Security Governance of Asymmetric Threats in the Mediterranean: Agendas, Identity Implications and Global Impacts

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Abstract:

*For decades, the Mediterranean region has grabbled with unique challenges from asymmetric threats such as: terrorism, illegal immigration, organized crime, cyber attacks, and maritime vulnerabilities, all necessitating nuanced security governance. This article examines the interplay between national/*regional agendas, identity *interference and global influences to (re)shape the security governance arrangements in the Mediterranean. I will draw on content analysis of the regional security strategies and Institutional/constructivist approaches to capture the main elements of the subject. The article concludes that disparate accounts of the security governance of asymmetric threats in the region could be explained by the combination of regional rational institutionalism with identity nuances in facing asymmetric threats; furthermore, extra-regional events are deeply influencing the Mediterranean security, a fact that prompts broader collaboration beyond the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea.*

Keywords: *Security Governance; Asymmetric Threats; Mediterranean Region; Institutionalism; Constructivism.*

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Introduction:

The Mediterranean region, characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures and intricate geopolitical dynamics, has consistently faced a spectrum of asymmetric threats. These challenges, notably terrorism, illegal immigration, organized crime, cyber-attacks, and maritime vulnerabilities, necessitate a nuanced and sophisticated approach to security governance. Understanding how these diverse threats are managed is crucial, as they directly impact the region's stability. The central aim of this study is to dissect the complex dynamics of security governance within the Mediterranean, focusing on the interplay between national/regional agendas, the influence of identity, and the impact of global power dynamics. This analysis is pivotal in comprehending how these various components interact and collectively shape the region's response to the ever-evolving landscape of asymmetric threats.

Guided by existing literature, this study is centered around a critical question: How do national and regional priorities, intertwined with identity factors and global forces, influence the management of asymmetric security challenges in the Mediterranean region? The research assumes that variations in governance responses to these threats are influenced not only by the lack of coherence between unilateral/multilateral policy trends but also significantly by underlying identity-related factors and external geopolitical influences. To explore this state of affairs, the study will draw on institutionalist and constructivist perspectives, thus examining both the explicit institutional structures and the nuanced elements of identity and culture that underpin overlapping and conflicting policies.

1. Unilateralism at Odds: Striving for Efficiency in the Shadow of Multilateralism's Necessity

The Mediterranean region's unilateral policies, targeting asymmetric threats, reveal a complex web of strategies marked by overlapping and contradictory elements. Korkmaz (2008, p. 142) critiques these strategies for their failure to tackle the root causes of asymmetric threats, highlighting their focus on short-term objectives and immediate self-interest over long-term stability. Such strategies often neglect the intricate, transnational character of threats like terrorism, trafficking, and migration, which demand collaborative responses instead of isolated actions. McKenzie (2000) further underscores this issue, pointing to the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of approaches among Mediterranean nations. This fragmentation arises from divergent national interests and the influence of external actors, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes conflicting regional threat responses.

Blank (2003), however, presents a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging some benefits of unilateral policies. These advantages include the ability of states to respond promptly and decisively, tailoring their strategies to specific challenges without the constraints of multilateral decision-making. Nevertheless, the efficacy of such policies largely depends on the capacity and resources of individual states. Additionally, these unilateral actions can be perceived as aggressive or destabilizing, potentially intensifying regional tensions. It's important to acknowledge that while unilateral strategies may offer immediate security benefits to individual states (Daoudy, 2009, p. 363), they can impede cooperative efforts across the region. Such actions, often viewed as provocative, can exacerbate tensions and conflicts among states. The paradox lies in unilateral strategies designed to mitigate threats inadvertently creating new challenges and obstructing collective action.

Table 1: Demonstrating examples of Mediterranean countries unilateral conflicting policies

Nature of the Asymmetric Threat	Example of a unilateral stricter approach	Example of a unilateral open approach
Illegal immigration	**Italy**: Fortified borders, return agreements, detention centers, criminalization of assistance	**Greece**: Regularization programs, access to services, labor market integration, focus on root causes
Terrorism	**France**: Increased surveillance, stricter border controls, pre-emptive measures	**Tunisia**: Dialogue and engagement, focus on countering extremist ideologies
Organized crime	**Italy**: Anti-mafia laws, asset seizures, infiltration of criminal organizations	**Morocco**: Anti-corruption measures, judicial independence, protection of witnesses
Cybercriminality	**Egypt**: Strong data protection laws, focus on prevention	**Algeria**: Emphasis on cyber intelligence and disruption of criminal networks
Maritime vulnerabilities	**Spain**: Increased coast guard patrols	**Turkey**: Focus on maritime safety regulations

Source: Reports of global and regional agencies detailed in the bibliography

The table presents a comparative overview of the contrasting approaches adopted by Mediterranean countries in addressing a range of security threats. It

highlights the divergent strategies employed by Italy and Greece in tackling illegal immigration, with Italy emphasizing stricter border controls and return agreements, while Greece prioritizes regularization programs and integration efforts. Similarly, France and Tunisia exhibit differing approaches to combating terrorism, with France favoring increased surveillance and pre-emptive measures, while Tunisia advocates for dialogue and engagement. Italy and Morocco also diverge in their strategies against organized crime, with Italy implementing anti-mafia laws and asset seizures, while Morocco focuses on anti-corruption measures and judicial independence. Egypt and Algeria demonstrate contrasting approaches to cybercriminality, with Egypt emphasizing strong data protection laws and prevention, while Algeria prioritizes cyber intelligence and disruption of criminal networks. Finally, Spain and Turkey exhibit differing strategies in addressing maritime vulnerabilities, with Spain focusing on increased coast guard patrols and cooperation with neighboring countries, while Turkey prioritizes maritime safety regulations. These contrasting approaches reflect the unique challenges and priorities faced by each Mediterranean country in addressing these security threats.

Although unilateral policies provide certain advantages in terms of rapid response and autonomy, their capacity to effectively manage the complex array of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean is limited. These policies tend to result in a disjointed response, potentially aggravating tensions and compromising the overarching objective of regional security and stability. Therefore, a transition towards multilateral cooperation, encompassing all pertinent stakeholders, is imperative to devise more effective strategies. This collaborative approach can cultivate mutual understanding, amalgamate resources, and bolster the ability to address asymmetric threats comprehensively and sustainably.

2. The quest for Multilateralism:

In the face of asymmetric threats that transcend national boundaries, jeopardizing regional security and stability, unilateralism has proven to be an inadequate approach, so a multilateral approach is indispensable. Multilateralism offers several advantages in addressing asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean: Shared Intelligence and Information Sharing: Facilitates the exchange of intelligence and information, allowing countries to identify and track emerging threats more effectively; Joint Operations and Capacity Building: Enables countries to pool resources and expertise to conduct joint operations against asymmetric threats and support capacity building in countries with limited resources; Addressing Root Causes: Can address the root causes of asymmetric threats, such as poverty, social inequality, and political instability; Promoting International Norms and Laws: Fosters the development and implementation of international norms and laws that govern responses to asymmetric threats; Legitimacy and

Public Support: Brings legitimacy and public support to efforts against asymmetric threats, enhancing their effectiveness and gaining broader public acceptance.

Multilateral policies and strategies play a crucial role in addressing asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean region. As argued by Korkmaz (2008), these threats are complex and transnational in nature, requiring a coordinated and collaborative approach to effectively address them. Multilateralism, through the involvement of multiple actors such as international organizations, regional bodies, and individual states, provides a platform for cooperation and collective action. For instance, the European Union (EU) has been actively involved in promoting multilateral strategies to tackle asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean. Through initiatives like the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU seeks to enhance regional cooperation, strengthen border security, and promote stability in the Mediterranean.

By bringing together different stakeholders, multilateral policies facilitate the sharing of information, intelligence, and resources, enabling a comprehensive response to asymmetric threats. Furthermore, multilateralism serves as a mechanism to build trust and foster dialogue among states, which is essential for addressing the underlying causes of these threats. (Korkmaz, 2008).

The effectiveness of the European Union (EU), Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and the Mediterranean Partnership (MPartnership) in combating asymmetric threats has been subject to analysis. Bouckaert and Delputte (2020) argue that these organizations have made significant strides in addressing asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean region. The EU's comprehensive approach to security, which encompasses military, diplomatic, and development dimensions, has allowed it to tackle a wide range of challenges effectively. The UfM, with its focus on regional cooperation and dialogue, has provided a platform for member states to address common security concerns. Additionally, the MPartnership has facilitated collaborations between the EU and Mediterranean countries, enhancing their capacity to combat asymmetric threats. However, it is important to note that challenges remain.

The collaboration between Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and the 5+5 Forum in securing the Mediterranean region is a significant development in the efforts to address migration and security challenges in the area. The 5+5 Forum, established in 1990, brings together the five North African countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) and five European countries (France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain) to promote dialogue and cooperation in various fields, including security and migration. This collaboration serves as a platform for exchanging information, coordinating actions, and enhancing operational cooperation among the participating countries

(Papagiorcopulo). Frontex, on the other hand, is an EU agency responsible for coordinating border management and operational cooperation among member states.

Table 2: Summarizing Mediterranean Intergovernmental Agencies Major Achievements and Failures in Fighting Against Asymmetric Threats

Name of the Inter-governmental Agency	Major Achievements in Fighting Asymmetric Threats	Main Failures in Fighting Asymmetric Threats
European Union (EU, 1993, 27 Members)	-Successful implementation of shared intelligence frameworks. Effective border management through Frontex.	Struggles with consensus-building among members on migration policies. Inconsistent responses to the refugee crisis.
Union for the Mediterranean (UfM, 2008, 42 Members)	Facilitation of regional dialogue and cooperation. Initiatives in sustainable development and education.	Limited impact on resolving political conflicts. Challenges in integrating economic policies across diverse economies.
Mediterranean Partnership (MPartnership, 1994, Varied Members)	Promoting regional stability through collaboration. Engagement in environmental and cultural projects.	Limited influence in policy-making beyond cultural and environmental areas. Inadequate response to security crises.
5+5 Dialogue (1990, 10 Members)	Enhancement of cooperation in defense and security matters. Effective maritime surveillance initiatives.	Inconsistencies in immigration policies among member states. Difficulties in coordinating counter-terrorism efforts.
European Union (EU, 1993, 27 Members)	Successful implementation of shared intelligence frameworks. Effective border management through Frontex.	Struggles with consensus-building among members on migration policies. Inconsistent responses to the refugee crisis.
Union for the Mediterranean (UfM, 2008, 42 Members)	Facilitation of regional dialogue and cooperation. Initiatives in sustainable development and education.	Limited impact on resolving political conflicts. Challenges in integrating economic policies across diverse economies.

Source: Reports of global and regional agencies detailed in the bibliography

This table offers a comprehensive overview of various Mediterranean intergovernmental agencies dedicated to addressing asymmetric threats such as illegal immigration, terrorism, organized crime, cybercriminality, and maritime vulnerabilities. Organized alphabetically, it includes the name of each agency, its date of creation, and the current number of member states, providing a succinct reference to the organizational structure and scope. The table further delves into the major achievements and notable failures of these agencies, giving a balanced view of their effectiveness and challenges in combating these threats. This representation is instrumental for understanding the collaborative efforts and limitations of regional entities in managing complex security issues in the Mediterranean context

Through the coming sections, the article will explore factors that constrain the cooperative approach within intergovernmental agencies: identity based attitudes and global repercussions.

3. Limitations of the Cooperative Approach – Identity Implications:

National and regional identities play a crucial role in shaping governance strategies for Mediterranean security, as argued by Pace (2005, p.), these identities are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and political contexts, and have a significant impact on the development and implementation of security policies in the region. The Mediterranean is a diverse and complex area, encompassing countries with distinct national and regional identities such as Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey. These identities are often shaped by historical conflicts, territorial disputes, and power dynamics that have persisted for centuries. For example, the longstanding rivalry between Greece and Turkey has influenced their respective security strategies and the way they engage with other countries in the region. Similarly, the historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism has shaped the national and regional identities of countries in North Africa and the Middle East, leading to distinct governance approaches to security. These identities are not static, but rather evolve over time in response to changing political and social dynamics. As a result, governance strategies for Mediterranean security must take into account the complexities and nuances of national and regional identities in order to effectively address the diverse security challenges in the region (Pace, 2005, p. 204).

Johnston (2013, p. 125) highlights the impactful role of cultural and religious identities in managing asymmetric security threats. These identities can be both beneficial and detrimental. Cultural identity unifies communities, promoting resilience and collaboration, especially during crises, leading to effective threat responses. Religious identity influences perceptions and responses to threats, as religious beliefs often emphasize peace and justice. However, these identities can

also intensify threats if they create divisions and conflicts, especially among different groups with opposing beliefs. Addressing such security challenges then requires understanding and dialogue among diverse cultural and religious groups, underscoring the complexity of these identities in security contexts. So what are the accounts that we could be drawn from a constructivist perspective in IR to the Mediterranean landscape of security governance.

From a constructivist perspective, national and regional identities are not merely static labels but social constructs that are continually being negotiated and contested (Wendt, 1999). These identities shape how states perceive and respond to security threats, and they also influence the norms and rules that govern international cooperation. In the Mediterranean, national and regional identities are particularly complex and fluid, due to the region's rich history, diverse cultures, and overlapping political systems. This complexity makes it difficult to develop a single, overarching framework for Mediterranean security governance. Instead, a constructivist approach suggests that governance strategies should be tailored to the specific identities and interests of the countries and regions involved (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 158).

Constructivists argue that cultural and religious identities can be both a source of strength and a source of vulnerability in the face of asymmetric security threats. On the one hand, these identities can provide a sense of unity and shared purpose, which can help communities to mobilize and respond effectively to crises. For example, the shared cultural identity of Mediterranean communities can facilitate cooperation and information sharing in the aftermath of natural disasters or terrorist attacks. On the other hand, these identities can also be exploited to create divisions and fuel conflict. Religious extremism, for instance, can be a powerful tool for mobilizing individuals to engage in violence. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of how cultural and religious identities are constructed and how they can be used to promote both cooperation and conflict (Lechner, 2011, p. 87).

The influence of identity on the perception of the threats by consequence the Mediterranean countries attitudes within intergovernmental agencies could be tracked through the failures of these agencies dealing with asymmetric threats. Highlighting how different actors, including those within multilateral agencies, perceive and respond to threats based on their identity narratives would help understand the issue. The research has shown that identity plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding, interpretation, and response to asymmetric security challenges in the region. This is evident in the varying approaches taken by Mediterranean countries to address issues such as terrorism, migration, and maritime security. For instance, countries with a strong national identity may prioritize border security measures, while those with a more regional identity may

emphasize cooperation and dialogue. By recognizing the significance of identity, policymakers and stakeholders can develop more effective strategies and policies that take into account the diverse perspectives and interests of the Mediterranean countries.

4. Global Repercussions on the Region Fragile Institutional Fabric:

4.1. The Impact of COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the response to asymmetric security threats in the Mediterranean region. As argued by Czech et al. (2020, p. 3), the pandemic has acted as a catalyst for various security challenges, including irregular migration, terrorism, and organized crime. The authors emphasize that the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus have inadvertently disrupted the security landscape in the Mediterranean, creating both opportunities and challenges for various actors. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had a significant impact on public health but has also exposed vulnerabilities in governance strategies for addressing asymmetric security threats in the Mediterranean region. As asserted by Jaidi (2020, p. 12), the post-COVID-19 era calls for a reassessment of governance approaches to effectively tackle security challenges. The pandemic has highlighted the interconnectedness of various security dimensions, including health security, economic security, and social stability, necessitating a holistic approach to governance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to global security, particularly in the Mediterranean region. Asymmetric security threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, and illegal migration, have become even more complex in the face of the ongoing health crisis. In managing these threats, international collaboration plays a crucial role. According to Kortunov and Magri (2020, p. 14), international cooperation is essential in addressing the multifaceted security challenges in the Mediterranean. The authors argue that no single country or organization can effectively tackle these issues alone. Instead, a collective effort is required to enhance intelligence sharing, strengthen border controls, and promote regional stability. The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably had a significant impact on the governance of asymmetric security threats in the Mediterranean. The outbreak has not only highlighted the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the region's security infrastructure but has also necessitated the development of new strategies and approaches to address these challenges. Governments and international organizations have been forced to adapt quickly to the evolving nature of security threats in the face of a global health crisis. Moving forward, it is crucial for policymakers to prioritize cooperation, information sharing,

and resource allocation to effectively manage and mitigate the risks posed by asymmetric security threats in the Mediterranean. By learning from the lessons of the pandemic and implementing comprehensive and coordinated measures, the region can enhance its resilience and ensure the safety and well-being of its populations.

4.2. The Impact of the War in Ukraine:

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has undoubtedly heightened security concerns in the Mediterranean region, prompting a reassessment of governance strategies to address evolving threats (Saini, 2022, p. 640). The conflict has underscored the interconnectedness of global security challenges, emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation and coordination among Mediterranean countries and international partners (Fabbri, 2022, p. 656). One of the most immediate repercussions is the potential for spillover effects, particularly in terms of arms proliferation and the flow of foreign fighters (Alfonsi, 2022, p. 678). The conflict could also exacerbate existing security challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and illegal migration. In response, Mediterranean countries have strengthened their border security measures and intelligence sharing efforts.

Moreover, the invasion has reinvigorated efforts to revitalize the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), a framework for cooperation between the European Union and Mediterranean countries (Fabbri, 2022, p. 656). The EMP aims to promote regional stability and address common security challenges through dialogue, economic cooperation, and capacity-building.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also disrupted regional dynamics and exposed diverging interests among Mediterranean actors (Sanchez-Montero, 2022, p. 692). The conflict has strained relations between Russia and its traditional allies in the region, such as Algeria and Syria (Tocci, 2022, p. 716). Conversely, it has strengthened ties between Ukraine and its Western allies, including Italy, Spain, and France (Sanchez-Montero, 2022, p. 692). The invasion has also highlighted the delicate balance between security concerns and economic interests in the Mediterranean (Charoudi, 2022, p. 730). Many Mediterranean countries have significant economic ties with Russia, particularly in the energy sector (Charoudi, 2022, p. 730). This has created a complex situation for these countries, as they seek to maintain their economic relationships while also condemning Russia's actions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a profound impact on Mediterranean governance of security threats. The conflict has heightened security concerns, prompted a reassessment of governance strategies, and disrupted regional dynamics. Moving forward, Mediterranean countries and international partners will need to navigate these complex challenges through enhanced cooperation, diplomacy, and a willingness to address both immediate and long-term security threats.

Conclusion:

The Mediterranean region, with its rich historical background and complex geopolitical landscape, stands as a pivotal area confronted with a spectrum of asymmetric threats. These range from terrorism and organized crime to cyberattacks and maritime vulnerabilities, which challenge not only the regional security mechanisms but also impact its socio-political fabric. The management of these issues is further complicated by the fusion of regional agendas and identity politics, adding layers to the governance complexity. Simultaneously, the interconnected nature of our global community means that events beyond the Mediterranean, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, significantly influence its security dynamics, necessitating a reevaluation of existing security frameworks and broader regional cooperation.

Content analysis of regional security strategies highlights the critical interplay between national interests, regional agendas, identity politics, and global influences, shaping the Mediterranean's approach to security governance. This situation calls for a nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives and interests of Mediterranean actors, emphasizing the importance of inclusive and adaptable governance mechanisms. The interplay of institutionalist principles with the nuances of identity narratives leads to varied approaches in addressing asymmetric threats, fostering both collaborative and competitive dynamics among Mediterranean actors.

These observations emphasize the need for a comprehensive and collaborative strategy that integrates regional cooperation, technological advancements, and mutual understanding among diverse populations. Such a strategy, informed by both institutional and constructivist approaches, should consider shared norms, power dynamics, and identity narratives, essential in shaping security policies and practices. The implications of these findings stress the necessity for adaptable governance mechanisms capable of responding to the evolving nature of asymmetric threats and the importance of continued research on the interplay of regional, extra-regional, and identity factors.

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