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The Sahara Conflict: Bilateralism or Sub-Regionalism?

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Introduction

Despite sporadic attempts at western Mediterranean co-operation through the 'Five plus Five' grouping, the 1990s saw few signs of the emergence of a coherent security community in this purported 'sub-region' of the Mediterranean. The grouping was liveliest during its infancy in the early 1990s and then experienced a revival a decade later, as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) lost momentum insofar as its security agenda was concerned. It was in this context that 'sub-regionalism' was held up as a means of revitalizing the Barcelona Process [Patten, 2000]. The 'Five plus Five' has played a useful if modest role as a North-South forum for informal discussion among representatives of the riparian countries of the western Mediterranean, capable of generating occasional policy proposals for subsequent consideration by the broader EMP. Yet, lacking resources of its own, it has not been able to achieve much in the way of security co-operation. At most, in relation to the latter, it has facilitated discussion and information exchanges between interior ministries concerning the activities of terrorist organizations, a development that might have taken place in any case in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

A western Mediterranean dynamic has proved difficult to develop owing to the highly asymmetrical nature of this 'sub-region' — not only in terms of differing national capacities to address security challenges unilaterally or bilaterally, but also because of the greater degree of integration of the southern European countries and their commitments to organizations such as the EU and NATO. Obstacles to security co-operation at the sub-regional level also include differences in national security concerns and in military security cultures [Attinà, 2002; Haddadi, 2002], which to a considerable degree correspond to a North-South divide across the Mediterranean.

There remains, however, the theoretical possibility that a protracted sub-regional conflict, namely the Western Sahara dispute, might provide an opportunity for key players to reach a compromise solution and thereby not only put an end to the conflict itself but also lay the foundations for further security co-operation in the future. This working paper explores recent developments in the Western Sahara conflict to see whether there is any basis for expecting a sub-regional solution involving Morocco, Algeria, France and Spain.¹ The role of external actors, such as the EU or USA, is likely to be less decisive than that of countries within the area, though such actors may be able to facilitate dialogue and give financial support to sub-regional cooperation once the political will materializes on the ground. Indeed, external actors could even play a negative role — for example, if Morocco were to become the privileged Arab ally of the West in the Maghreb, thus undermining the kind of international balance needed for sub-regional compromise and stability. Yet hardly more encouraging, in the recent past, has been the manner in which the above four national actors from the western Mediterranean have tended to adopt one of two very different positions towards the dispute, even though France and Morocco, on the one hand, and Spain and Algeria, on the other, have been involved in courtship of one another. These differences have impacted on bilateral relationships among the four, as seen on various occasions: during the prolonged Spanish-Moroccan dispute of 2001-03; in France's vetoing of EU support for Spain during the Parsley Island crisis of July 2002; and in King Mohamed VI's decision not to attend a Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) summit scheduled to be held in Algeria the previous month and eventually cancelled as a result of the Western Sahara dispute (*El País*, 13 and 19 June 2002).

In terms of structure, the paper will first track the recent positions taken by key actors (both sub-regional and external) in the Western Sahara dispute up to July 2004. It will then consider the role of bilateral relationships, in particular that between Spain and Morocco, seen as being of fundamental importance for the prospects not only of sub-regional co-operation but also for the future of the EMP. It will be argued that, although this remains a very difficult relationship, recent improvements in it could constitute stepping-stones towards sub-regional co-operation in the future. Though the EU can assist by continuing to support southern efforts to integrate horizontally, and should encourage modest forms of western Mediterranean security co-operation, it is faced with deep-rooted southern preferences for separate, distinctive relationships with the EU, as evidenced especially by Moroccan efforts to upgrade its own individual relationship with Europe since the 1980s. The need for a judicious balance between region-building activity and differential approaches to individual neighbouring countries constitutes a central challenge for the EU as it contemplates the implementation of its

1. The first draft of this paper was prepared for a EuroMeSCo working group on 'Sub Regional Co-operation within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership' and was presented at a workshop in Athens in August 2003. This revised and updated version is based partly on interviews conducted in Spain and Morocco during 2003-04 in the course of research for a project on 'The Spanish-Moroccan Security Relationship and the Euro-Mediterranean Context', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK (RES-000-22-0432).

Peace Plans, Veto and Interests

new 'Wider Europe' strategy and embarks upon the Mediterranean dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy [Commission of the European Communities, 2003, 2004].

Although on paper everyone has agreed at some time that some sort of referendum on the future of the Western Sahara should be held [Mohsen-Finan, 2002], the only issue on which the parties to the dispute openly or tacitly agree is that the original UN peace plan accepted in principle by the two sides in 1988 is not viable.² A plan that might have promised a democratic solution earlier, in the mid-1970s following Spanish withdrawal from the territory, quickly saw itself affected by demographic complications and the war between Morocco and the Polisario Front, whose outcome gave Rabat the advantage if a referendum on self-determination were ever to be held. While the fortunes of war favoured Morocco, the possibility of a pro-Moroccan solution sanctioned by the international community has been thwarted thus far, for many years chiefly as a result of Algerian and Spanish opposition but more recently owing to extreme caution on the part of Morocco itself. Faced with deadlock within the Maghreb, in March 1997 the secretary general of the United Nations entrusted the task of finding a compromise formula to former US secretary of state James Baker, whose proposals up to 2003 received far more enthusiastic responses from Morocco, the United States and France than from Algeria, Spain and Russia (the latter 'off-stage', but still relevant owing to its previous relationship with Algeria and current efforts to reassert itself on the international stage).

Amid growing international recognition of the fact that the original UN peace formula is not viable and is simply consuming the international organization's resources, American and French support for Moroccan efforts to 'absorb' (or in the Moroccan view, 'integrate') the disputed territory has become stronger and more overt during the last four years, though it is still associated with the idea of a referendum to validate and legitimise the outcome afterwards. In October 2001, France tried to persuade the EU to back the idea of limited Western Sahara autonomy within Morocco, one of four options presented in the initial version of the so-called 'Baker Report'. Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Sweden and Finland voted against, insisting that the option of holding a referendum on self-determination — which had been the basic UN theme earlier on — should be kept open. A few months later, in April 2002, Washington's support for the same formula was finally made official [OADB, 2002].

US-Moroccan relations have long been good, owing to Morocco's pro-western alignment, moderate voice on Middle East issues, post-1980s record of economic and political liberalization, and recent readiness to collaborate in the 'war on terror'. French-Moroccan relations have been more varied, affected in the past by occasional clashes over human rights and by the special relationship that France has had with Algeria (before 1962 regarded as an integral part of France); but they have improved over the last decade, facilitated by internal changes in Morocco, and the consideration for Paris that Algeria's usefulness as a partner was restricted by the country's bloody internal conflict. As a by-product of Morocco's economic liberalization — and one may surmise that it has much to do too with Rabat's strategic manoeuvring over the Western Sahara — during 2001 the US and French companies Kerr-McGee and TotalElfina were granted rights to prospect for oil off the coasts of the disputed territory.

Oil politics has thus entered into the equation, whereas earlier it was the territory's rich phosphate deposits and equally abundant fishing grounds that provided the economic interest. It is certainly a factor that has heightened the tensions surrounding the dispute by fomenting economic rivalry. In December 2001, just a few months after the oil explorations were authorized by Rabat, Spain tried to assert its own rights by allowing Repsol YPF to prospect for oil in the never demarcated waters between the Canary Islands and the Atlantic coast of Morocco, a move that prompted a Moroccan minister to refer to the islands as a 'continental extension of Morocco' (*El País*, 28 December 2001). In February 2002, Rabat suffered another disappointment when the UN's legal counsel Hans Corel gave the Security Council his authoritative opinion that Morocco was not entitled to issue oil exploration licences without the consent of the

2. Indeed, there has not even been a consensus as to which parties are involved in the conflict: the international community has seen it primarily as involving Morocco and the Polisario movement, whereas the former has generally presented Polisario as simply a proxy for Algeria.

people of the Western Sahara (*Financial Times*, 6 February 2002).

Another major factor affecting diplomatic efforts to resolve the Western Sahara issue has been September 11, 2001. With the former Spanish government of José María Aznar lining up behind the Bush Administration in the 'war against terror', Rabat was encouraged to speculate that it might secure its sovereignty claims in exchange for only a very limited degree of Saharan autonomy. In fact, the Bush administration has regarded both Morocco and Algeria as allies in its war on the 'axis of evil', and President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has been granted increased access to the White House as a result. However, US gestures during the first half of 2004 favoured Morocco in particular: the signing of the US-Morocco free trade agreement followed by the award of 'preferred ally' status designed for partners that are not members of NATO. For its part, Morocco has accommodated US requests to receive prisoners from Camp Delta in Guantánamo Bay for interrogation at the secret service headquarters at Temara. There have been some indications too that Morocco may agree to American requests to send troops to Iraq; in any case Rabat has confirmed its readiness to train members of the Iraqi Army and security forces in Morocco (*El País*, 6 June, 9 July 2004). The United States would like to see Morocco's leaders 'finish' the process of post-independence nation-building, so that they can devote more resources to development tasks, undercut the appeal of the country's Islamist movement and eventually play a more substantial role in the struggle against international terrorism.

The obstacles to a pro-Moroccan solution remain formidable, however, as was seen when the issue returned to the agenda of the UN Security Council in July 2003. On that occasion it was Morocco that resisted the latest version of the Baker Plan under which there would be first the election of a Western Sahara government authority, on the basis of an electoral register acceptable to Polisario, and later a referendum on integration with Morocco, on the basis of a census reflecting the demands made by Rabat. Moroccan caution on this occasion was fuelled by suspicions that Polisario, if elected to office as a result of phase one of the plan, would either ensure that phase two never took place, or would use its new institutional platform to campaign vigorously, with some international backing, for self-determination. There would also be the political problem for Morocco of what to do with the military if its services were no longer required in the South, where senior officers were rumoured to have acquired lucrative economic interests. In addition, Rabat's misgivings about the plan reflect the monarchy's concerns about the implications that such a formula might have for regionalisation and constitutional reform more generally. Following Mohamed VI's insistence that his priority is economic reform rather than democratisation, there has been recent reluctance to go down the road of devolving power throughout the country, first because it presupposes a constitutional reform that might blow wind into the sails of democratic vessels, and second because 'regionalisation' even if limited to Western Sahara could prompt fresh challenges to the Moroccan state, particularly in the north of the country where there are historical traditions of Berber separatism.

Both Algeria and Spain, meanwhile, have stood by the UN commitment to honour a Saharawi right to self-determination, or at least have insisted that any settlement must be acceptable to Polisario. For a while, Algeria embraced the possibility of partition (one of the options floated by Baker), but this was wholly unacceptable to Morocco, which besides seeing the issue as one of national sovereignty is well aware that the economic assets of the territory are concentrated in the southern part of the territory [Maghraoui, 2003; Mohsen-Finan, 2002: 11]. Neither Algeria nor Spain, however, has been able to ignore the extent to which the military balance within the territory has shifted in favour of Morocco. In this context, they have indicated their preparedness to compromise, if an internationally defensible formula can be found; and their enthusiasm might grow if economic or other advantages were to follow from a deal.

To date, Algeria has been given no public indication by Morocco of even a limited concession relating to its historical ambition to gain land access to an Atlantic port, which in the past it had hoped to realize through sponsorship of Polisario and support for the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, established by exiles. With Algeria weakened by its protracted internal conflict, Morocco has been in no hurry to offer its neighbour compensation in the form of limited transit rights. After breaking off relations in 1976 owing to the Saharan war, the two countries restored them in 1988, only to close their border six years later amid allegations of collusion between terrorist

groups and the Algerian security forces. Mutual distrust persists over the Saharan issue and traditional rivalry for regional leadership has also found reflection in the UMA. Rather than address or dilute the Saharan problem, the regional initiative has attempted (unsuccessfully) to sidestep it.

Meanwhile, the prospect of a pro-Moroccan solution to the Saharan dispute elicits mixed reactions in Spain. On the one hand, if successful annexation of the territory were to make Morocco a more stable country, there is the expectation that it would thereby facilitate economic development and political reform and in the long run enable the authorities to address some of the security issues of concern to Spain, such as irregular migration and drug trafficking [Gillespie, 2002b]. On the other hand, there is Madrid's traditional concern that a settlement of the Sahara conflict would herald increased pressure from Rabat in relation to Ceuta and Melilla (a concern fed by the Moroccan occupation of Parsley Island in July 2002). In fact, the gradual process whereby Morocco has regained territory from Spain since independence in 1956 (Tarfaya 1958, Sidi Ifni 1969, Western Sahara 1975) does lend itself to interpretations based on so-called 'salami' tactics. Yet Spain has not proved entirely inflexible on the question, even under the People's Party (PP) governments of 1996-2004. On one occasion in 2001, former foreign minister Josep Piqué seemed to open the door to negotiations based on Western Saharan autonomy within Morocco (*El País*, 22 November 2001). This apparent gesture was not reciprocated by Morocco: indeed, Spain — still feeling aggrieved as a result of the failure of the EU-Morocco fishing negotiations in April 2001 — seemed to have been left out of Rabat's plans for co-operation with foreign oil companies. Later, in July 2003, while occupying the chair of the UN Security Council, Spain pushed for consensus around the autonomy formula, and seems to have been genuinely surprised when Morocco complained of being 'let down' by Madrid.

The behaviour of the Spanish and Algerian states in the dispute is subject to rather different constraints. The Spanish government has resisted an *imposed* UN solution, whatever its content, and is particularly aware of the widespread public sympathy in Spain and among European NGOs for Polisario, or at least for the Saharawi refugees residing in Polisario camps in Tindouf, in south-west Algeria. An authoritarian regime such as Algeria's is less sensitive to public opinion, although rival factions within it have attempted to rally nationalist support through taking a pro-Polisario line [Mohsen-Finan, 5, 10]; inevitably, in the past this has tended to reinforce traditional demands rather than bring more imaginative approaches to the issue.

Are these positions now changing? In theory, processes of democratisation in the Maghreb might help bring a solution — consolidating the more flexible position recently adopted by Algeria, reducing the territorial concerns harboured by Spain and favouring a genuine regionalisation policy in Morocco — but such developments seem unlikely to occur in the near future. Equally, the push given to the limited autonomy option by Washington may receive little effective follow-up in the period ahead owing to US preoccupation with Iraq and other 'hot spots'. Morocco itself sees a direct negotiation with Algeria as the only way forward, but this has proved notoriously difficult to set up and in any case the Polisario Front would need to sanction a settlement as well if it were to attract UN approval. While some Algerian generals (notably General Nezzar) feel that their government should terminate its support for Polisario, there is significant internal opposition to such a move. To achieve a dialogue between the interested parties, mediation (though currently rejected publicly by Morocco) may be most effective if emanating from Europe (easier to sell to the public than US involvement). This seems unlikely to come from the EU as such, given the limits to its dexterity as a global actor; but a degree of optimism has arisen around the possibility that Spain (following the general election of March 2004) and France might together play a brokering role, facilitating a compromise among the parties that might subsequently find UN endorsement. Thus, attention must therefore focus on the way in which the Spanish position has changed and on the evolution of the bilateral relationship between Morocco and Spain (and indeed Spain and France). After being subjected to huge strains and stresses over the previous two years, in February 2003 Hispano-Moroccan relations began to show signs of having turned a corner, with ambassadors being exchanged once more after a protracted diplomatic dispute. More recently, since the election of the Socialist government headed by José

Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, a new initiative has been launched, implying a Spanish shift from 'passive neutrality' to 'active neutrality', as it has been described by foreign minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos (El País, 14 June 2004). This seems to be the main development capable of producing 'movement' in the near future with regard to efforts to resolve the Western Sahara question.

If sub-regional co-operation is to grow along the North-South axis of the Mediterranean, it would seem axiomatic that existing key bilateral relationships, while they may be in need of re-equilibration, should at least hold up, and ideally develop further. Relations between Spain and Morocco, countries that the late King Hassan II often described as being *condenados a entenderse* ('condemned to get along with one another'), were nurtured by Hassan and González from the 1980s. The relationship is one between two neighbours who, having managed to achieve a close collaborative relationship in several specific areas in the 1980s and 1990s [Gillespie, 2000: ch. 3], became embroiled in a damaging dispute at the start of the new millennium. This reached a height in July 2002 during the scramble for control over Parsley Island, near Ceuta.

Both countries sustained considerable losses in this dispute. Andalusian fishermen found themselves deprived of their traditional fishing grounds off the Atlantic coast of Morocco; Spanish employers saw their supply of Moroccan seasonal labour disrupted and had to find contract replacements in eastern European and Latin America; Spanish aid and investment all but dried up; Morocco's tourist industry was hit by a fall in Spanish demand. While diplomatic efforts finally brought a return to normality in 2003, the resort to pressure tactics by both sides during the dispute shows the fragility of the relationship and how hard it will be to establish collaborative relations based on genuine mutual confidence — even if one impediment (Aznar) has now been removed from a crucial position of influence. It is argued below that Spain and Morocco have paid a price for papering over the cracks in their relationship during the years of apparent (and in some respects superficial) friendship — just as Morocco and Algeria have over the Western Sahara while joining together in the Arab Maghreb Union. Spain and Morocco will need to address the issues in dispute (among them the Western Sahara) and make greater efforts to understand each other if they are to restore their relations on firmer foundations.

For a variety of reasons, constructive relations between these two countries are crucial to the success of the EMP in general and the pursuit of security in the western Mediterranean in particular. These reasons include: Spain's influential role in the development of the EMP from the very start (seen especially in the preparation of the Barcelona and Valencia ministerial conferences); the geopolitical location of the two countries astride the straits of Gibraltar (a major migration gateway to Europe); and Morocco's tradition of openness to Europe, its recent record of reform and the way in which part of the Moroccan Islamist movement has been integrated successfully within the political system. Spanish diplomats (as was demonstrated by the EMP Conference in Valencia in April 2002) have worked actively for a dialogue between cultures [Gillespie, 2002a, 2003], but this at a time when Spain's practical relationship with Morocco has reached depths now known for twenty years. The two countries resorted to military and para-military action in the course of their recent dispute, despite having agreed to resolve disagreements by peaceful means through a friendship treaty signed in the early 1990s.

Morocco withdrew its ambassador from Madrid in October 2001, only to return him 15 months later. During the dispute, prime minister Aznar issued veiled threats to Morocco that it would suffer for refusing to renew its fisheries agreement with the EU and for not doing enough to control illegal migration to Spain. For much of 2002, Spanish foreign policy towards the Maghreb seemed almost to resemble that of Francoist Spain, as difficult relations with Morocco prompted additional efforts in Madrid to strengthen Spanish ties with Morocco's traditional rival, Algeria (chiefly by signing a friendship treaty with the Algerian authorities and fêting President Bouteflika during a state visit to Spain).

What went wrong in the Hispano-Moroccan relationship? And where does the recent

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dispute leave the prospects of more stable collaborative relations in the future? Although the outcome of the Spanish general election in March 2004 has provided an opportunity to re-launch the relationship, what is required is a critical questioning of the assumptions that have underpinned Spanish policy towards Morocco over the last 20 years (particularly pertinent to the purposes of this study since these assumptions are shared by the EU and are reflected in the EMP). Since the election of González and his Socialist administration in 1982, the fundamental assumption in Madrid has been the functionalist one that a more secure environment would emerge in the western Mediterranean chiefly through the growth of interdependence between the two countries (as well as between EU and North African countries in general). Faced with a history of tension between Madrid and Rabat arising from Spain's former colonial presence in North-West Africa, and persisting through the sovereignty dispute over Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish strategy to dissipate tension essentially has been to develop links of interdependence that would raise the cost to Morocco of adopting pressure tactics in support of irredentist ambitions. The strategy was underpinned by major Spanish credit packages and a state-promoted investment drive that quickly converted Spain into Morocco's second commercial partner (after France) and momentarily also its second largest foreign investor as well. Meanwhile, co-operation was pursued in a variety of spheres. Ironically, Spain helped to develop the Moroccan fishing industry (thus in the long run helping to create the conditions for its own exclusion from Moroccan fishing grounds) and supplied various types of defence equipment (including jeeps used in the desert war against Polisario). The symbolic highpoint came in 1991, when the Hispano-Moroccan friendship treaty was signed, providing for annual summit meetings and involving a commitment on both sides to resolve any agreements without recourse to force.

Some observers of Hispano-Moroccan relations have identified in them a deterioration resulting from the change of government in Madrid in 1996, with González and the PSOE being replaced by Aznar and the PP [Núñez Villaverde, 2001]. Others have attached further significance to the PP's greater political dominance after winning of an absolute majority four years later [Gillespie, forthcoming]. Nobody, however, predicted the sharp deterioration in these relations that occurred in 2001-02, which had several dimensions:

- Morocco's decision not to renew its fisheries agreement with the EU (under which 90% of the beneficiaries were Spanish) and a rather threatening discourse in Madrid concerning the consequences (hinting at a Spanish refusal to show flexibility when the chapters relating to agriculture were reviewed in the context of the EU-Morocco Association Council).
- Morocco's efforts to absorb the Western Sahara, with US and French diplomatic support, thus far frustrated by Spain and other countries.
- Arguments over the policing of migration, with Spain alleging negligence on the part of Morocco and the latter pleading a lack of resources (plus similar ill-feeling caused by large-scale smuggling of Moroccan cannabis to Europe via Spain).
- Negative media coverage of the 'other', particularly in Spanish and Moroccan newspapers.

Exactly what went wrong with the Spanish interdependence strategy merits further analysis³. One possibility is that 'interdependence' did not fail but simply has not yet gone far enough, even if one includes the informal economy, in which case Spain emerges as a close rival to France in terms of trade with Morocco. If this is the case, one still needs to understand the practical impediments that may stand in the way of deepening the relationship, which might include:

1 the marginal interest shown by Spanish big business in the Moroccan market (with the notable exception of *Telefónica*, the 800 Spanish companies operating there are overwhelmingly small or medium-sized enterprises);

2 a diversion of Spanish foreign policy effort under the PP towards 'new' regions such as central and eastern Europe and Asia, as the Aznar administration attempted

3. For a more detailed discussion of Spanish-Moroccan relations in terms of theories of interdependence, see Gillespie [2004].

to meet the challenges of globalisation; and

3 cultural reservations about Spanish involvement in North Africa (surveys have shown that xenophobia in Spain is most pronounced in relation to Arabs and North Africans; the PP government showed a strong preference for immigration from Latin America; and even Spanish NGOs traditionally have preferred to operate in Latin America rather than in North Africa).

It is arguable, in any case, that interdependence has been invested in without sufficient attention being paid to the broader context in which it has been promoted. In particular, whatever the diplomatic brinkmanship in the dispute of 2001-03, the hardening of attitudes and successive misunderstandings between the two countries' representatives were fuelled by a long history of confrontation, which still affects perceptions of the 'other' [Balfour, 2002]. The González/Hassan willingness to put territorial disputes into 'quarantine' while business between the two countries flourished was ultimately no real substitute for discussing awkward issues and seeking to reconcile differences. However, it must be recognized too that the nature of the bilateral agenda has changed since the 1980s as the difficult issue of migration has come onto the agenda, often at the very top of it. In Spain's case, it is this subject above all (compounded by a residual sense of historical duty to the Saharawis and sympathy for aggrieved fishermen) that has brought the sentiments of civil society into the dispute, constraining the ability of the authorities to transact bilaterally in quiet, lofty isolation. Meanwhile, in Morocco, with elections becoming more competitive in recent years, public opinion — including nationalistic support for claims to sovereignty over territory historically held by Spain — may be becoming more of a force to be reckoned with.⁴

Interdependence has also come up against economic rivalry, in particular the stubborn defence in Madrid of traditional Spanish agricultural and fishing activities, competing with the ambitions of the young Moroccan state to rely on these activities as part of its development plans. This obstacle has been eroded somewhat by the effects of the EU-Morocco Association Agreement of 1995. Yet alongside the lack of economic complementarity, which is far from total [Jordán Galduf, 1997], there is a lack of political symmetry too. With regard to the latter, there was a degree of political artificiality associated with the nurturing of economic relations in the 1980s and 1990s: the difference between an authoritarian and a democratic regime was ignored as the fiction was entertained in Madrid that Morocco was, broadly speaking, following the Spanish path to modernization — that economic liberalization would breed a parallel political process and thus democracy would emerge gradually, nurtured by a progressive king. From the vantage point of today, this can be seen as highly dubious, given the existence of significant differences in the transition processes of the two countries and the actual limits to political reform under Mohamed VI. The regime contrast between the two neighbours is still substantial and in addition to it, despite some bilateral defence co-operation, they possess rather different defence cultures and different perceptions of security threats. Security thinking in Morocco has long been preoccupied with the Sahara and in recent years has focused as well on the extremist fringes of the Islamist movement. Spain meanwhile focused primarily on the domestic challenge posed by Basque separatism, but gradually came to perceive its relatively small but fast growing immigrant population as a security 'risk' as well [Gillespie, 2002b]. September 11, 2001 and its sequels have provided the two countries with a common additional concern in the form of international terrorism, but the differences of security perception and discourse remain an obstacle to effective bilateral co-operation [Haddadi, 2002].

Even in relation to terrorism, the two countries at first reacted strategically to September 11, 2001 in rather different ways. Morocco suddenly saw itself upgraded as a potential US ally in the 'war against terror' and tried to use its stronger position *vis-à-vis* the West to gain international support for its efforts to finally absorb the Western Sahara. The authorities there feel vindicated by the spread of al-Qaeda activity to Morocco (and more recently to Spain), and claim fresh justification for restrictions on legal political competition in the country; there has also been widespread use of torture against Islamist detainees since 2002, according to Amnesty International (*El País*, 26 June 2004). Spaniards in the meantime seemed to become more wary of immigrants

4. Of course, nationalism in society is rarely as widespread as governments often try to suggest; there are plenty of Moroccans who are indifferent to the status of Ceuta and Melilla just as there are many Spaniards who care little about the status of Gibraltar.

(particularly Muslims), encouraging the PP to increase the 'securitisation' of policy in this area. International terrorism also gained greater priority on the Spanish security agenda, but principally as an emphasis that served Madrid's domestic agenda of using tough, intransigent tactics against ETA, its allies and sympathisers alike. Anti-terrorism, concerns about unregulated migration and a recent rise in common crime became intermixed in official security discourses, with part of every problem being traced back to Morocco. However, eventually a sense of common cause between Spain and Morocco began to emerge following the Casablanca suicide bombings on 16 May 2003, for now (with some of the targets being Spanish) the two countries were being targeted by the same Islamist extremists and Morocco began to perceive a greater need for external assistance in order to combat them. Unfortunately, the change of attitude discernible in official discourses failed to translate into practical co-operation, as the investigation of the Madrid bombings ten months later would demonstrate.⁵

In this context, the behaviour of elites in both countries during 2001-03 was inconsistent: at times they acted with great prudence and took pains to avoid upsetting the sensitivities of their interlocutor; on other occasions they clearly played to the nationalist gallery in a deliberate bid for cheap applause. Both sides tried to bring in their allies as additional pressure on their counterparts to make concessions. In this regard, one might expect Spain to have been in the stronger position to play the multilateral card (in view of the limited coherence of the AMU and the Arab League), but in fact Madrid misplayed its hand on two occasions: first, ahead of the European Council meeting in Seville in June 2002, by threatening (along with the UK) to commit the EU to a policy of sanctions against any third countries that failed to collaborate with the Union in efforts to curb 'illegal' migration; and second when assuming that Common Foreign & Security Policy would deliver European solidarity during the conflict over Parsley Island. As is well known, a majority of EU member states rejected a sanctions-based approach to immigration at Seville, and the French, for reasons of national interest, prevented the EU from adopting a robust stance to try to force the withdrawal of the Moroccan occupiers during the July 2002 crisis.

The appointment of the pragmatic Driss Jettu as prime minister of Morocco following the elections of September 2002 helped bring a return to normal diplomatic relations with Spain; talks began the following year on a number of issues in dispute, with working groups being established to discuss illegal migration, the drug trade, investment and the Saharan dispute (but not Ceuta/Melilla). The discussion of migration issues may be helped by the emergence of the new EU consensus, determined to achieve North-South collaboration over irregular migration and prepared to fund the policing of it and extend aid to source regions. There would seem to be a balance of benefit to be achieved by Spain and Morocco here, at least in relation to the economic aspects of migration; and collaboration in these field may be facilitated by signs of 'desecuritisation' of the policy area under Zapatero, with responsibility for most aspects of migration policy being taken away from the Ministry of the Interior. The territorial disputes are more difficult to resolve, however, even if Rabat is now prepared to discuss delimitation of the waters between Morocco and the Canary Islands, for the first time. Over the Western Sahara, Spain has become decidedly more pro-active since the change of government in Madrid. A modified formula based on autonomy within Morocco is now acceptable to the governing Socialists, so long as a consensus can be negotiated among the parties to the conflict and can command support on the ground. However, widespread sympathy for the Saharawi cause within Spain remains a constraint on Zapatero's government and explains why its early statements and actions have been slightly inconsistent, at least insofar as emphasis is concerned. The PSOE seems to be less fearful than the PP previously that, if the Western Sahara were integrated successfully with Morocco, the focus of nationalist agitation and mobilisation would then shift to Ceuta and Melilla. At present, Rabat is not demanding talks with Spain over its claims to these cities.

Zapatero made an excellent initial impression on Moroccans by the way in which he made Casablanca the destination of his first official visit as prime minister in April 2004 and by his statements both there and in Paris, signalling a change in the Spanish position over the Sahara.⁶ He pleased his Moroccan counterparts by expressing support for an agreement among 'all the parties' (i.e. not simply with Polisario), by

5. The Madrid bombings of 11 March 2004 showed Spain to be largely unprepared for a major al-Qaeda attack and revealed that intelligence and security cooperation between the neighbouring countries was still negligible, amid continuing mutual mistrust.

6. In fact Zapatero was already popular in Morocco as a result of a visit he made in December 2001 (despite the express disapproval of the PP), in an initiative to halt the deterioration in bilateral relations.

expressing a readiness to work together with France (a staunch supporter of the Moroccan position), and by making no explicit reference to the Baker Plan which Morocco had rejected the previous year, though he did make reference to the UN framework (*El País*, 3 May 2004). Rather surprisingly, Zapatero expressed confidence that an agreement (implicitly based on Moroccan-Algerian rapprochement) could be reached within six months — i.e. by the end of October, when the issue was due to come up once more at the UN. Moroccan optimism was encouraged further by the resignation of James Baker as special representative of the UN general secretary in June, having failed to come up with a formula acceptable to the parties in seven years of consultations. Although Baker's successor, the Peruvian diplomat Álvaro de Soto, has defended the Baker Plan, it has been pronounced dead in Rabat.

As was made clear after a meeting between Mohamed VI and President Bush in the White House on 8 July, Morocco sees its interests as best served by a direct agreement with Algeria, the assumption being that the Algerians would be able to persuade Polisario leaders to accept it thereafter. Yet while dialogue between Morocco and Algeria would no doubt be a positive step forward, any notion that a final deal could simply be bilateral would be naïve, and would risk driving Polisario into adopting more militant responses. Since 2003 Polisario has accepted the possibility of the Western Sahara being granted *provisional* autonomy under Moroccan rule, but it defends the Baker Plan for leaving open the possibility of eventual independence. With Rabat still refusing to negotiate with Polisario so long as independence is on the table, there are clear difficulties in achieving triangulation among the interested parties. Could Spain make a difference? So far, Madrid's diplomats have been (a) encouraging rapprochement between Morocco and Algeria by working towards what Miguel Ángel Moratinos calls an 'integral plan for the Maghreb', (b) seeking to attain at least a Morocco-Algeria breakthrough before the issue returns to the UN Security Council, (c) reassuring Polisario by still upholding the UN approach to the Saharan conflict and increasing the level of Spanish humanitarian aid for the Saharawi refugees in Tindouf, and (d) working in close coordination with France, in recognition that any agreement will require flexibility/concessions on the part of Morocco as well as Polisario. The Spanish initiative is thus based on bringing together the parties most centrally involved in the conflict, engaging with other countries that may be able to exert pressure or provide incentives, and (for the moment) keeping at arms length the wider range of countries represented on the UN Security Council. Efforts to recast Spain's relations with France *vis-à-vis* the Maghreb, in terms of cooperation rather than rivalry, could prove just as important as the efforts to overcome traditional rivalries between Morocco and Algeria. Chirac has endorsed the Spanish initiative, possibly opening the way to a more unified EU stance in the future.

Since 2003, and especially since the change of government in Spain, clear improvements have been seen in Hispano-Moroccan diplomatic relations, which could facilitate a process of negotiation over the Western Sahara in the future. This would not mean abandoning the UN framework, but rather exploring its flexibility by drawing the various parties and interlocutors into more direct conversation. If such an approach prospers, it may still be problematic from the perspective of international law [Ruiz Miguel, 2003, 2004], but would at least break the existing sub-regional (and UN) impasse over the Sahara.

The eventual achievement of a resolution of the Western Sahara conflict could create conditions in which intra-Maghreb relations improved, the 5+5 grouping became more important and, in this broader context, Spain and Morocco lost their traditional 'obsession' with one another as relations become more (sub)regionalised. But it is important to remember that only very recently, seriously troubled relations between Spain and Morocco have been a major obstacle to such a scenario materializing, and an impediment to the development of the EMP. The EU can play no more than a secondary role in the Western Sahara dispute [Vaquer i Fanés, 2004], which remains in the domain of the UN, but there are ways in which Spain and France could assist in bringing about a process of Moroccan-Algerian rapprochement. Spain especially has a potential role to play too in bridging the gap between Rabat and Polisario, while working for sub-regional co-operation in a longer time frame, with EU financial and

Conclusions



technical support.

The EU cannot realistically hope to achieve multi-faceted sub-regional co-operation in the western Mediterranean overnight, yet it may be able to make some progress towards this objective in discrete policy areas. Counter-terrorism, most obviously, has become the subject of increased North-South co-operation in recent years, especially since September 11, 2001. As the pattern of meetings between southern European and North African interior ministers reveals, however, this is not an area that privileges a sub-regional approach in the western Mediterranean. Moreover, though these endeavours may represent a marriage of convenience in the short term, to counter the international spread of terrorist networks, in the longer term, and in a more general sense, this may not be conducive to the creation of a sub-regional security community. Indeed, over-investment in counter-terrorist co-operation could make it more difficult to place North-South co-operation on a stable, broader basis, since it might tend to perpetuate the existing dichotomy between democratic regimes along the northern shores of the Mediterranean and authoritarian regimes in the South [Jünemann, 2003].

More promising bases for sub-regional co-operation include the expansion of western Mediterranean energy connections, maritime co-operation and transport infrastructures. This cooperation could be supported in the context of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, so long as the resources invested prove sufficient for major region-building projects. Even in these policy areas, though, there is normally a less than total geographical fit between real initiatives and the western Mediterranean 'sub-region'. In the energy field, an agreement to link the electricity grids of Europe and the Maghreb was signed in Rome last December. Gas pipelines, though, tend to be more discriminatory. While still governed by the PP and with relations with Morocco deteriorating, Spain opted for a *direct* second pipeline link with Algeria, to leave itself less reliant on the existing Western Mediterranean pipeline, which passes through Morocco. At the same time, the gasification of Morocco has been hampered by the reluctance of the country's elite to accept strategic dependence on Algerian gas. Meanwhile, maritime policing to prevent irregular migration to Europe by *patera* has been approached by the EU rather exclusively and again on a basis not fully congruent with the sub-region in question. 'Operation Ulysses', one of several pilot projects undertaken by groups of EU member states since the Seville summit, is focused on the western Mediterranean but its participants include the UK as well as France, Portugal, Spain and Italy. Nonetheless, it is envisaged that the experiment will be extended to involve co-operation with countries of transit and of origin of irregular immigrants, as proposed by the European Commission in October 2002; if this happens, it could help to generate the kind of momentum required to bring about a more comprehensive attempt to address issues of migration and mobility, including the rights of people from the Maghreb working in southern Europe. Finally, there is transport where there is joint European and Maghrebi interest in the expansion and upgrading of road systems, in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, the one transport project that might conceivably provide a real North-South axis for the western Mediterranean sub-region — that is, the idea of building a tunnel linking Spain and Morocco across the strait of Gibraltar — remains a remote possibility, primarily for financial reasons.

Much of the above analysis suggests that sub-regional co-operation projects can only be expected to flourish if there are healthy bilateral relationships to effectively underpin them. The experience of the EC being driven historically by the French-German axis is of some relevance here, but the additional challenge in the western Mediterranean is to build key relationships on a cross-cultural basis, aided by the activities now being planned within the third chapter of the EMP. It is important that sub-regional projects are undertaken in relation to migration as well as infrastructures, since ultimately the human dimension is crucial; besides, migration is a field in which the countries of the Maghreb now have a growing interest in cooperation with each other (e.g. in view of Moroccan concerns about sub-Saharan migration across the border from Algeria). So far, migration has been one of the least successful facets of Hispano-Moroccan bilateral co-operation, even though agreements have been signed. While the problems here sometimes derive from ulterior motives on both sides, they also point to insufficient resources to make co-operation in this field effective — resources that the EU could provide (and indeed has started to), in order to achieve a more

effective policing of northward migration and a better deal for immigrants from the South living in Europe.

It remains to be seen how the prospects of co-operation in the western Mediterranean will be affected by EU plans to develop the European Neighbourhood Policy and by South-South integration initiatives among Mediterranean Partner countries. At the time of writing, it is not clear to what extent the EU will really promote sub-regionalism in the course of offering further integration to the individual countries forming its southern periphery. It is at least as likely that, in favouring countries with the greatest commitment and ability to align with European norms, the new policy will tend to divide putative regions such as the Maghreb. Equally, it is not yet clear whether the Agadir Process will grow to include all (or even most) of the Maghreb countries, or again might take Morocco and Tunisia along a different path to those followed by their North African neighbours.

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