of objectives and geographical scopes, it also reveals and illustrates how fragmented the security landscape is in the Mediterranean. Some security mechanisms may compete with each other and be sponsored by parties with conflicting interests. As such, one can argue that, even combined, all these initiatives do not constitute an overarching coherent and comprehensive security structure according to the definition given above.

The reasons for this fragmentation are well known. First, the absence of a genuine Middle East Peace Process and the difficulties of reaching a two-state solution continue to feed resentments and tensions across the Mediterranean. Second, the competition for regional leadership between Iran and Saudi Arabia has fuelled renewed tensions between Sunni and Shia communities and added a layer of complexity to conflicts in countries such as Yemen or Syria. Third, states in the region are challenged by non-state actors (and in particular jihadist groups) as well as sub-state actors (e.g. Kurds or local Libyan groups) that compete for power. Fourth, some global players continue to use the Mediterranean as a terrain for posturing purposes and for asserting their renewed global ambitions. Energy geopolitics continues to be a key to understanding these fault lines, shifting interests and alliances in the region.

TABLE 8 A Typology of Security Frameworks in the Mediterranean

Creation	Members	Objectives	Activities	Advantages	Limits
Ad Hoc Security Mechanisms					
International Syria Support Group	14/11/2015 ("Vienna Peace talks")	20 countries and international organizations	To accelerate an end to the Syrian conflict and to achieve a lasting political settlement	Mainly declaratory ¹ . Ministerial meetings co-chaired by Russia and the US and task forces	Broad statements without decisive operational follow-up, divided members
Other examples: Friends of Syria group (2002, French initiative), Middle East Quartet, Libya's neighbouring countries (2012, Algerian initiative), United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, EU Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED), United Nations Support Mission in Libya.					
Sub-Regional Security Fora					
Western Mediterranean Forum "5+5 Defence"	1990. First Ministerial meeting in the Defence format in 2004	N: France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain; S: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia	Foster relations between European countries and the Arab Maghreb Union	Regional cooperation projects (Maritime Surveillance, Education & Training, Civil Protection), military drills	Limited geographic scope. Limited integration. Some divisions among southern members
Other examples: The League of Arab States with its various security strings (Peacekeeping force during the Lebanese civil war, Arab peace initiative, project of a joint military force); Although less institutionalized, one could add the triangular cooperation structures in shaping (Egypt, Greece, Cyprus on the one hand and Israel, Greece and Cyprus on the other hand).					
Regional Security Initiatives in the Framework of International Organizations					
NATO Mediterranean Dialogue	1994	NATO + 7 non-NATO countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia)	Contributing to regional security and stability, achieving better mutual understanding	Forum for political consultations and practical cooperation, including a bilateral and a multilateral component	Need to adapt to the new security environment in the Mediterranean. Limited policy convergence and interoperability between NATO and MD members
Other examples: OSCE's Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation (1993), NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (2004)					

A Security Role for the Union of the Mediterranean?

While the Mediterranean can be considered as a rather well-defined geographic area, there is no single overarching security structure gathering all Mediterranean countries. The only comprehensive organization is arguably the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) with its 43 Member States. However, it has no direct security mandate, although one shouldn't underestimate the links between the development agenda it is promoting and the security of the region. Some projects that have been labelled by the UfM have straightforward positive spillover effects in terms of security.

Not to be underestimated either is the potential of the Foreign Ministers meeting that should now be held on a yearly basis. Although security issues are not formally on the agenda of those meetings as

such, these meetings are important gatherings in terms of confidence building and the opportunities they offer for such issues to be discussed between delegations in the margins.

Furthermore, a number of ideas have been floating around regarding the possibility of reinforcing the political and to some extent security mandate of the UfM on the basis of a roadmap that the UfM Secretariat has prepared in consultation with the Co-Presidency. Increasing the political dimension of the Senior Officials Meetings and organizing a regional dialogue on the fight against terrorism and radicalism are two examples of such ideas. It is also worth noting that the EU Global Strategy contains rather innovative language regarding the UfM: "We will back practical cooperation, including through the Union for the Mediterranean, on issues such as border security, trafficking, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, water and food security, energy and

¹ See for example the statement released on 17 May 2016 (www.un.org/sg/offthecuff/index.asp?nid=4528).

climate, infrastructure and disaster management.” Yet, it appears that UfM Member States are not united in pulling the UfM towards this direction. In the South, countries such as Algeria and Egypt are defending the line that the UfM mandate should not move much beyond the development related agenda it has today, a line which is also shared to some extent by some northern European countries.

The 5+5 Dialogue as the Most Complete Security Community in the Mediterranean

In the context of the 5+5 dialogue that covers a number of cooperation areas, Western Mediterranean countries (Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia) have built up an advanced mechanism for dialogue and cooperation in the field of security. The first Defence Ministers meeting in this format was held in 2004. While it is not per se a security architecture according to the definition provided at the beginning of this article, the 5+5 Defence is arguably the most effective security platform in the Mediterranean. This can be explained by a number of factors. According to Dahan Ahmed Mahmoud, executive Director of the Mauritanian Institute for Strategic Studies, the 5+5 is arguably the formation with the least number of spoilers to constructive dialogue among all Euro-Mediterranean fora.² Moreover, the 5+5 Dialogue has had the merit of resisting the temptation to create grand institutions and has remained rather small. According to Roberto Aliboni, scientific advisor of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, effectiveness tends to be inversely proportional to inclusiveness in matters of security cooperation.³ This format has facilitated understanding and trust between its members in an “equal-to-equal” relationship. By its very nature, the 5+5 is a rather confidential process, not prone to outside interference and scrutiny. However, recent developments and notably the creation of the network of Western Mediterranean think tanks seem to indicate that the network has become more open. In the same vein, the 5+5 Defence formation has developed a dedicated website (www.5plus5defence.org/).

However, the 5+5 configuration is not a panacea either. Both blocs are quite heterogeneous. While representatives of the five northern countries see each other a lot in the context of other fora, in particular within EU structures, the southern ones are less integrated and some of them are in open conflict on some issues. Yet, according to Gabriel Busquets, the Spanish Ambassador of the Special Mission for Mediterranean Affairs, the impact of the differences such as on Western Sahara or on the Algerian-Moroccan border should not be overestimated.

Towards Sub-Regional Integration in the Eastern Mediterranean?

The 5+5 format seems to be an inspiring reference if one looks at trends in the Eastern Mediterranean, although the geopolitical parameters in the Eastern Mediterranean are very complex and not settled yet. As illustrated by Eran Lerman, from the Shalem Academic Center, the multiplication of diplomatic visits, meetings and summits involving Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt may indicate a trend towards more structured sub-regional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean inspired by a gradual geo-political convergence of interests that could materialize in cooperation in the field of energy and counter terrorism among others.

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Turkey has watched these trends closely and recent efforts towards rapprochement with Egypt, Israel and Russia are to be analyzed as an attempt to avoid political and diplomatic isolation. Although fragile, there are some indicators of fence-mending efforts between Ankara and Cairo spearheaded by

² Presentation given at the inauguration of the network of Western Mediterranean think tanks organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean in Barcelona on 24 May 2016.

³ Ibidem.

Saudi Arabia. More significantly, a normalization agreement between Israel and Turkey was negotiated in Rome in June 2016. According to the deal and among other provisions, Israel agreed to provide compensation to the families of Mavi Marmara victims and to allow Turkey to renew its humanitarian aid in Gaza. While Turkey and Israel may find it difficult to return to close security cooperation, the possibilities for cooperation in the economic field appear more promising.

What Role for the European Union?

The ambition of the European Union in global affairs and in particular in its neighbourhood has been thwarted by the internal crisis of the EU with the high speed succession of the Greek crisis, the difficult handling of the refugee crisis and the BREXIT, against the backdrop of rising radical political forces in a number of EU Member States. This was acknowledged in an unusually frank manner in the ENP review "The EU cannot alone solve the many challenges of the region, and there are limits to its leverage."

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When it comes to its actorship in its southern neighbourhood, the EU needs to surf between two waves. The first wave to avoid is the wave that would send the EU drifting away from the Mediterranean, under the combined effect of the emergence of new actors, shifting alliances in the region and a lack of decisive actions from the EU. In this regard, it is worth noting that the EU Global Strategy released in June 2016 displays a more combative tone regarding the EU's Foreign Policy in its southern neighbourhood than the ENP review and makes a commendable plea in favour of greater autonomy and responsibility for EU Foreign Policy. In an attempt to avoid being

drawn into the first wave, the EU should not take the second wave either, the wave of hyper-realism that would send the EU drifting away from its core principles. Recent EU Foreign Policy moves vis-à-vis Turkey as well as some strains of the EU Global Strategy seem to indicate a trend towards a more pragmatic and realist EU Foreign Policy, which in itself should not be blamed as long as the EU does not renounce its principles. As Stefan Lehne -visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels- notes, "Mogherini denies any contradiction between interests and values, but in fact the tension between the two is very much present in the text. Advocating 'principled pragmatism,' Mogherini aims for a more realist approach without abandoning the EU's transformational agenda."

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In order to manoeuvre in these difficult waters and contribute to security in the Mediterranean, the EU needs to:

1. Acknowledge that it is well equipped to deal with the security situation in the Mediterranean. In particular, the EU needs to be well aware that its soft power tools are well tailored to dealing with the root causes of the security crisis. While the EU Global Strategy has a strong focus on defence, there is also a welcome reference to the idea of a "joined-up Union" that refers among other things to the need to better integrate internal and external policies of the EU. The focus on societies' resilience is also welcome in this regard.
2. Secure its role in mediation and negotiation formats or 'functional cooperative formats' as they are called in the EU Global Strategy. The EU needs success stories. The precedent of the

Iran nuclear deal with the pivotal role of the European Union and in particular the High Representative and the then Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs Helga Schmid should be a reference.

3. Reinforce the diplomatic credentials and capacity of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The presence of diplomats from Member States in the EEAS should help convey good practices to the EEAS and in particular the capacity to develop sharper geopolitical analysis to guide diplomatic actions. As a sharp connoisseur of the diplomatic machinery of a big Member State but also of the EEAS where he served as a Secretary General, Pierre Vimont (2016) explained that there is “a permanent weakness in most of the strategies developed by the European Union’s institutions, lying precisely in the fact that they are not real strategies, since there is no significant geopolitical analysis.” The articulated effort of the EU Global Strategy to identify ‘lines of action’ when it comes to the Mediterranean and Middle East, including multilateral cooperation, sectorial cooperation with Turkey, engagement in the Gulf and cooperation with neighbours of neighbours, should therefore be welcomed. As Stefan Lehne puts it, the Global Strategy should become a “starting point of systematic efforts of strategic analysis” that would “help infuse EU foreign policy with a greater sense of purpose.”
4. Strengthen the ‘equal to equal’ spirit of its cooperation mechanism. The European Union would be well advised to draw inspiration from the dynamics that characterize the 5+5 dialogue. Too

often, southern partners have perceived EU mechanisms, in particular in the context of the ENP, not only as too scripted but also as patronizing and unbalanced.

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