



*"Economic Dimensions of Asymmetric Threats in the
Mediterranean: Sources, Consequences, and Remedies"*

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Received :27/01/2024

Accepted :24/02/2024

Abstract:

In response to the escalating asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean, including terrorism, illegal immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity, this study investigates how economic factors contribute to a perpetuating cycle of these threats and their severe economic impacts. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, grounded in qualitative analysis and augmented with relevant quantitative data, the analysis seeks to dissect the intricate economic dimensions of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean. The findings reveal a cyclical pattern

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where economic factors not only give rise to these threats but are also exacerbated by them, leading to heightened economic instability. The study highlights the potential of economic resilience in breaking this destructive cycle. It concludes with the necessity for integrated policies that strategically combine economic and security measures, emphasizing that effective mitigation of these threats requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both their economic roots and their security implications.

- ✓ Keywords: Asymmetric Threats; Mediterranean Economy; Economic Resilience; Security Governance; Regional Cooperation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean region is at the epicenter of numerous modern challenges, among these are asymmetric threats – phenomena characterized by the imbalance in power and tactics between state and non-state actors. This study aims to dissect the economic underpinnings of such threats, including terrorism, illegal immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity. A central question driving this research is: How do economic factors fuel a perpetuating cycle of escalating asymmetric threats, which in turn lead to severe economic impacts, further exacerbating these challenges, and what role can economic resilience play in breaking this cycle and mitigating these threats?

To answer this, the paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, primarily rooted in qualitative analysis, and supplemented by available quantitative data pertinent to the topic. The findings aim to provide insights into the profound economic impacts of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean and advocate for solutions that encompass economic resilience and strategic regional cooperation. The study underscores the need for integrated policies that marry economic strategies with security measures, a critical step towards ensuring breaking the escalation cycle and mitigating these

threats.

1. Historical Context and Definitional Landscape of Asymmetric Threats in the Mediterranean

Asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean refer to security challenges that are characterized by an imbalance in power and capabilities between adversaries. According to Korkmaz (2008), asymmetric threats are defined as "phenomena in which non-state actors or weaker states employ unconventional means to counter the militarily superior forces of states." These threats typically involve non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, or criminal networks that operate outside the conventional framework of warfare. The characteristics of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean include their ability to exploit vulnerabilities and gaps in security systems, their use of unconventional tactics and strategies, and their capacity to adapt and evolve rapidly. These threats often target civilian populations, critical infrastructure, and economic interests, posing significant challenges to regional stability and security. Additionally, asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean are often transnational in nature, crossing borders and requiring a coordinated response from multiple states and international organizations. The Mediterranean region, with its complex geopolitical dynamics and proximity to conflict zones, provides fertile ground for the emergence and proliferation of asymmetric threats. Consequently, effective countermeasures must be developed to address these challenges and mitigate their impact on regional security and stability (Korkmaz, 2008).

The dimensions of asymmetric threats encompass a range of complex and interconnected issues that pose significant challenges to national and international security. As SD Bachmann and H Gunneriusson (2014) note in their study, terrorism, illegal immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity are all critical components of asymmetric threats. Terrorism has emerged as a prominent asymmetric threat in the modern world, with non-state actors using violence and fear

to achieve their objectives. The rise of transnational terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, has further intensified the threat landscape. Illegal immigration, on the other hand, poses challenges to national borders and internal security. It involves the movement of individuals across borders without proper authorization, leading to potential economic, social, and security concerns for receiving countries. The issue of cybersecurity vulnerabilities has gained significant attention in recent years due to the increasing reliance on technology and the interconnectedness of global systems. Cyberattacks, whether perpetrated by state-sponsored actors or independent hackers, can disrupt critical infrastructure, compromise sensitive data, and undermine national security. Lastly, maritime insecurity encompasses a multitude of threats, including piracy, smuggling, and territorial disputes, which can disrupt maritime trade routes and regional stability. These dimensions of asymmetric threats, examined by Bachmann and Gunneriusson, highlight the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by policymakers and security agencies in maintaining global security and stability (Bachmann and Gunneriusson, 2014).

Asymmetric threats have had a significant impact on the Mediterranean region, with far-reaching implications for the security and stability of the area. According to Maisaia (2021), these threats have emerged as a result of complex and dynamic factors, including political instability, socio-economic disparities, and the proliferation of non-state actors. The impact of these asymmetric threats has been felt not only by the countries within the region but also by the international community as a whole. For instance, terrorist activities carried out by groups like ISIS have not only caused loss of life and destruction but have also led to a sense of fear and insecurity among the local population. Additionally, the influx of illegal migrants has put immense pressure on the Mediterranean countries, straining their resources and creating social and economic challenges. Furthermore, the rise of maritime piracy has adversely affected trade and commerce in the region, hindering economic development. The implications of these asymmetric threats are multifaceted. They

pose a threat to the stability and security of the Mediterranean region, undermining efforts towards peacebuilding and regional cooperation. Moreover, they have the potential to spill over and impact neighboring regions, exacerbating existing conflicts and creating new ones. Therefore, addressing these asymmetric threats is crucial for ensuring the overall security and prosperity of the Mediterranean region.

2. Economic Sources of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean Region

The economic situation has had a profound impact on the Mediterranean Region, leading to an explosion of asymmetric threats such as terrorism, illegal immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity. These threats are not only fueled by various factors but also find their roots in economic causes and sources. Firstly, economic causes play a significant role in driving asymmetric threats in the region. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality create fertile ground for radicalization, making individuals more susceptible to engaging in acts of terrorism. Additionally, economic instability and lack of opportunities push people towards illegal immigration as they seek better socio-economic conditions. Moreover, economic sources contribute to the proliferation of terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Illicit trade, including drug trafficking and arms smuggling, thrive in economically deprived regions, providing financial support to terrorist organizations and fueling their activities. Furthermore, economic disparities and inadequate investment in cybersecurity infrastructure make the region vulnerable to cyber attacks, compromising its digital security. Finally, the economic situation also impacts maritime insecurity in the Mediterranean Region. Economic instability and lack of resources lead to a rise in piracy and organized crime in coastal areas, posing a threat to maritime trade and security. In conclusion, the economic situation in the Mediterranean Region has not only caused an increase in asymmetric threats but also serves as a breeding ground for their development. Understanding and addressing the economic causes and sources of these threats are crucial steps in promoting stability, security, and prosperity in the region.

According to Štrbac and Mitrović (2011), one of the key economic causes of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean region is the vast wealth disparity between countries. This economic disparity creates a breeding ground for various types of threats, as poorer nations are more vulnerable to exploitation and radicalization. The authors argue that this wealth disparity is a result of historical, political, and socio-economic factors, such as colonial legacies, limited access to resources, and unequal distribution of wealth. Moreover, economic disparities lead to significant disparities in development and living standards, which can exacerbate grievances and fuel resentment, ultimately leading to asymmetric threats. Therefore, addressing economic inequalities and promoting inclusive economic growth should be a priority in mitigating these threats in the Mediterranean region (Štrbac & Mitrović).

The economic sources of terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities are interconnected and have profound implications for national security. According to Colarik (2006), economic factors play a significant role in the perpetuation of terrorism. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities can create a breeding ground for extremist ideologies and recruitment. Terrorist organizations often exploit economic grievances and offer financial incentives to recruit individuals who are marginalized and desperate for economic stability. Additionally, illegal immigration can be driven by economic factors as individuals seek better economic opportunities in other countries. Economic disparities between countries, such as income inequality and limited job prospects, can push individuals to resort to illegal means of migration. Furthermore, these economic disparities can contribute to cybersecurity vulnerabilities. As countries strive to bridge the economic gap, they often prioritize economic growth without adequately investing in cybersecurity measures. This makes them more susceptible to cyberattacks and information breaches. Therefore, addressing economic sources of terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities requires a

multifaceted approach that includes promoting economic development, reducing income inequality, and strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure. (Colarik, 2006)

The economic situation has also a significant impact on maritime insecurity. As argued by Mair (2011), economic factors such as high unemployment rates, poverty, and income inequality contribute to the rise of maritime insecurity in the region. The economic downturn experienced by many countries in the Mediterranean has led to limited job opportunities and a lack of economic prospects for the younger generation, which in turn has fueled social unrest and political instability. This, in combination with the presence of organized crime networks and the proliferation of illicit activities such as drug trafficking and smuggling, has created an environment conducive to maritime insecurity. Moreover, the economic challenges faced by coastal communities have also resulted in increased illegal fishing practices, further exacerbating the problem. Therefore, addressing the economic situation in the Mediterranean region is crucial for effectively tackling maritime insecurity (Mair 2011).

Economic situation has undeniably played a significant role in fueling the explosion of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean Region. These threats have found their roots in economic causes and sources. Economic disparities, poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities have created an environment ripe for the emergence and proliferation of these challenges. It's not surprising how most of the asymmetric threats stem from complex economic factors that contribute to their emergence and persistence. The pursuit of economic gains, including the control of vital resources, territorial disputes, and pronounced economic disparities, has propelled these threats into a widespread phenomenon. Meanwhile, their economic impacts contribute to further economic crises, leading to an escalating cycle of threats and exacerbating the overall situation.

3. Economic impacts of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean Region

Negative economic factors fuel asymmetric threats, creating a cyclical pattern that places substantial repercussions on the economies of the region. Terrorism has significant economic consequences in the Mediterranean Region. Drakos and Kutan (2003) argue that terrorism negatively impacts economic growth, as it increases uncertainty and reduces investment, trade, and tourism. The authors conducted a comprehensive study using panel data analysis, examining the relationship between terrorism and economic performance in the region. Their findings indicate that terrorism has a detrimental effect on economic growth, as countries experiencing higher levels of terrorism tend to have lower GDP growth rates. This is primarily due to the heightened insecurity and fear that terrorism creates, leading to reduced investment and a decline in business confidence. Furthermore, terrorism disrupts international trade by increasing transportation costs and creating barriers to market entry, thereby impeding economic integration and hindering regional development. In addition, the tourism industry, a vital source of revenue for many Mediterranean countries, is severely affected by terrorism. The threat of attacks and the negative perception associated with terrorism discourage tourists from visiting the region, resulting in declining visitor numbers and a loss of income for businesses in the tourism sector. Consequently, the economic consequences of terrorism in the Mediterranean Region are significant, leading to reduced economic growth, hindered trade, and a decline in the tourism industry (Drakos and Kutan, 2003).

Illegal immigration in the Mediterranean Region has significant economic implications that affect both the host countries and the migrants themselves. According to Reyneri (2004), the influx of undocumented migrants puts pressure on the labor market and can lead to downward pressure on wages for low-skilled workers. This is particularly apparent in industries such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work, where undocumented migrants are often employed. The availability of a large pool of cheap labor can lead to exploitation and the violation of labor rights, as employers take advantage of the vulnerable situation of these

migrants. Additionally, the informal nature of the employment often means that these workers do not have access to social security benefits or proper working conditions, further exacerbating their precarious situation (Reyneri, 2004). On the other hand, host countries may benefit from the economic contributions of undocumented migrants through their participation in sectors that are less attractive to local workers. For example, in agriculture, the availability of migrant labor ensures the viability of the industry and helps maintain food production levels (Reyneri, 2004). However, the economic benefits derived from undocumented migrants are often overshadowed by the strain they place on public services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare systems (Reyneri, 2004). Consequently, the economic implications of illegal immigration in the Mediterranean Region are complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative effects on the host countries and the migrants themselves.

The Mediterranean Region has been facing significant challenges in terms of cybersecurity vulnerabilities and maritime insecurity, which have had profound economic effects. According to Kapalidis (2020), these issues have created a sense of uncertainty and instability in the region, impacting various economic sectors. One of the key economic effects is the loss of revenue for maritime industries. The Mediterranean plays a crucial role in international trade, serving as a major transit route for goods and energy resources between Europe, Africa, and Asia. However, the presence of cybersecurity vulnerabilities and maritime insecurity has hindered the smooth flow of trade and increased the risk of piracy and terrorist attacks. As a result, shipping companies have been forced to take additional security measures, such as hiring armed guards and investing in advanced cybersecurity systems, leading to a significant increase in operational costs. Furthermore, the fear of maritime insecurity has deterred foreign investors from engaging in economic activities in the region, thus limiting the potential for economic growth and development. These economic effects highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies and collaborations among Mediterranean countries to address cybersecurity vulnerabilities and enhance

maritime security (Kapalidis, 2020). By implementing robust cybersecurity measures and strengthening maritime security frameworks, the region can mitigate the economic impact of these vulnerabilities and create a safer and more stable environment for economic activities to thrive. (Ibid.)

Asymmetric threats pose not only immediate dangers to the safety and security of the region, but also impose heavy economic burdens on affected countries. The costs associated with counter-terrorism measures, border control efforts, and cybersecurity enhancements can strain national budgets and hinder economic growth. Additionally, the disruptions caused by these threats can disrupt trade, tourism, and investment, further diminishing economic prospects. It is crucial for governments, international organizations, and stakeholders to collaborate in addressing these challenges, implementing effective strategies, and fostering regional cooperation to mitigate the economic impacts and promote stability in the Mediterranean Region.

4. Economic Solutions of of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean Region

To effectively address asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean, it is crucial to explore economic solutions that go beyond traditional security measures. We will examine three key supporting points: firstly, the importance of strengthening regional cooperation to address these asymmetric threats; secondly, the implementation of effective economic policies to combat terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities; and finally, the significance of enhancing maritime security through economic investments and strategic partnerships. By considering these points, the Mediterranean Region can forge a path towards greater stability and resilience in the face of these complex challenges.

Strengthening regional cooperation is crucial in addressing asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean region. Asymmetric threats, such as terrorism, piracy, and irregular migration, require a collaborative effort among neighboring countries to

effectively combat them. According to Marquina (2019), regional cooperation plays a significant role in enhancing security and stability in the Mediterranean. Through joint intelligence sharing, coordinated military operations, and information exchange, countries can better respond to and prevent asymmetric threats. For instance, the establishment of the European Union's (EU) Operation Sophia in 2015 aimed to disrupt human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Mediterranean. This operation involved the cooperation of several countries, including naval assets from various EU member states. Additionally, initiatives like the 5+5 Dialogue, which brings together five countries from the European side and five from the North African side, have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and cooperation in the region. These examples demonstrate the importance of regional collaboration in addressing asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean. By working together, countries can pool their resources, expertise, and intelligence to effectively combat these complex challenges (Marquina, 2019).

Implementing effective economic policies is crucial in addressing terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. According to White (2016), economic policies play a significant role in combating these security threats. One way to tackle terrorism is by cutting off its financial resources. Governments can establish stringent regulations and monitoring systems to prevent the flow of funds to terrorist organizations. Additionally, economic policies focused on addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty and unemployment, can help reduce the recruitment pool for extremist groups. In terms of illegal immigration, economic policies can target the economic incentives that drive individuals to leave their home countries. By addressing economic disparities and providing opportunities for economic growth, countries can discourage illegal migration. Furthermore, economic policies can play a crucial role in strengthening cybersecurity. Governments can invest in research and development, education, and infrastructure to enhance cybersecurity capabilities. By prioritizing cybersecurity in economic policies, countries can foster

innovation and create a secure digital environment. In conclusion, the implementation of effective economic policies is essential in addressing terrorism, illegal immigration, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities (White).

Enhancing maritime security through economic investments and strategic partnerships is a crucial objective in today's globalized world. As highlighted by Conway, Roughead, and Allen (2008), this approach is essential for safeguarding maritime trade routes and ensuring the stability of the international maritime domain. Economic investments play a pivotal role in enhancing maritime security by promoting the development of infrastructure, technology, and capabilities necessary for effective maritime operations. By investing in port facilities, surveillance systems, and communication networks, countries can strengthen their maritime security apparatus and effectively monitor and respond to potential threats. Moreover, strategic partnerships among nations are instrumental in fostering collaboration and coordination in addressing maritime security challenges. These partnerships not only facilitate information sharing and intelligence cooperation but also enable joint patrols, exercises, and capacity-building initiatives. By combining their resources, expertise, and capabilities, countries can enhance their maritime security posture and effectively combat piracy, arms smuggling, and other transnational threats. Therefore, it is imperative for nations to prioritize economic investments and strategic partnerships to ensure the safety and security of the global maritime domain (Conway, Roughead, & Allen, 2008).

A table summarizing the asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean region, their economic sources, impacts and remedies:

Asymmetric Threat	Economic Causes	Economic Impacts	Example from the Mediterranean	Economic Remedies/Solutions
Terrorism	Poverty, unemployment, socio-economic disparities	Reduced tourism, decreased foreign investment, increased security costs	Terrorist attacks in France (2015) led to a drop in tourism	Job creation programs, economic development, counter-radicalization efforts
Illegal Immigration	Economic disparities, lack of opportunities	Strain on public resources, labor market disruptions	Migration crisis in Italy and Greece due to conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East	Strengthening economic conditions in origin countries, legal migration pathways
Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities	Digital infrastructure disparity, underinvestment in cybersecurity	Costs to businesses, compromised national security	Cyberattack on the Port of Barcelona (2019)	Investing in cybersecurity infrastructure, public-private partnerships in digital security
Maritime Insecurity	Inadequate maritime infrastructure, regional instability	Disrupted maritime trade, increased shipping costs	Piracy and smuggling activities in the Strait of Gibraltar	Strengthening maritime security, international maritime cooperation, economic development of coastal communities
Organized Crime	Economic inequality, weak law enforcement	Illegal trade, loss of government revenues, corruption	Mafia activities in Southern Italy affecting local economies	Strengthening legal frameworks, economic opportunities in affected areas, anti-corruption measures

Source: compiled by the authors

From the table above we can discern that addressing the asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean Region requires holistic economic solutions that go beyond traditional security measures. The interconnected nature of terrorism, illegal

immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity necessitates a comprehensive approach that focuses on enhancing economic development, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting social stability. By investing in job creation, education, and infrastructure, countries in the Mediterranean Region can address the root causes of these challenges and create opportunities for their citizens. Additionally, collaborative efforts, such as information sharing and joint operations, can strengthen cybersecurity defenses and improve maritime security. Ultimately, by integrating economic solutions with security strategies, the Mediterranean Region can effectively mitigate the asymmetric threats to finally end the perpetual cyclical pattern of this challenge.

Conclusion:

This study has delved into the complexities of asymmetric threats throughout the Mediterranean region, revealing how they are not only a security concern but deeply intertwined with economic factors. The central question addressed -the role of economic factors in perpetuating a cycle of escalating asymmetric threats and the potential of economic resilience in breaking this cycle- has unearthed critical insights.

Our findings indicate that economic drivers such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality significantly contribute to the rise and intensification of asymmetric threats like terrorism, illegal immigration, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and maritime insecurity. These threats, in turn, catalyze economic instability, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of disruption and hardship. However, the study also illuminates a path forward, highlighting the pivotal role of economic resilience. By fostering economic resilience, Mediterranean countries can not only mitigate the immediate impacts of these threats but also build long-term stability and security.

The mixed-methods approach, blending qualitative analysis with quantitative data, has provided a comprehensive perspective on the issue. The insights gained

underscore the urgency for integrated policies that synergize economic strategies with security measures. Such policies are essential for disrupting the escalation cycle of asymmetric threats. By focusing on economic development, job creation, and equitable wealth distribution, along with strengthening cybersecurity and maritime security, the region can move towards a more secure and prosperous future.

As we conclude, it becomes evident that breaking the cycle of asymmetric threats in the Mediterranean requires a concerted effort from regional governments, international organizations, and local communities. The journey towards stability and security is complex and multifaceted, demanding an approach that is as dynamic and adaptive as the threats themselves. This study serves as a call to action for policymakers and stakeholders to embrace economic resilience and integrated strategies as the bedrock for navigating through the asymmetric challenges of the Mediterranean.

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