

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE MAGHREB

ROSA MARÍA GARCÍA-BARROSO

IUIEN – UAH

(Resumen)

El Magreb se está convirtiendo en una zona cada vez más importante en la relación transatlántica por dos razones fundamentales: primero, porque para la UE, los acontecimientos que se producen en el norte de África tienen repercusiones en el sur de Europa, por lo que los países a los que afecta (especialmente España, Francia e Italia) están presionando para desarrollar una nueva y mejor relación económica, social y política con el Magreb y esto influye en la relación transatlántica. Segundo, porque después de la Guerra Fría, el Mediterráneo en general ha adquirido un carácter relevante internacionalmente. El hecho de que se hayan creado más iniciativas políticas, económicas y militares por parte de la UE y EE.UU. para mejorar la relación con el Magreb lo prueba.

Este interés por parte de la UE y de EE.UU. parece haber dado lugar a un reparto de tareas respecto a la región del Magreb. Siendo la UE la que se enfrente a temas como la inmigración y las relaciones culturales y económicas, y EE.UU. tratando otros temas como el terrorismo, la proliferación de armas de destrucción masiva, etc. Este trabajo de investigación trata de establecer la relevancia de esta región dentro de la relación transatlántica y por qué es importante para EE.UU. y la UE.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Maghreb region becoming more important to the Transatlantic relationship for two main reasons: first, because since the end of the Cold War, the Mediterranean region in general has started to become a crucial region on the international scene. The fact that there are more economic, political, and military initiatives from the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) to create a better relationship with the Southern Mediterranean countries, proves this. The second reason is that for the EU, the events that take place in the North of Africa have repercussions in Southern Europe. Southern European countries, especially Spain, France, Italy and Portugal are pressing to develop a new and better economic, social, and political relationship with these countries, and this has an influence in the Transatlantic relationship.

This interest on the part of the EU and also of the US seems to have created a sharing of tasks between both. The EU tries to address issues in the political, social and economic areas. The US cooperates more in the military and security issues of the region, though the economic relationship between the US and the Maghreb countries is growing and there are also American organizations such as The Peace Corps and USAID implementing social, economic, and political programs.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The study of the Maghreb region is not possible without first mentioning the importance that the Mediterranean in general has been acquiring over the last years. During both World Wars, the Mediterranean was an area used for military operations, and during the Cold War it was a confrontational zone between the US and the Soviet Union, though it had a secondary importance compared with Central Europe and the borders with the Soviet Union (Morales 49-53). The Mediterranean area that could be threatened by the Soviet Union was protected by bilateral defense relationships between the US and the bordering countries like Italy, Spain, Turkey. With those agreements, the US was able to establish a military naval and air presence. On the other hand, the Maghreb countries, during the 50s and 60s, went through a decolonization period that produced some tension with the European countries, especially France, because they had nationalistic claims (Lesser 5-7). Although there have been periods of tension between the Maghreb countries and the colonizer European countries, Tunisia and especially Morocco had always been closer to the Western countries during the Cold War than Algeria, which had an anti-imperialistic and pro-revolutionary ideology, and which was closer to the Soviet Union. Algeria received economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union until the 80s. Later, Algeria became closer to France and the US, due to economic reasons and to end its international isolation, since the Soviet Union was then unable to provide assistance to the country (Algeria 1993).

With the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the Mediterranean became more important, especially during the Gulf War, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. One of the consequences of that war was the strategic importance of the Mediterranean, because it was used as a logistical support zone for military operations in the Gulf. Also, the traditional idea of the Mediterranean as a zone separated from the Middle East changed, especially for the US. Today, analysts and policy makers see a greater connection between the Mediterranean and the Middle East for air power (Lesser 1-4).

Other reasons why the Mediterranean has received international attention have been the disagreement between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara, Turkey's and Greece's dispute over Cyprus, and the war in the Balkans.

2.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MAHGREB FOR THE EU

Although there is an official EU policy towards the Maghreb and the Mediterranean, we cannot forget that not all EU members have the same interests in the region. Southern European countries have special interests due to geographical proximity. We cannot say either that the EU's CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) is only one and that there are not different policies in the EU regarding the Mediterranean and other regions.

However, since what happens in the Mediterranean has an influence in European security, the Mediterranean region, the South and the East of the Mediterranean, and the Middle East are identified "as a key external relations priority for the EU" (The EU's Mediterranean and Middle East... 2002) because the ultimate objective of the EU is the stability and the

security of these regions. The Maghreb has serious problems such as tremendous population growth, economic instability, and Algeria particularly suffers from political violence, terrorism, and radical Islamic groups. There is a confrontation between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara, and all these problems can have consequences for the European countries, especially for Southern European countries, which fear massive immigration, discontinuation of the energy supplies from Algeria, terrorist attacks, the spillover of political violence, and terrorism among others.

Economically, the Maghreb is also important for the EU, since Algeria exports 62,7% of its products to the EU, and the EU supplies 58% of Algeria's imports (The EU's Relations with Algeria, 2001). Morocco gets more than half of its imports from the EU and it exports three quarters of its exports to the EU (The EU's Relations with Morocco, 2002). Also, 80% of Tunisian exports go to the EU, and the EU provides 71% of Tunisian imports (The EU's Relations with Tunisia, 2001).

In conclusion for the EU, the most important interests in the Maghreb are stability, the continuity of the energy supply, and trade and investment.

2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MAGHREB FOR THE US

Although the Maghreb is not as important for the US as it is for the EU, the US wants to maintain a good relationship with these countries because they can help to preserve US interests in the Middle East, which mainly are access to oil and Israel's security. Stability in the region is important, in order to provide logistical support for the American naval control of the Mediterranean, and support for the Middle East peace process. Algeria is especially important because radical Algerian Islamic groups could influence other groups in neighboring countries. These groups could also negatively influence the good relationship the US has with Morocco and Tunisia, and try to undermine some military, political and economic bilateral agreements between the US and those two countries (Quandt 10-11). Also, after the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, the US wants the support of these countries in the international coalition against terrorism. Morocco has been an especially important "...strategic ally for the Western countries at first during the Cold War as an anticommunist force and more recently as a support against Islamic militancy" (Zunes). Its strategic geographical situation can make it a gateway to Africa and the Arab world. That is why after Egypt, Morocco is the country that receives the most military and economic assistance from the US. Its constant support of the peace process in the Middle East makes it an indispensable ally, and this is proven by the many visits by US government envoys to Morocco to find out the government's opinions and ensure support in the conflict (Zunes 2-4). On the other hand, Morocco has been active internationally--the King of Morocco is the President of the Al-Quds Committee, which is part of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This organization, made up of 57 states tries to protect the interests of all Muslim countries and speak with one voice. The Committee, under the chairmanship of King Mohammed VI, meets periodically to address the situation of the Palestinian population (Islamic Conference). Also, its participation in military operations during the Gulf War and in international peacekeeping operations, makes it a key ally in Africa and the Arab world for the

next decades. According to Ex-Secretary of State, William Cohen, Morocco, South Africa and Nigeria, as members of the African Crisis Response Initiative, could act multilaterally in humanitarian operations and crisis, if the Initiative is revived, and their military forces are trained in the respect of civil governments. These countries could act multilaterally when a crisis arises, so the US would not have to intervene in those conflicts, unless it is in its interest (Corey).

Economically, but since the 80s, the Maghreb countries have tried to modernize their economies and have looked for foreign investment not only from European countries but from the US as well. In Morocco, the US is the second-largest investor nation, with more than 90 American companies operating. In Tunisia, the US is the third-largest investor nation, and Algeria is the fifth most important Arab country that has economic relations with the US (Indyk). It is also important, the Eizenstat Initiative or the US-North African Economic Partnership, which was launched by Stuart Eizenstat (Undersecretary of State, during the Clinton Administration) to improve the economic relationship among these three countries (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), since only 4-7% of the trade in the region is done among them (Entelis 7). The Initiative also has the objectives of advancing the private sector and making structural economic reforms, in order to integrate the economies of the three countries. But the final objective of all these improvements was really to create a stable region and more political dialogue, especially between Morocco and Algeria (Eizenstat). However, the Initiative has not had the expected results, because it does not involve political changes as well. Although the bilateral economic relationships between the US and each of the three countries have improved much, the regional economic integration has not taken place, due to the differences between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara.

3. THE PROBLEMS OF THE MAGHREB AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

3.1. PROBLEMS IN THE MAGHREB

The problems of the Magreb and the Mediterranean in general have been classified as Soft Security Issues¹, referring to political, economic and social problems and Hard Security

1. Among them, immigration from the Maghreb is very important for Southern European countries; the dependence that Spain or Italy, among others, have on Algerian energy supplies; what has been called "Cultural Security" which originated with the influence that Western societies had in different Arab and Muslim countries through television programs, the Internet, and other forms of communication; and because Maghrebi immigrants' customs and ways of life are not always well-accepted by Western societies. <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR957/#contents>>.

Issues² that affect the US and Europe. Considering that these are very complex issues and very difficult to resolve, cooperation between the Atlantic institutions is paramount, because trying to resolve some of these problems unilaterally, can be “costly” and can create “political discomfort” that could be avoided with a joint policy and action between European and Atlantic institutions (Larrabee 17).

Other problems in the Maghreb have been internal problems like the Algerian crisis, when in 1991 the Islamists won the elections and the results were cancelled. This event made the neighboring countries fearful of the possible spread of the conflict to their territories, and the European countries, especially the Southern European countries, were afraid of possible waves of immigrants. Also, the crisis was seen with concern from the European countries, because in 1995 and 1996 some terrorist attacks took place in Paris, where a connection was discovered between the Armed Islamic Group (an Algerian terrorist group) and some European nationals. The Algerian situation was then a subject in the Transatlantic Agenda, and it influenced the US view of NATO, because not only was NATO's expansion to the Eastern European countries considered important, but the danger of the Algerian crisis spreading to other countries made members of NATO think about the role of the Alliance in such situation. On the other hand, Algeria is an important producer of natural gas and oil, and countries like France, Spain, and Italy have great dependence on these products. For them and the rest of Europe, it is necessary that Algeria remain stable, in order to avoid possible energy interruptions (Lesser 12-20), waves of immigrants, and the spreading of its instability to other countries.

Another unresolved problem has been the disagreement between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara. The differences between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara run deep and are difficult to solve. In April 2002, when Mohammed VI visited the US, he told President Bush that his position on the Western Sahara was to give great autonomy to the territory but not independence nor to permit a partitioning of it, because that could cause a situation similar to the one in the Balkans and it could create instability in the region (Arabic News Com, 2002). On the other hand, Algeria is in favor of a referendum and its president, Bouteflika, expressed his view of the problem to President Bush when he visited the US in 2001. For Algeria, the implications of this conflict have been important because there have been about 155,000 refugees in Algerian camps since 1976 (afrol Com, Western Sahara refugees..., 2001). However, the reasons why Algeria supports the Polisario Front (a saharawi group that led the opposition against Spain first and then Morocco when it occupied Western Sahara. Today it acts as the government of Western Sahara) might be deeper: though during the 70s, the Algerian government supported anti-colonial revolutionary groups due to ideological reasons, Algeria also wants to prevent Morocco from dominating the Northwest of Africa, because Morocco would have more political and territorial influence and that could cause a Moroccan

2. These would include the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), drug trafficking, etc. <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR957/#contents>>.

territorial claim to the western Algerian territory. But if Western Sahara is independent, it could be used as a buffer zone between Morocco and Algeria (a way to contain Morocco, as Algeria sees it), as a way to gain access to the Atlantic for Algeria, and for exploiting the mineral resources of the area (Berke 6).

The problem of the Western Sahara needs to be addressed by the international community, and the EU and the US need to cooperate to resolve it. One of the issues in this conflict has been the constant US support of Morocco, which has been criticized by analysts like Stephen Zunes (a professor from the University of San Francisco) because it can have undesirable consequences, since

“U.S. support for Morocco’s invasion and occupation legitimizes territorial aggression, which serves as a dangerous precedent. The ongoing occupation is a source of political instability both in Morocco and in the region as a whole. The U.S. has supported an autocratic government in Morocco and is proffering questionable economic priorities” (2).³

The EU’s position on the problem has been influenced by France, which has oil interests in the area. In fact, the French company TotalFinaElf and Morocco signed a contract for oil exploration off the coast of Western Sahara in October 2001, which caused protests by the Saharawi President, Mohammed Abdelaziz, who protested to the United Nations (UN) about the signing of that illegal contract, since the territory does not belong to Morocco (afro.Com 2002). So far, France has sided with Morocco and has opposed a referendum. The Spanish government has declared that it is necessary that both parts (Morocco and the Polisario Front) agree on a solution, because any imposed solution will not solve the problem.

Another problem in the region, and one that worries Washington more than Brussels, though it can affect European countries more directly than it can the US, due to geographical proximity, is the possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and Cruise Missiles. It is worrying for the US that a country like Algeria could acquire these types of weapons, because not only could they reach European capitals but they could also limit the freedom of movement of US troops, due to possible attacks on military installations in Europe and other regions. For European countries, the possession of these types of weapons also can be dangerous because they could be threatened when they follow policies opposed to those countries’ interests (Lesser 22-23).

Another problem has been the unpredictable Libyan regime, which helped terrorist groups in the past and tried to acquire all kinds of weapons. Nowadays, it seems that this regime wants a closer and better relationship with the West, including the US, and to end its international isolation. Although the sanctions imposed on the Libyan regime—due to the Lockerbie attack in 1998—by the UN have disappeared, the US sanctions have not, but there have been declarations by Gadaffi expressing his intention to resume relations with the US and

3. For a detailed explanation of the Western Sahara occupation, see: <www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/briefs/vol3/v3n42mor_body.html>.

the EU (CNN.com 2001). Also, he condemned the terrorist attacks of September 11th and expressed sympathy for the victims (Wikipedia). In any case, it cannot be forgotten that Libya has chemical weapons and performs research on biological weapons, and other countries like Iran and Iraq could buy and sell these types of weapons as well.

There is a conflict that affects the whole region, the Arab world, the US and the EU, which is the Arab-Israeli conflict. "It is impossible to ignore the links between the health of the Middle East peace process and the prospects for deepening security cooperation along Mediterranean North-South lines" (Larrabee 6). This conflict has also created deep differences between the US and the EU, because the US is more indulgent with the Israeli position, due to domestic political pressures, and the EU is more critical of Israel and more prone to defend the Palestinian position in the conflict, due to commercial reasons and geographical proximity (Gompert 4-5).

3.2. PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

The US and the EU have a common objective in the Mediterranean and the Maghreb, and that is regional stability. However, to develop a common policy and course of action is difficult, because they do not agree on the methods to use. Since the end of the Cold War, their relationship has changed and problems that were not so obvious before are more visible now. During the Cold War, Europe had a tremendous dependency on the US, especially in security terms, and both had the objective of containing the Soviet Union. Once the Soviet Union disappeared, the mutual objective also disappeared, and though there still are common objectives like the promotion of democracy, justice, and human rights, differences in opinions and ways of proceeding when a conflict arises are more obvious now than before, regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Libya, terrorism, etc.

Another problem has been the different meanings that the Mediterranean region has for the EU and for the US, though this is changing. When European countries, especially southern European countries, think about the Mediterranean, they think about the Maghreb, because it is closer to them and what happens there has an impact on these countries. When the US thinks about the Mediterranean, it thinks about Greece, Turkey, the Black Sea, Israel and the neighboring countries.

These differences, together with the absence of a common transatlantic policy to resolve crises in this region, resulted in the creation of different initiatives to address the Mediterranean, such as the Barcelona Conference in 1995 (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership), in which the US did not participate, and the launching of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue.

4. APPROACHES TO THE MAGHREB

There have been several initiatives approaching Mediterranean issues, like the Western European Union Dialogue of 1992, created to exchange views of the security and defense, and Mediterranean issues between Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Western European Union members. Another initiative has been the

OSCE's Mediterranean Dialogue, between Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, which started in 1994 as an informal meeting with OSCE's members. The objective of the initiative is the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, and see the "human side" of security. (Lesser 39-40). For the Maghreb, two of these are very important: NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue was launched in 1994, based on the idea that security in Europe is linked to security in the Mediterranean. The objectives of the Dialogue are to make the Mediterranean participants (Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Mauritania, and Algeria, which has been a member since 2000) understand the defense policies, information, civil, and emergency planning of NATO (NATO Handbook). The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in 1995 with the Barcelona Declaration, with the objectives of establishing an area of peace and security, create a free-trade area between the EU and the 12 Mediterranean participants (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, The Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta) and Libya as an observer, and promote the cultural understanding between both sides of the Mediterranean and develop free civil societies (EU, External Relations 2002).

NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has been criticized because it was supposed to be a dialogue, but it excluded Lebanon and Syria, so the main point of the initiative was missed by not including all those countries. It was also criticized because by excluding those countries, it created the idea of good and bad countries, the good ones being those included in the initiative and the bad/excluded ones, and so giving NATO a "new enemy stereotype": Muslim and Arab countries that do not conform to the rules of the West. As a result, some Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, France and Portugal) have followed this new doctrine, and have even created a Rapid Deployment Force (EUROFOR) and an associated maritime force (EUROMARFOR) to respond to the possible threats from Southern Mediterranean countries (Koechler 4-5). Also, the Arab-Israeli conflict makes it difficult for participants to agree on different issues and to build confidence among members. The fact that NATO is composed of former colonial countries and the slow response to the suffering of Muslim populations during the war in Bosnia and Kosovo creates little confidence on the part of the Southern Mediterranean countries (Lesser 27-28).

The results of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are not as positive as expected, due to the scarce progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the lack of desire on the European part to open up its markets to the Mediterranean partners, and the unwillingness of Mediterranean authoritarian governments to open up their political systems to more democratic ones (Jünemann, 2002).

5. CONCLUSION

Since the Mediterranean is a complex region and the US and the EU want peace and security for the area, cooperation between them will be essential. Due to geographical proximity, historical ties, and political and economic interests, the EU will necessarily need to tackle most of the political, economic and social issues that affect the Maghreb. Security and defense issues will need special participation by the US. Transatlantic cooperation will be

necessary to maintain the stability in the region through NATO. The US can support and complement European political, economic and social policies, with economic agreements such as the US-North African Economic Agreement (Einzestat Initiative) and also with programs that improve and develop better social policies for the Maghreb population and democratic principles, through agencies like The Peace Corps and USAID.

In order to provide security in the region, the EU will need to speak with one voice and develop a true foreign policy and military capabilities. To do that, the EU will have to address its military needs, and it will need clear and transparent communication with the US in order to avoid bureaucratic and jurisdictional problems when a conflict arises. It will be necessary to avoid the duplication of military capabilities, and consider the opinions of NATO member countries which are not EU members when a conflict arises (Larrabee).

Also, NATO will need to adapt to the new international environment. In the Mediterranean, its roll will need to be subordinated to the EU, because most of the Mediterranean problems are economic, political and social. However, the different views of NATO members make it difficult to agree on a common course of action (Lesser 43-45)⁴. It will be necessary to address the different views that the US and the EU have of the Mediterranean and the rivalry between the US and France over NATO's Southern Command will need to be addressed (Koechler 6).

As it can be seen, stability more than democracy is the objective of the US and the EU in the Maghreb due to a lack of confidence among about the possibility of Arab countries becoming real democracies, because most of them suffer from nationalistic conflicts, poverty, population growth, lack of democratic traditions (Entelis 9). However, supporting democratic governments, investments, information technology, human rights would mitigate problems such as terrorism, WMD, poverty and violence, and Arab countries' internal situations would improve (Gompert 3). The support of democratic institutions could help the image of the US in the region, and the support of a common Transatlantic policy on the Maghreb could be an example for the region at a time when the differences between the US and the EU here so obvious in so many international issues.

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4. For a detailed explanation of different scenarios in the Mediterranean after the Cold War, see chapter 5 of *NATO Looks South: New Challenges and New Strategies in the Mediterranean* by Ian O. Lesser et al. or web: <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1126/>>.

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