



NSDS HUB
NATO STRATEGIC DIRECTION SOUTH

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NSD-S Hub Workshop

“North Africa Regional Dynamics”

Executive Summary



NSD-S Hub, Via Madonna del Pantano, Lago Patria - Italy 80014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On 09 April 2019, the NATO Strategic Direction South (NSD-S) HUB hosted a “North Africa Regional Dynamics” Workshop at Allied Joint Force Command, Naples. The aim of the workshop was to confirm or challenge the research conclusions of the NSD-S HUB North Africa analysis team, as well as to benefit from participant first hand knowledge and expertise in order to improve the overall NATO understanding of the region. Through gaining a better understanding of the main challenges to regional stability from the Egyptian, Mauritanian and Tunisian perspective, the NSD-S HUB ultimately hopes to identify possible opportunities for NATO to support through partnership initiatives.

SUMMARY:

Stability in North Africa (NA) is highly influenced by regional dynamics as well as external factors. Challenges to stability arise from diverse factors such as economic development and unemployment, energy security, migration and demographic pressures, trafficking, radicalization and terrorism. A comprehensive approach to understanding these drivers is necessary in order to identify effective mitigation strategies. In order to facilitate discussion, the workshop broke them into two main topics, economic developments and security challenges; however, it was repeatedly emphasized that the impacts in one domain certainly influence the other. In fact, the group all agreed that economic difficulties magnify the impact of other challenges such as lacking social cohesion, acting as a threat multiplier for instability.

Economic Development:

Despite historical trends of economic issues, today, macroeconomic performance in the region is indicative of an economic recovery, boosted by increasing investor confidence and providing a positive mid-term regional outlook. However, it was agreed upon by all attending that a larger effort is still needed to produce wealth that is accessible to all levels of the population.

In the Economic domain, the discussion centered on three subtopics:

1. Regional Cooperation Programs;
2. Energy Challenges and Opportunities, especially in terms of Energy Security and Energy Transition; and
3. Impact of Migration Flows, in terms of Rapid Urbanization, Social Pressure and Economical Weight (strain)

Regional cooperation programs aim to develop economies through trade agreements, industrial support through investments, and by facilitating the mobility of labor. There are many levels of cooperation, starting from bilateral, to regional and international. All NA countries are members of the Arab League (AL), the African Union (AU) and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC),

except for Egypt, which participates in the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). At the same time, all NA countries, with other AU members (49 on 55 total members), signed the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) with the aim of improving trade relations and the movement of goods throughout the entire African continent.

The relevance of improving economic growth and the need for better wealth distribution to guarantee economic security were universally acknowledged by the representatives during the workshop, with all forms of cooperation being positively recognized. Cooperation was seen as the proper approach to assist economic developments throughout the region.

The importance of cooperation between NA and Sahel countries was also emphasized due to the security challenges emanating from the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. Most NA countries are already engaging in the Sahel bilaterally, as well as proclaiming their support for the G5 Sahel.

Supplying energy to a growing population is one of the concerns shared by NA countries, as well as the increasing energy demand of industry. To meet this growing energy demand, production diversification is needed. Fortunately, NA represents one of the world’s most important hydrocarbon producing regions, and has the potential to become a renewable energy powerhouse through the vast implementation of solar and wind farms. As a result, all national level energy strategies call for increased exploitation of clean energy technology.

Migration in the NA region is both an inter and intra-state issue. Primarily, migrants are relocating due to economic, security and demographic pressure. All countries are implementing national policies that aim to reduce internal flows from rural to urban areas through initiatives mainly aimed to relaunch agriculture. Very successful projects desert rehabilitation projects have by implemented in Egypt and Tunisia to reclaim farmland.

“Micro Projects” are initiatives that are meant be more focused on the local communities, while also being driven by the local/tribal leaders. Rather than provide large loans, which can become lost in the bureaucracy and possible corruption, these smaller, *micro-loans* allow for more effective distribution at the lower level in hopes of advancing the local economies.

Security Challenges:

The NSD-S Hub presented the current Libyan crisis as a potential threat to the entire region and all participants concurred that it was. They agreed that a solution in Libya would improve Mali’s situation and also improve border security along their southern borders. NA countries want stability in Libya, and support the possibility of NATO using its influence to encourage productive dialogue.

Terrorism is viewed as a critical threat to the region especially with southern Libya available as a safe haven, training ground, and operations base for activity in the wider region. NA states have not agreed on a common Counter-Terrorist (CT) strategy, but rather rely on complimentary national level strategies. Tunisia’s new National Strategy to Counter-Terrorism is based on four pillars, Prevention (of radicalization), Protection (of persons and infrastructure), Pursuing, and Responding (how to mitigate crisis management).

The return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) after the collapse and loss of territory previously controlled by Daesh and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq is a common concern among NA

countries. There is uncertainty about how many Tunisian FTFs have gone to Iraq and Syria, and all pointed out that it is very difficult to identify who are returning FTF because they entered and left Iraq and Syria illegally.

CONCLUSIONS:

The participation of the National Representatives of Mauritania, Tunisia and Egypt in the workshop proved very valuable. The small group discussion allowed for candid conversation that otherwise would hardly have been achievable in a larger setting. Their insights will prove very valuable for NATO as it endeavors to broad its regional understanding and looks for opportunities for proactive engagement to help its Mediterranean neighbors address shared challenges.

Several times during the workshop it was stressed that the socio-economic development is crucial, as it targets the root causes of conflict and other problems in NA and the Sahel. Persistent structural issues hinder development throughout the region as a whole.

The actors present in this part of Africa are aware that the solution, although starting at a national level, should be a regional strategy that allows them to face regional challenges and threats more efficiently.