



NATO Defense College
Collège de Défense de l'OTAN

The strategic interests of the Maghreb states

Belkacem IRATNI

NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE
COLLEGE DE DEFENSE DE L'OTAN

Research Division
Division Recherche

THE STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF THE MAGHREB STATES

by Belkacem Iratni
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Publications Assistant: Maria Di Martino

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Copies of this NDC Forum Paper may be obtained directly from the
NATO Defense College, Research Division
Via Giorgio Pelosi, 1 - 00143 Rome, Italy
Fax +39-06-50 52 57 97
E-mail: research@ndc.nato.int or m.dimartino@ndc.nato.int
Web site: <http://www.ndc.nato.int>

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The Maghreb states are key partners for NATO in the Mediterranean Dialogue. This is why it is so important for NATO and the other MD partner countries to understand the strategic interests of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, and even Libya, in order to address the complexities and challenges of the South-South dialogue.

This research topic proved daunting for several reasons:

- First, the problem of defining concepts. What is meant by strategic interests? Assets and potentials, or threats and challenges? Are they related to traditional security or do they also encompass the 'soft' aspects examined in recent theoretical writings?
- Second, the notion that only states have strategic interests. Are the interests of states and peoples intertwined? Do authoritarian regimes, like those in the Maghreb region, embody national aspirations or do they merely pursue objectives closely linked to their own survival?
- Third, the lack of official documentation or public discourse in Maghreb countries on national strategic objectives, apart from the usual vague statements about asserting the identity paradigm, consolidating the democratization of the political system, strengthening the market economy and promoting human development. In all Maghreb states, these issues are quite sensitive and are still not the subject of public debate, given the relative lack of openness of their regimes.
- Fourth, since strategic interests are not clearly articulated in the official discourse of Maghreb states, in general the only concern addressed, at length and in grandiloquent language, is the need to defend territorial integrity and national sovereignty and to preserve political stability and internal order. Potential threats to survival from foreign sources are seldom clearly identified as such. Domestic threats have arisen from terrorist violence, as illustrated only too well in the last few years. Many other threats have been acknowledged, such as corruption, drug trafficking, light arms dealing, illegal migration and organized crime, as well as environmental issues, mainly desertification and the shortage of water resources. But, as with strategic interests, there has been no prioritization of these threats based on the level of danger they pose.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study of the strategic interests of the five states making up the Union of the Arab Maghreb created in 1989. As stated in the preliminary remarks, their security interests are ambivalent. To simplify matters, the Maghreb states are treated as given political entities.

The Maghreb as a political unit based on sovereign states is the central topic of this research paper. In recent years, however, other parameters - non-governmental and transnational actors, civil society, economic issues and identity - have to some extent influenced the behaviour of these states: both internally, as regards the dynamics of national interest, security threats, identity paradigms and developmental policies, and externally, driving them to seek strategic partnerships.

It seems highly pertinent to quote Professor William Zartman's statement that: "neither decisive will or geographic determinism nor any other permanent destiny has imposed fixed or immutable causes for conflict or cooperation in this world. Objective factors are subject to actors' perception, and are highly variable"¹. But in societies that are not fully democratic, the data on rulers' perceptions are scarce and highly speculative, and the decision-making process is not transparent and does not reflect conflicting interests and their management. To sidestep this analytical problem, the simplistic view taken by many analysts of North Africa is that political systems in this region are based on ruling elites pursuing narrow interests. But however closed a regime may be, it must also be "sufficiently sensitive to public opinion to retain the support of its key constituents, cadres and security services"². And in this regard, the present process of democratization, however arduous and painful, is bringing with it global perceptions of strategic interests and much larger perspectives for the state and for society.

Strategic interests are understood in terms of security matters that include military aspects (hard security) and other, different dimensions that are less military and increasingly societal (soft security). In the case of the Maghreb, security interests mean the preservation of territorial integrity,

¹ William Zartman, *Maghrebi Politics and Mediterranean Implications*, in Giacomo, Luciano (ed): *The Mediterranean Region: Economic Interdependence and Future of Society*, Croom Helm, London and Canberra, 1984, pp 149-178.

² Clement Henry, *'Reverberations in the Maghreb of the war on terror'*, paper submitted to the MESA conference, Boston, November 2007.

the assertion of national identity and cohesion, and the strengthening of solidarity and cooperation with other countries and regions. These concerns are better understood in the light of the perceived threats facing these states, both internally and externally. They are clearly asserted by King Mohammed VI in a statement summarizing his country's strategic interests, which seem to bear similarities to those of other Maghreb states, with the exception of Morocco's avowed attempts to complete what it regards as 'unachieved national integrity': "Setting up an effective Maghreb Union with full mechanisms and procedures is an objective of paramount importance to Morocco, and, no doubt, to our brothers in the Arab Maghreb. This is a strategic choice... This objective, however, cannot be achieved unless we manage to overcome the obstacles facing us, particularly the artificial dispute regarding Morocco's territorial integrity... Any settlement, however, must guarantee the national unity and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco... Otherwise, the region runs the risk of becoming a hotbed of tension and conflict. This risk, coupled with the potential threat of terrorist activities, which are rejected by all revealed religions and are incompatible with our shared cultural values, represents the biggest threat to security of the entire region. I am convinced our five European partners, with whom we share many interests, will support this approach, which reflects our ambitions to build a realistic, comprehensive and integrated partnership with them. Given its rich tradition of cooperation with friendly nations, Morocco will make every effort to give substance to the Arab Maghreb project, and turn it into an integrated bloc, capable of making full use of its peoples' energies and potentialities, and of engaging in constructive interaction with its European partners, in a spirit of trust, security and complementarity³".

Apparently, then, Maghreb unity is thought to be the paramount strategic option of all the Maghreb states. National integrity and sovereignty are considered vital to them, while terrorism is depicted as a threat to the entire region. To safeguard state sovereignty and independence, Tunisia, perhaps because of its relative lack of economic and military capabilities, has emphasised the importance of diplomacy. As pointed out by President Bourguiba: "The option of the invulnerability of our nation lies in the prosperity and improvement of the quality of life. The Tunisian army, whatever the number of its troops or armaments, could not on its own

³Speech at '5+5' Summit in Tunis, December 5, 2003.
(<http://www.ncom.gov.ma/English/generalities/speech/2003/5plus.summit.html>).

discourage or resist aggression...It is the role of diplomacy to reinforce independence and alliances"⁴. Mauritania, which is "a country small by the number of its inhabitants, and poor by the modesty of its national production"⁵, and is in an even weaker situation, has voiced only modest aspirations.

In contrast, Algeria has placed the emphasis on a global perspective well beyond endogenous determinants, since it regards the challenges it faces as stemming from the logic of an unequal world and a globalization process that is not benefiting the countries of the southern hemisphere." In our search for the means to preserve our identities and chances of survival", President Bouteflika has argued, "there are economic and social problems of exceptional danger which are induced by a rampant globalization that is operating at the expense of the weaker states...This globalization generates an intensity line of tearings and fractures of the world that no longer passes through the confrontation of ideologies but follows a unipolar world from which neither the logics of conflicts nor the dynamics of domination have disappeared. Such a dilemma has its sources in a world-scale controversy around many concepts, notably those linked to the rights of interference, human rights and the debt burden of developing countries...national sovereignty is a national right consecrated by the Charter of the United Nations and constitutes as such, in the context of rampant globalization, our last protection against (the) implacable rules of an unequal world"⁶. Libya's world design, inspired by a revolutionary philosophy that blends progressivism, conservative Islamic precepts and active Third Worldism, has substantially diminished in recent years, leaving more latitude for national development concerns. According to Saif AI Islam, son of the Libyan leader Qaddhafi, "the external battle is over and all our efforts will now focus on internal development"⁷.

On the external level, the European Union is regarded as a strategic partner with which the Maghreb countries share many interests.

Rather than conduct a state-by-state case study of strategic interests and related security concerns, this research paper aims to provide a global,

⁴ Grimaud, Nicole: Tunisie à la recherche de sa sécurité, PUF, Paris, 1995 p.95.

⁵ President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi, coronation/enthronement Speech, http://www.ami.ms/fr/articles/2007april19/09_on_26/11/2007

⁶ President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Discours et Messages (III), Direction de l'Information de la Présidence, ANEP, Rouiba, Volume I, February 2000.

⁷ Libyan Human Development.

thematic approach, with comparative analysis whenever possible. It is divided into distinct but closely linked chapters:

- The first chapter outlines the main identity references of the Maghreb states, through an assessment of their cultural backgrounds and geographical settings.
- The second chapter singles out the threats to territorial integrity as perceived by the Maghreb states. These threats chiefly concern the balance of power in the Maghreb, sustained by territorial irredentism and disputes, especially in the case of Morocco. Territorial conflicts between some Maghreb states and other countries outside the region are also examined. One of these conflicts is still acute.
- The multifarious threats to the security of the Maghreb states described in the third chapter are scrutinized through the lens of domestic threats, mainly terrorism, 'cultural specificities', economic discrepancies, migration in its diverse forms, and smuggling.
- The fourth chapter looks at the policy of economic and security cooperation followed by the Maghreb states, with the European Union as their main partners, as well as the attempts by the Maghreb states to diversify their relations in order to acquire greater autonomy in national decision-making. These attempts are also examined in links with the US, in particular, and with other foreign powers, Russia and China, whenever needed. The issues addressed and potential actions to be undertaken with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as outlined in the Mediterranean Dialogue, are also briefly mentioned, given their relevance to the Maghreb states and to this study.
- The fifth chapter examines more thoroughly the recent but promising cooperation with NATO, through a study of the Mediterranean Dialogue initiated by that organization in 1994. Military cooperation, especially in the common fight against transnational terrorism and other threats, seems to have been the main concern of the Maghreb states over recent years. The limitations of the Mediterranean Dialogue from the Maghreb point of view are also examined, as well as the benefits the Maghreb states may gain from their strategic partnership with NATO.

CHAPTER ONE

MAGHREB IDENTITY AND GEOSTRATEGIC SETTINGS

The Maghreb is a geographical entity stretching from Cyrenaica in eastern Libya to the Atlantic shores, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sahara desert. Its geographical location is of great importance as it lies on the periphery of three distinct and interrelated worlds: the Arab world, Africa and the Mediterranean. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya share a long coastline on the western shores of the Mediterranean Sea, while Mauritania and Morocco have a coastal fringe on the Atlantic Ocean. All of Algeria, Mauritania, and Libya lie south of the Sahel and Sahara borders, and a sizeable portion of their territories is desert landscape (nearly three quarters of the total surface of 6.5 million sq km). In the east, the Libyan region of Cyrenaica is joined to the Arab world through Egypt.

This geographical location has largely shaped the Maghreb's set of identity references as well as its basic strategic concerns, some of which were stressed well before the independence of its political entities from Western colonial rule.

1.1 The Arab-Islamic background

Nearly all the peoples of the Maghreb are Muslims, of mixed Berber Arab stock, or Berber Arab-African stock, as in the case of Mauritania⁸. Furthermore, the extinction of the Berber language in Tunisia reinforced identification of both the state and the people with the Arab nation, while in Morocco the Alawit dynasty, which has ruled the country ever since 1640, claims a direct line of descent from the Prophet, making clear its racial origins and links. The racial blend in Mauritania is of some significance, as both the White Moors, formed from Arab and Berber elements (*Beydan*), and the Black Moors, known as *Haratin* (Black Africans enslaved by the Moors) consider themselves as Arabs. This

⁸The Berbers were Islamized and became Arabized to varying degrees after the arrival of the Arabs in the late 7th century.

assertion of Arab origins may be explained by the search for an identity in contradistinction to the former colonial powers; the implicit objective was to maintain the unity of the peoples, once independence had been gained.

In all five countries, the process of massive Arabization to replace progressively the use of the former colonial languages in the educational system, administration and public discourse was designed to cement the nation's identification and preserve it from fears of internal divisions along racial lines. The Berber language was recognized as a national but not official language in both Algeria and Morocco in the 1990s. National languages were also proclaimed in Mauritania: Pulu, Soninké and Wolof. There appears to be a clear indication that the Maghreb states, in spite of their internal cultural diversity, have favoured identification with the Arab world, since Islam was regarded as the force unifying their peoples and as a close link to the far greater Arab and Islamic *Umma* (nation).

Islam was proclaimed the state religion in the five Maghreb countries, with greater emphasis in Morocco, where the King is also the Commander of the Faithful. Almost the entire population in the region is Sunni Malekit⁹, a rigorist form of faith mixed with local beliefs. Both Morocco and Tunisia host a sizeable Jewish-Christian community whose origins may be traced back to before the Roman conquest¹⁰. This Jewish-Christian component may also explain the stronger attachment of Morocco and Tunisia to the Western world and their pledge for a dialogue between religions.¹¹

Located far from the Middle East confrontation area and lacking financial and military capabilities, the Maghreb states were not able to play a significant role in Arab affairs and could only look on somewhat helplessly at the defeat of the Arab armies in the June 1967 war, the peace treaty concluded between Egypt and Israel, subsequent tensions between Palestinians and Israelis, and the US invasion of Iraq. Despite official rhetoric, neither Tunisia nor Morocco has recognized the state of Israel so far because of societal pressures arising from the identification of their peoples with the Arab cause, and also because of the tragic events

⁹ Except for a tiny Muslim population, the Mozabits, living in a close community in central Algeria, who practise the Ibadite rite.

¹⁰ Most of the 150,000 Jews left Algeria in the aftermath of its independence and most of the Jews living in Libya fled this country in the aftermath of the June 1967 war.

¹¹ Pope John-Paul II was invited to Morocco in 1987 and to Tunisia in 1996.

in the Middle East, in which the Palestinians, they believe, are still the victims¹².

1.2 The Maghreb process

Realizing that the building of a union would be a long process, the three Maghreb states, joined by Libya, created the Permanent Consultative Council of the Maghreb in 1964 through a protocol agreement signed by their finance ministers, as recommended at the Tangiers meeting. The assigned objectives were to develop exchanges through the harmonization of customs policies and to coordinate positions towards the European Economic Community (EEC). However, sharp differences over political orientations, industrialization and trade policies prevented economic integration and the creation of a free trade zone.

The Maghreb countries' economies – agriculture, textiles and manufactured goods in Morocco and Tunisia, and oil and gas in Algeria and Libya – appeared to be complementary, but were also competing with foreign markets for their main exports.

For a long time the Maghreb unity process made no tangible progress and it was only in the late 1980s that the idea of a summit was placed on the agenda of the Maghreb states. Their ideological differences had been considerably attenuated by the easing of relations between the two superpowers and the rise to power in Algeria of Chadli Bendjeddid, who departed from the socialist line of his predecessor, partly because of Libya's diplomatic isolation as a result of American pressure, UN economic sanctions and a long and costly war with Chad.

Accordingly, in February 1989 in Marrakesh a treaty founding the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UAM) was signed.

The treaty had two major objectives:

- the strengthening of solidarity against any aggression directed against one of the member states;
- the establishment of a common market through the progressive circulation of goods and services as well as capital flows.

It also agreed upon the institutional architecture of the Union through the establishment of:

¹² Mauritania's decision to set up diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999 was dictated mainly by tactical reasons and financial needs, as Arab inducements to this country had significantly diminished at that time. Washington duly paid off a part of Nouakchott's external debt (\$6.7 million).

- a Presidential Council, considered as the supreme decision-making body;
- a Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, tasked to examine questions submitted by the Follow-Up Committee and specialized ministerial commissions;
- a General Secretariat, to work as a coordinating organ.

Other bodies were also created, such as:

- a legislative body entitled to express its opinions on decisions and projects submitted to the Presidential Council;
- a judicial body empowered to deliberate on disagreements arising from the interpretation and application of the Union treaty;
- a Maghreb bank for investments and foreign trade, and an academy of sciences.

From the start, unfortunately, the UAM was confronted with two major problems:

- One was related to its status, under article 2 of the Union Charter, which stated "the pursuit of a common policy in all domains", while article 3 stipulated the safeguarding of the independence of each member state on the defence level. It seems clear from these assertions that the declared intention does not envisage evolution towards a supra-national entity.
- The other problem concerns the principle that decisions were to be taken unanimously by the Presidential Council of the UAM. The principle, which gives a de facto veto right to each member state, takes no account of differences in power and influence and reduces the possibility of reaching a consensus or decisions based on majority votes.

On a practical level, the Union remained in a state of lethargy because of the profound disagreements between its leaders on border issues, the future of the Western Sahara and rivalries over the leadership in the region. Thus not a single high-level meeting was convened from 1994, as Libya and Morocco refused to assume the presidency of the Union when it was their turn. A Union summit announced for June 2005 was cancelled, leaving the Union in a deadlock. According to the Algerians, it was Morocco which officially announced the freezing of the Union's institutions¹³.

¹³ Declaration by Mohammed-Salah Dembri, Algeria's Ambassador to the UK, at a round table on the Western Sahara organized by the British scholar, Hugh Roberts, London, June 2007.

1.3 The African dimension

Because of their geographical location the Maghreb states felt that they had a strong claim to be part of the African continent, as stated in their respective constitutions, though in Tunisia the emphasis was more on the need to cooperate with the African states. Mauritania is perhaps the only Maghreb country where the dual attachment to its Arab and African roots is less blurred and persists today.

In addition to being a member of the OAU (Organization of African Unity), like the other Maghreb states, Mauritania has demonstrated its attachment to African sub-regional groupings through its inclusion in the African-Malagasy gathering set up in the early 1960s by French-speaking countries in order to maintain privileged relations with France and boost economic cooperation.

In 1970 Libya set up an association for the spread of Islam in order to train missionaries sympathetic to Qaddhafi's reformist approach to Islam and provide assistance to Islamic liberation movements and Islamic relief associations in sub-Saharan Africa. Libya also tried, allegedly, to encourage the creation of a 'Targui nation' across the Sahel-Saharan region in the early 1990s and again in summer 2006, amid skirmishes between Targui guerrillas and the Malian regular forces.

1.4 The Mediterranean bridge

The Maghreb countries gained their independence as a result of a dramatic and painful liberation process during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Far from creating a rift between them and Europe, independence led to close economic cooperation and alignments dictated by cold war logic and ideological positions. Culturally speaking, even though Maghreb peoples, and Algeria in particular, regarded their colonial past as an era of plunder and destruction, wide latitude was left for maintaining the French language in schools and in administrative dealings.

On the political level, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania sought a strategic alliance with Western Europe, and incidentally with the United States and the Atlantic Alliance, because they were opposed to the Algerian regime (and later to that of Qaddhafi) on ideological grounds, and also because the Mediterranean Sea had become one of the most crucial strategic areas in East-West rivalry. This evolution was marked by the presence of United States and Soviet Union naval forces, by 'high politics' (the Arab-

Israeli conflict), and by the search for secured energy sources in the Middle East region. Thus, inevitably, the Algerian plea to keep the Mediterranean for the Mediterranean peoples was ignored.

After the end of the cold war there was increasing unease about the Maghreb states, regarded by the Western world as a potential source of its newly perceived threats. Hoping to be a part of and not a mere victim in the search for a shared security and economic development with the northern shore of the Mediterranean, the Maghreb states attended the various forums created through the '5+5' dialogue, the Barcelona process and the Mediterranean Dialogue initiated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in which the European Union is also an active partner.

CHAPTER TWO

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND RELATED BORDER ISSUES

To ensure its survival, the state has the right to preserve its physical boundaries from outside threats and territorial claims, as well as from other states striving for domination and supremacy. To understand the concern of the Maghreb states to defend and strengthen their territorial integrity, we need to examine rivalries over leadership in these countries and their border disputes with other states.

2.1 Power rivalry and shifting alliances

History and colonial legacy shaped the regimes that emerged from the disintegration of the colonial order. Conservative monarchies in Morocco and Libya claiming religious legitimacy consolidated their political foundations, while in Tunisia and Mauritania liberal middle-classes rose out of traditional aristocracies. Amid these conservative political systems, a revolutionary and self-proclaimed socialist regime came to power in Algeria after a long and bloody war of liberation. The strategic options of each Maghreb state were defined by its regime's political and ideological orientations and external alliances.

The strategic interests of the Maghreb states, which were linked to national security, were determined in relation to one another and inevitably against one another. Alliances shifted along with occasional changes in the balance of power.

Throughout this period of exacerbated differences in ideology and economic policies, at one time or another all the Maghreb states except Libya saw a neighbouring state as a threat to their national security. Only Libya, after the reign of King Idriss, clearly felt threats from powers outside the Maghreb region, mainly the US.

The balance of power in the Maghreb witnessed an important shift with the rise to power of Qaddhafi in 1969. On both occasions when an attempted coup against King Hassan took place, in July 1971 and February 1972, Qaddhafi promptly expressed support to their authors, arousing the hatred of the Moroccan king.

Squeezed between two powerful neighbours, Tunisia used diplomatic skills to manage each of them, while strengthening strategic links with France and the US. Against the reinforcement of a strategic alliance between Algeria and Libya stood a good working relationship between all of Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. Morocco's position was increasingly enhanced by the occupation of the former Spanish Western Sahara, following the launching of a 350,000-strong march over this territory and the signature of the Madrid agreement in 1975. Since then, the balance of power that seemed to be in favour of Algeria has shifted, despite the Algerian leadership's attempt to alter the *fait accompli* by providing multifarious support to the Polisario.

Until the early 1980s, the Maghreb was entangled in its own cold war running parallel to the world scale conflict between the two superpowers: the Maghreb states were similarly divided and evenly opposed by the perceived threats each country saw to its national security. Morocco went on to maintain its hold over the Western Sahara, to preserve economic and territorial gains and to capitalize on the national dimension that the Western Sahara issue had come to enjoy in domestic politics. Tunisia resisted Libya's pressures to force it to accept a union in 1974, and successfully averted Tripoli's attempts to destabilize its regime through the support Qaddhafi was assumed to have given to Tunisian insurgents during their violent clashes with the security forces in Gafsa in 1980. As tensions grew between the two countries, thousands of Tunisian workers were expelled from Libya in 1985.

The Maghreb states remained divided along opposing alliances¹⁴, but as the regimes in Algeria and Libya moved towards political moderation and economic liberalization¹⁵, animosities were partially removed with the announcement of the setting up of the Union of the Arab Maghreb in 1989.

Externally, the easing of East-West relations also had a positive impact on the security perceptions of the Maghreb states. If throughout the cold war there were frictions, hatred and even clashes between Maghreb countries, in the new era the emphasis was on the internal menace,

¹⁴ Under the moderate leadership of President Chadli Bendjeddid, Algeria concluded a treaty of friendship with Tunisia in March 1983, which Mauritania signed in August the same year. Feeling diplomatically isolated, Morocco and Libya forged a union a year later, regarded as a 'marriage de raison', given the deep dissonances that had always marked relations between Qaddhafi and Hassan II.

¹⁵ Libya adopted a low profile in its foreign policy following US aid in 1986, the humiliating withdrawal from Chad a year later, and the sanctions imposed by the United Nations in response to Libya's involvement in terrorist acts.

mainly terrorism. What was new was their shift from declared enmity to mutual distrust, even though the aggressive diatribe and discourse of the past had been largely tuned down.

In contrast to the US, for instance, where political circles, academic think tanks and media started to look for a potential enemy after the withering away of the communist peril well before the emergence of transnational terrorism, in the Maghreb region there seems to be no concern to find a new enemy, at least in terms of political discourse. Fairly explicit reference may have been made to international terrorism or to foreign hands meddling in internal affairs, but the precise source of a real menace to national security has not been clearly asserted, though implicit deductions may be made, particularly in the light of power rivalry and opposing views on the fate of the Western Sahara.

Although in the past the Maghreb states went through shifting alliances, in the era that followed the 'oneself option' seemed to prevail. When terrorist violence broke out in Algeria in the early 1990s, King Hassan, who regarded his neighbouring country as a laboratory for radical Islam experiment, adopted a 'wait and see' policy. When two Algerian-born French national youngsters were arrested in Morocco in 1994 and accused of having perpetrated a terrorist attack against a luxury hotel in Marrakech, King Hassan, perceiving that Algerian military security was involved, imposed a visa requirement for Algerians entering Morocco. Algeria reciprocated with similar diplomatic measures, and also closed the common border, claiming that terrorists operating in Algeria had found refuge facilities in the neighbouring country.

Despite repeated calls from the Moroccan side, the frontier remained closed. The defection of hundreds of thousands of Algerian tourists each year undoubtedly had a negative impact on the commercial activities of the Moroccan cities situated near the common border¹⁶.

Morocco was disappointed not to receive support from Algeria during the crisis with Spain over the Leila-Perejil island dispute in 2004.

¹⁶ When Morocco lifted visa requirements in 1994, Algeria followed suit.

2.2 Inter-Maghreb border conflicts

In the Maghreb region, the concept of a territorially bounded state is relatively new, as most of the present frontiers were set during the colonial era and in some cases marked according to metropolitan strategic interests and military concerns. Sometimes the borders could not be defined because the terrain was difficult to mark or not worth marking, in the absence of settled populations.

It is against this historical background that boundary disputes between Maghreb states since their independence should be seen. Moreover, Algeria is the only country in the Maghreb that shares a border with all the others.

Border claims were from time to time put on the agenda by Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, depending on the balance of power and the weight of alliances that have characterized relations between Maghreb states.

Tunisia asserted claims to the Algerian Borma region just after oil was discovered by the colonial authorities, on the ground that the section of border from Chott Rharba to Bir Romane was the subject of disagreement between the Bey of Tunis and the Resident General (the Governor of Algeria), despite the agreement concluded in 1905 and formalized a year later. On the basis of the agreement signed by the Ottoman rulers of Tripoli and Tunis, the three-point line (the junction of the borders between Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) was to be located 15 km south of Ghadames, at Boundary Marker 223, and the demarcation was established in 1911. But French administrative practice in Algeria set the three-point line at Boundary Marker 220, to the north of Ghadames.

After Algeria's independence, Tunisia dropped its territorial claims, since it was satisfied with the implications (royalties), and in an agreement concluded in 1970 between the two countries, Boundary Marker 220 was sanctioned and demarcation of the common border was eventually completed.

Libya also made claims to parts of the adjacent Algerian territory on the ground that the section of frontier south of Ghadames had not been clearly defined during negotiations between France and Italy in the colonial era.

Although a treaty of friendship was signed between Algeria and Libya in 1968, during the reign of King Idriss, and an agreement on demarcation of the border was also concluded, Qaddhafi has from time to time reiterated Libya's territorial claims.

The land border between Tunisia and Libya was demarcated and did not lead to conflict between the two countries. But a disagreement arose between them in the mid-1970s, following the news that the offshore of the common Gulf of Gabes might contain oil reserves. The two states submitted their dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Court's judgement in February 1982 did not satisfy either side, though Libya gained "more than Tunisia and certainly more than it had expected"¹⁷.

Morocco stated that it had not fully obtained territorial integrity. Invoking its 'historical territorial rights', the kingdom expressed reservations about the principle of the intangibility of the frontiers inherited from colonial era, sanctioned at the 1963 founding meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, and attempted to reconstitute 'Greater Morocco', with the inclusion of Mauritania and other Spanish possessions.¹⁸ It thus opposed Mauritania's independence, arguing that it was part of the kingdom well before the French conquest, and with the support of Middle Eastern monarchies lobbied to prevent it from becoming a member of the Arab League. It was not until 1969 that Morocco agreed to recognize Mauritania's independence, mainly in response to French pressure.

Morocco's most important territorial conflict was with Algeria, concerning divergences over the treaty that Morocco signed with France after its defeat in the 1844 war. The Lalla Marnia treaty, concluded a year later, set the common border from the Mediterranean coast to Teniet Al Sassi, and established a delimitation line as far as Figuig. Further south, there was no need for demarcation because the land was uninhabited. In 1912, however, the French authorities in Algeria codified the Varnier line and set the border portion south of Teniet Al Sassi.

Well before the independence of Algeria, the Moroccan rulers reiterated their claims and in 1961 they agreed with the wartime Provisional Government of Algeria (French: *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne*, GPRA) that they would support Algeria's integrity against France's attempts to separate off the Sahara, in return for the promise that negotiations on the demarcation of the common border would take place after Algeria obtained independence.

¹⁷Ronald Bruce St John, *Qadhafi's World Design*.

¹⁸ Other territorial claims were also drawn from the 'Greater Morocco' map drafted by Allal al Fassi, the leader of the nationalist movement, Al Istiqlal, which extended Morocco's historical territory to parts of Algeria and Niger down to the Senegal River. The map has never been officialized by the Moroccan authorities.

Shortly after Algeria became independent, there were violent skirmishes between the troops of the two countries over the control points alongside the disputed frontier, with each side blaming the other for the start of the hostilities. Under the terms of a ceasefire agreed under the OAU's auspices in February 1964, Morocco was confined to the Draa Oasis and away from Tindouf, while Algeria withdrew its troops from Ich and Figuig¹⁹.

Later, in June 1972, a treaty was signed by the two sides which implicitly acknowledged the inviolability of colonial frontiers and thus Morocco's acceptance of the initial French-Algerian administered border. A demarcation process was undertaken later.

2.3 Border frictions with other countries

The whole of Morocco, Libya and Mauritania were involved in the border disputes with other parties outside the Maghreb region.

Libya's maritime dispute with Malta was resolved peacefully by an International Court of Justice judgement in 1976, on the basis of which a demarcation agreement was signed between the two sides in 1984. Skirmishes on the Libyan-Egyptian border in 1976 were due to political reasons rather than territorial claims, since President Anwar Sadat was engaging his country in a US-based peace process with Israel, a move that Libya firmly opposed.

Among all the border disputes, the conflict with Chad, ostensibly over the demarcation of the common border, was the bloodiest, the longest, the costliest and the most difficult to resolve. The dispute concerned the Aouzou strip which Libya occupied in 1973 on the basis of a non-ratified treaty concluded in 1935 between France and Italy, the occupying powers at that time of Chad and Libya. During that period, Italy made claims to areas far to the south of the line that had imitated the zones of influence in Africa between Great Britain and France dating back to 1899. Italy's argument was that these areas were controlled by the Tripoli Turkish Regency and that, as its successor, it could claim the same Ottoman territorial configuration that existed during the time of the Beylical authorities²⁰. Thus, Libya not only revived the same territorial claims made by colonial Italy but was also involved in a war against Chad lasting until 1987, when Libyan troops were withdrawn. The result was

¹⁹ George Joffé, *Boundaries*, op. cit.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

that the Aouzou Strip dispute was submitted to the International Court of Justice, whose judgement did not uphold Libyan arguments but did agree with Chad's position that Libya "by accepting a treaty with France and an exchange of letters with Paris over treaty status in 1955 and 1956, had, as an independent State, also accepted the pre-colonial boundaries, and thus has no right to the Aouzou Strip"²¹. From then on, Libya was not able to force the issue militarily and instead offered a union with Chad after the end of the war. The ultimate desire of the Libyans was to have access to the mineral-rich Aouzou Strip in one way or another, as the country badly needed raw materials for its new industry after oil reserves had dried up during the 1970s because of the lack of investments to finance oil prospecting.

Morocco's territorial irredentism arose from the fact that this country was divided into three administrative zones during the colonial era (French and Spanish protectorates, and international status for Tangiers). Disputes with Spain concerned the Ifni and Melilla enclaves on the northern coast and the Western Sahara on its southern flank, as well as Al Huceimas, Valez and Chaffarinas. Ifni was returned to Morocco in 1969 after a long negotiation process, but no decision was obtained from Spain to relinquish other parts still in its possession.

In 1975, Morocco urged Spain to enter negotiations to settle the fate of the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, known as *presidios*, as leverage to force the Spanish kingdom to accept its claims to the Western Sahara territory. Consequently, whenever Spain supported the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination, Morocco revived its claims to the enclaves because of their strategic importance for the Spanish kingdom. Incidents occurred in Melilla in 1985 in response to a new law regulating the status of foreigners (mainly Moroccans) living in this enclave. Other incidents took place when Morocco vehemently reacted to what it regarded as Spanish determination to reinforce the Iberian character of Ceuta and Melilla, when they were granted a new autonomy status. It appears that the Spanish *presidios* will remain on the Moroccan political agenda and will surface whenever political disagreements arise between the two countries. This was precisely the case in 2002 when a serious crisis broke out between the two sides over the Leila-Perejil Islands. The crisis was followed by a military showdown at this islet after it was occupied by the Spanish forces. To Spain, this small and uninhabited little rock on the Mediterranean Sea is an extension of the Canaries, while to Morocco it

²¹Ibid.

constitutes an integral part of the Western Sahara, now under its occupation.

The Leila-Perejil Island incident highlights the question of whether the border issue, once reiterated by one side, is being used to force the issue of territorial claims, or whether it serves as an instrument of leverage and pressure to force the other side to depart from unwanted political standpoints or choices.

Mauritania's conflict with Senegal is less a border dispute *per se*, since the frontier inherited from French colonial rule was accepted by the two countries. The agreement did not, however, conceal a longstanding conflict over the common border formed by the Senegal River Valley. This area proved highly important in the search for land for cattle, partly because on the Mauritanian side there are Black African inhabitants who historically and economically tend to identify with Senegal. In April 1989, a slight incident escalated into ethnic violence which quickly drew the rival states into the fray. Diplomatic relations were broken off by both sides. They were resumed in 1992 and a cattle migration agreement was signed in 2006. However, the conflict remains latent and violence may flare up again whenever grievances over land and resources are raised.

How can NATO help ease tensions and settle the border disputes? Some of the juridical aspects of these issues were submitted to the International Court of Justice for an opinion. The integrity of territories is a right sanctioned by the Charter of the United Nations, and the right to self-determination of peoples was recognized in the case of the Western Sahara, for instance. Therefore any effective contribution by NATO to questions related to border disputes may not depart from these principles, and must comply with international legality. Otherwise, tensions may be fuelled.

2.4 The pending question of the Western Sahara

To many political observers, the issue of the Western Sahara has been the main reason behind the tensions which periodically occur between Algeria and Morocco and are the major obstacle to Maghreb integration. Both countries have diverged sharply over the fate of this territory, which has been under Spanish mandate since 1884. Morocco has claimed historical rights over the Western Sahara and Algeria has maintained that it merely supports the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination

and that it has no claim whatsoever to this territory²², in conformity with the United Nations resolutions.

Numerous UN resolutions were adopted by the Security Council, reaffirming the principle of self-determination. Morocco took over the Western Saharan territory following the November 1975 Madrid agreement, creating a *fait accompli* that has been rejected by the Polisario Front and by Algeria, which ever since has lobbied for a referendum to be held under the auspices of the United Nations.

Critics of the Algerian standpoint have argued that Algeria has a threefold regional interest: political, economic and strategic, in the sense that it would not like to see Morocco extend along the Atlantic coast, thus closing all access to the Algerian Sahara to the West and to the Ocean.²³ Algeria, it is claimed, wants to create a Saharawi micro-state over which it will exercise a kind of a protectorate. These motives, it is said, were shared by King Hassan: it was believed that he had offered Algeria an access to the Atlantic coast and a share in Western Sahara mineral resources.

The Western Sahara conflict has now reached a stalemate: the United Nations have failed to implement the Security Council's resolutions to hold a referendum, because of French and US support to Morocco. Meanwhile, Morocco has strengthened its hold over the disputed territory through military fortifications, the settlement of populations, administrative rules and economic projects.

Disagreements between Morocco and the Polisario Front over the size of the voting population (Saharawi settlers in the disputed territory, the refugees living in camps near the south-western Algerian town of Tindouf, and Moroccans posing as Saharawis, as the Polisario Front suspected) arose over the technicalities of implementing the referendum.²⁴.

²² Memorandum on the Western Sahara Question, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algiers, 1976.

²³ Lukan, Bernard, *Histoire du Maroc: des origines à nos jours*, Critérium, Paris, 1996, p.304.

²⁴ At the beginning of its militant activities, on the basis of the 1974 Spanish census the Polisario Front claimed there were 74,000 Saharawis. Meanwhile, during Moroccan occupation of the Western Sahara, Moroccan residents and their descendants were estimated as between 300,000 and 400,000 against 160,000 Saharawis, according to Mundy, J: *Autonomy and Intifadah*, New Horizons in Western Sahara Nationalism, *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 108, January 2006. The Polisario Front disclosed other figures to support the pro-independence trend, setting for instance the refugee population living near Tindouf at 150,000 in contrast to the 70,000 estimated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For another point of view, see Laurence Ammour, *A qui profite le gel du conflit du Sahara Occidental* (English translation: *The frozen conflict in Western Sahara: who benefits?*), Research Paper No. 30, November 2006, pp 1-7, Academic Research Branch, NATO Defense College, Rome.

To find a way out of the impasse, former US Secretary of State James Baker, acting as the United Nations envoy to the Western Sahara, drafted a peace plan after bringing Moroccans and Saharawis face to face for the first time in June 2002. The plan proposed a period of autonomy for the Western Sahara under provisional Moroccan sovereignty, followed by a referendum allowing settlers to vote either for integration with Morocco or for independence. The plan was accepted by Morocco but rejected by the Polisario Front on the basis that it favoured the Moroccan standpoint. A revised plan was issued in 2003, but this time was rejected by Morocco.

Various United Nations resolutions calling for a referendum to determine the fate of the Western Sahara failed dismally.

In these conditions, the UN Security Council opted at its October 2005 meeting for direct negotiations between the two belligerent parties, and in April 2006 Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary General, shifted on to the two belligerent parties the responsibility for finding a solution to their conflicting claims over the Western Sahara, and appointed Peter Van Welsnum as his special envoy. However, this solution should be "just and durable, mutually accepted and permit the self-determination of the Western Sahara as stated by the resolution adopted by the Security Council at its April 2007 meeting".

In the two meetings between the Moroccan and Saharawi delegations held at the US city of Manhasset in July 2007, Morocco announced that its project would be at the centre of the debates, but it appeared that the Polisario Front had also submitted its own plan for discussions, according to the United Nations special envoy, Peter Van Welsnum²⁵. The third round of negotiations and the fourth, convened in mid-March 2008, were to no avail. Once again, an alternative to the principle of the recognition of the inalienable right to self-determination for the Saharawi people proved illusory.

Given the situation, the consequences of this stalemate will probably endanger peace and stability in the region, in the light of new developments that have already taken place:

- First, it seems that Morocco will not depart from its 'autonomy plan', as the Saharan question obeys the logic of internal politics. It is difficult to see a reversal of its advocacy for self-determination by the Polisario Front, which has grown out of an early anticolonial movement, has devoted 30 years to militant

²⁵ In Liberté (Algeria) 13-14/2007.

activism and has secured the integration of its self-proclaimed Democratic Republic (RASD) in the Organization of African Unity and its recognition by nearly 80 countries up to now²⁶.

- Secondly, it is hard to see Algeria turning its back on the Saharan cause, given all its efforts to support the self-determination principle.

In the light of these facts, the fate of the Western Sahara may become increasingly linked to destabilizing parameters in the region, such as:

- the growing resistance of the Saharawis living in parts occupied by Morocco, highlighted by riots and clashes with the security forces in the last two years;
- the fact that, even if a 'third way autonomy' takes off, the future of the Saharawi refugees living in camps near the Algerian border will not be easy to foresee, as in many cases the 'integration' of exogenous elements has proved hard to manage;
- the granting of broad autonomy to the Saharawi population, which may have a domino effect on other regions, for the simple reason that centralized states tend to be more attached than open regimes and democratic societies to their basic prerogatives and foundations.

The persistence of these potentially destabilizing parameters may facilitate the expansion of radical Islam, terrorist activities and all forms of trafficking in the whole region.

Will NATO have a role in preventing risks linked to the expansion of terrorism and arms smuggling? This question has found a response in the framework of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, which was initiated in order to coordinate efforts made in recent years with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to fight terrorist activities in the Mediterranean Sea.

The other question may be whether NATO could help settle the issue of the Western Sahara, where the United Nations have partially failed because of pressures from foreign powers. Any NATO contribution risks failure if it does not take into consideration UN resolutions on this matter, since the Polisario Front resolutely upholds the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination. Algeria is backing this principle, which was framed in the decolonization process. In this context, helping to implement United Nations resolutions may set a good example.

²⁶ In reaction to the accession of the RASD to the OAU in 1984, Morocco withdrew from this continental organization.

CHAPTER THREE

PERCEIVED THREATS TO NATIONAL COHESION

As already stated, the strategic interests of the Maghreb states are linked to the dangers they believe may threaten their national identity and social order and ultimately sap their own foundations. These threats can be summarized under four main headings: terrorism, economic discrepancies, cultural specificities and ethnic differences, in addition to various forms of migration and smuggling.

3.1 Radical Islam and terrorism

For many reasons, the emergence of radical Islam in the Maghreb region and the cycle of violence that followed seemed a stark anachronism. Yet sociological ferment and the cultural predicament have not, it seems, sown the seeds for the emergence of fundamentalism, as they have in Middle Eastern countries, particularly Egypt. Indeed, close, longstanding relations with Western Europe and the absence of radical Islamic culture, added to the experience of egalitarianism and socialism in both Algeria and Libya and the subtle blend of traditions and modernistic values in Tunisia and Morocco, have prevented the emergence of a political Islam based on *jihad* (holy war).

When extremist Islamic groups emerged in the Maghreb, all the regimes in the region labelled them with code words such as 'deviants', 'terrorists' and 'criminals'. No reference was made to religious motivation, for the simple reason that Islam, as a religion of peace, tolerance and social justice, could in no way serve as a front for radical Islamist militancy and acts of violence.

In Morocco, it was believed that the country was targeted by terrorism "precisely because it has been able to create circumstances where Jews and Muslims can coexist and because the country's cultural religious diversity is a source of strength", to quote Moroccan former Prime Minister Driss Djettou. In Algeria, terrorists were regarded as enemies of the nation and of true Islam who aimed to sap the foundations of "a promising Arab State" alongside Iraq before the 1991 Gulf War. They were viewed as religious heretics in Libya, where no official

interpretation of the holy Quran is permitted except that of Qaddhafi. In Tunisia, radical Islam was thought to undermine modern values and the emancipated status of society.

However, there are other reasons that could explain the emergence of an Islamic trend opposed to the political and ideological orientations of the regimes in the Maghreb, as well as the proliferation, lately, of various groups defying the state's authority through violent acts and even insurgency, as we have seen in Algeria.

In all the Maghreb countries, Islam has been the major component of the frame of reference of ordinary people.

Teaching in the *medersas* (quranic schools) and the functioning of the religious and cultural lodges of Muslim Brotherhood associations were tightly supervised by the state. In 1972, the state became responsible for collecting *zakat* (Islamic alms tax) and the *imams* (preachers) became civil servants obeying the directives and general guidance from official religious authorities on religious discourses and Friday sermons. In Morocco the King, as 'Commander of the Faithful', is considered as the supreme imam, directing religious feasts and ceremonies.

Another factor that may have favoured the emergence of radical Islam is the Arabization in massive doses aimed at counterbalancing powerful left-wing and communist elements as well as the pro-Western trend. In addition, the intrusion of teachers imported from the Middle Eastern countries, especially Egypt, has helped, perhaps involuntarily in some cases, to propagate the fundamentalist culture. This culture, inspired by the teachings of *Wahabism*, is based on *Salafist* ideology, which advocates adherence to the teachings of the ancestor (*Salaf*) and an orthodox interpretation of Islam, as well as a rigorist and ascetic practice of the religion. In Mauritania, this Islamic schism has thrived thanks to donations and financial incentives from the Persian Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, while the political leadership has encouraged the spread of *Salafi* ideas, perhaps without realizing that it risked diluting its monopoly on Islamic interpretation²⁷. Under these circumstances, religious bodies and the religious leadership in the Maghreb countries were denied not only political influence but also autonomy in religion itself. Thus criticisms - mainly from the conservative sections of their societies - of the forms taken by official Islam in the Maghreb states inevitably increased.

²⁷ *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol.3, no 19, October 2005, <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article>.

Above all, these autonomous religious groups were vehemently critical of the behaviour of ruling elites, whom they accused of causing Western-style cultural alienation, social deprivation, growing social disparities and endemic unemployment, particularly among the youth.

The first violent clashes between Islamists and political authorities started in Tunisia during the Gafsa events of 1980. In Algeria, an armed Islamist group set up by a preacher, Mustapha Bouyali, conducted operations against military targets in the suburbs of Algiers. More clashes occurred in Tunisia following the participation of *al Nahda* in the 1989 elections and its rise as an important force in domestic politics, which alarmed Ben Ali's regime. An insurrectionist movement rocked Algeria after the cancellation of the second round of the December 1991 parliamentary elections, which the legalized Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut - FIS) was poised to win. The Algerian leaders who replaced President Chadli after his resignation in January 1992 were convinced that an Islamist victory would plunge the country into a dreadful civil war. They also argued that the FIS leaders had repeatedly declared that democracy was incompatible with Islam; they were opposed to a constitution, and recognized only the rule of divine law. In retaliation for the Islamist upsurge, a state of emergency was proclaimed, and the FIS was outlawed in March 1992.

Terrorist violence dramatically increased with the creation of the Islamic Salvation Army (Armée Islamique du Salut - AIS), believed to be the armed wing of the FIS. Other small groups were also formed, such as the Movement for an Islamic State (MEI - Mouvement pour un Etat Islamique Armé) and the Islamic Armed Movement (Mouvement pour un Islam Armé - MIA) operating mainly in the Algiers suburbs. But the most active armed group, to which a great number of violent attacks were attributed, was the Islamic Armed Groups (Groupes Islamiques Armés - GIA), a Salafist movement "staffed by Algerian Islamic Jihadists returning from Afghanistan and whose number was estimated at 2 to 3000"²⁸.

The Algerian tragedy had an impact on the neighbouring states, where Islamist armed groups were formed such as the Moroccan Combatant Group (MCG), and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

Fear of coordination between the Islamic armed groups prevented the Maghreb leaders from joining forces against the terrorist groups operating

²⁸ Martinez, J: Why the violence in Algeria? in *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 2004.

in the region, though attempts were made by Algeria, and by Tunisia, whose president, Ben Ali, has consistently supported the beleaguered Algerian regime. Morocco and Algeria did not trust each other, and each side accused the other of assisting Islamic guerrilla fighters in the neighbour's territory.

As terrorist violence escalated, all the Maghreb states responded by trying to crush the Islamist groups militarily and eliminate radical Islam from their societal foundations for good. In Algeria, the authorities waged an all-out war against terrorist activists, dismantling their urban cells in urban and *maquis* strongholds. The death toll as a result of terrorist violence and counter-insurgency operations throughout the 1990s was estimated as 150,000 to 200,000. 6,000 to 18,000 persons were believed to have disappeared and material damage of \$ 20 billion was recorded²⁹. Massive operations against the urban cells of radical groups were launched in Morocco, Mauritania and Libya from 1994 to 1995.

Terrorist movements in the Maghreb region have undergone an evolution on the ground and the following developments have taken place:

-Attempts have been made by Bin Laden's *Al Qaeda* to extend its terrorist activities in the Maghreb.

-Islamist terrorists in the Maghreb appear to have switched to a Middle Eastern terrorist style of suicide attacks, as borne out by the events in Algeria in Algiers in April 2007, and the failed suicide attacks in Morocco in the same period.

-Most of the suicide bombers, like the Moroccans involved in the Madrid rail attacks in March 2004 or the Algerian youngsters involved in the April 2007 suicide attacks in Algiers, had never been to Afghanistan. In both cases most of the convicted young terrorists were not well educated and came from the shanty towns and populous areas of the largest and most industrialized cities in the Maghreb.

Admittedly, as terrorist activities have expanded to many parts of the Maghreb as well as to the Sahel-Saharan region, allegedly under the influence of the *Al Qaeda* organization, and since terrorism is thought to be able to strike at Western countries in various forms, including propaganda through internet networks, NATO's contribution to fighting terrorism through joint naval operations and the exchange of intelligence on terrorist cells with the Maghreb has intensified and made real headway.

²⁹ As in all violent conflicts, available figures vary according to the multiple but divergent sources. This may explain gaps in the estimates.

An evolution of this kind may fuel thinking on the extension of NATO's role in the US-led Pan-Sahel initiative directed at combating and preventing terrorist activities from the Eastern Horn of Africa to the adjacent Sahel-Saharan region lying south of the Maghreb. This is, however, unlikely to occur, since the Maghreb states are reluctant to host naval bases that may have to be used and do not want to be used as proxy vehicles for conflicts in the Sahel-Saharan region. Another obstacle is the NATO notion of terrorism, which risks equating state terrorism with fundamentalist groupings and legitimate acts of resistance. This was stressed during the conference on relations between Tunisia and NATO in June 2007. In addition, divergences among NATO's members over NATO military involvement in Africa have already emerged, particularly with regard to the NATO Reaction Force (NRF) exercise in the Cap Vert Islands in June 2006, the first event ever to take place in Africa. France, for instance, vehemently opposed the initial project of testing the NRF operation in Mauritania, which Paris regards as being part of its zone of influence. It must be remembered that France still maintains a sizeable military presence in some of its former African colonies (about 1,000 soldiers) and has defence agreements and treaties with some of their governments. Conflicts of interests in Africa among NATO members, especially over the energy potential of this region, together with the competing efforts of China and Russia, could impede NATO's military involvement in the Black Continent.

3.2 Corruption and unbalanced development

An expert on Mediterranean affairs has aptly pointed out that "the link between economic liberalism, democracy and security remains problematic in the Maghreb"³⁰. In the Maghreb region, like elsewhere, the search for economic prosperity and sustainable development is viewed as an important tool to help the state defend itself from external menaces and acquire the potential for influence abroad. By the same token, unbalanced development, mismanagement, corruption, informal trade networks and black market activities are seen as highly dangerous for internal political stability and social cohesion. Several ills observed in the socio-economic sphere (speculation, corruption, embezzlement and nepotism) are regarded by the ruling elites as the result of the deviant

³⁰ Borgomano-Loup, Laure, introduction to *Le Maghreb Stratégique, 1ère partie*, NDC Occasional Paper n. 6, Research Branch, June 2005.

behaviour of socio-economic actors, but seldom as a consequence of their own policies.

Economic underdevelopment, mismanagement and corruption undermine the legitimacy of the Maghreb regimes, and indeed the foundations of their states.

Despite substantial efforts to strengthen market economy and enhance the business climate, the following problems are major worries for the Maghreb states:

- Lack of economic diversification
- Weakness of the private sector
- Lack of substantial foreign investments
- Corruption.

Generally speaking, corruption in all its aspects cannot be dissociated from patronage, clientelism, family connections and illicit networks linked to political regimes, informal markets or hydrocarbons-dependent economies. It takes a variety of forms, ranging from nepotism, financial credits with no legal guarantee or economic considerations to embezzlement of public money and assets, illegal commissions, bribes and tax evasion.

The Corruption Perceptions Index, published annually by Transparency International, classifies countries according to the severity of existing corruption on a scale from 0 (high corruption) to 10 (no corruption). In its 2000 report, Tunisia ranked 51 (with a 4.6 index), Morocco 72 (with a 3.2 index), Algeria and Mauritania 84 (with a 3.1 index) and Libya 105 (with a 2.7 index).³¹

3.3 Risks of cultural specificities

If neglected or oppressed, cultural specificities can lead to social discontent, political protest and in some cases an upsurge of violence.

Claims related to Berber 'cultural specificities' were asserted in Morocco, and in Algeria led to a violent uprising. In Mauritania racial discrimination against the Black segments of the population led not only to insurgency but also to skirmishes with neighbouring Senegal. Insurrections staged intermittently by the Tuareg against the central governments of Niger and Mali have always preoccupied their northern neighbour (Algeria). In all three cases, threats to national identity and

³¹El Ouali, A: Corruption and Morocco: Worries rise with it, [IPS news-net/news.asp](http://IPS-news-net/news.asp) 19/09/ 2007.

even to national integrity loomed, and were exacerbated by attempts to politicize these cultural differences.

3.3.1 Berber cultural demands

The Berber-speaking population is estimated at 20 million, including those who were Arabized without renouncing their language³². Another source estimated them at 17 % in Algeria, 13% in Morocco and 2.6% in Tunisia³³.

In Algeria, the process of Arabization was believed to have left little space for Berber expression. The Berber language was neither taught nor promoted, for the sake of the 'sacrosanct' unity of the Algerian people. Attempts to promote Berber culture were made within the strong Kabyle community living in France, where a Berber Academy was created and propaganda campaigns organized.

The combination of these claims resulted in bloodshed in May 1980, known as the 'Berber spring', during which skirmishes took place between rioters, and the security forces and leaders of the Berberist movement were arrested and jailed. Violent events also occurred in 1984, 1988 and April 2001.

The Algerian leadership perceived the manipulation by local adversaries behind this uprising and accused 'foreign hands' of meddling and interference. After a long confrontation, the regime agreed to promote the Berber language 'as a national language' and allowed it to be taught in public schools.

In Morocco, the Berberist movement was confined to a peaceful expression of its cultural claims, as the Berber-speaking people believe that they constitute the majority of their homeland or at least are numerous enough to feel at ease in a nation to which they firmly belong. The first publicized manifesto of Berber cultural claims came in 1991. The authorities reacted by creating a High Council of Amazighity in 1995 and promoting the Berber language as a national language.

3.3.2 The question of black Mauritians

Racial and cultural differences between 'Arabs' and 'Berbers' in the Maghreb seem to be diluted into a relative symbiosis by the Islamic faith,

³² Bonnefous, Marc: Les Berbères in *Défense Nationale*, 02/ 2002, pp.139-146.

³³ Prenant, André, Semmoud, B: Maghreb et Moyen-Orient. Espaces et sociétés, Eclipses, Paris, 1997 p.23.

a long common past and a deep racial mix. This also applies to Mauritania, where the Moorish population, referred to as *Beydan*, claims to be of Arab-Berber descent. They account for 70% cent of the country's population and are concentrated mainly in the north. Southern Mauritania is, by contrast, inhabited by non-Moor Black African Muslims, composed of African Fula/Toucouleur, Wolof, Soninké and Bambara peoples. Their total number is estimated as 30 % of the country's population³⁴.

Given these racial, ethnic and even geographical divisions, Mauritania has tried to be the "link between White Africa and Black Africa", in the words of its first President, Mokhtar Ould Daddah. But this hope has proved hard to sustain as Mauritians are still seeking a middle course between Arabism (which their Middle Eastern heirs have denied them) and Africanism, which they would implicitly reject³⁵).

Power politics in Mauritania are ethnically influenced. Opposition parties, for instance, openly claim their belonging to an ethnic group, such as the Mauritania Liberation Front (Forces de Libération Africaine de Mauritanie -FLAM), which represents Black Negro-African elements, or the Mauritania Unity of Action Front (French: FUAHAM), which represents the Black Moors (*Haratin*) or Black African freedmen who have completely assimilated to Moorish culture and religion.

Reports claimed that clashes occurred between the Black population and the central power in 1966 and later in 1989. This time, blatant violations and acts of repression were committed against the Black people, who were also forced off their land by violence. These events inevitably led to a border skirmish with Wolof-dominated Senegal, causing ethnic tensions to boil over. Tens of thousands of Black Mauritanian southerners fled or were expelled to Senegal and Mali, and a number of brutal killings were reported. In addition, 40,000 Black Senegalese migrant workers were thought to have been driven out of the country.

Senegal reacted by chasing Moorish citizens from the country and sacking and burning Moorish shops and homes. Hundreds were believed to have been killed on both sides, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed³⁶. Until now, some 20 to 30,000 Mauritanian

³⁴ Reiner, S: Révolution de Palais en Mauritanie in *Géopolitique africaine*, Nos 19-20, Spring-Autumn, 2005.

³⁵ *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol.3, issue 4, Feb. 2007,

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid/>

Francis de Chasey: Mauritanie, 1900-1975 (L'Harmattan, Paris 1984).

³⁶ http://eu.wikipedia.org/wiki/1989-events-in-Mauritania_and_Senegal. Viewed on 26 October 2007.

refugees remain in Senegalese camps which serve as the rear base for FLAM combatants.

The violent events ended and the political crisis was alleviated in 1999, but tensions within the Mauritanian population have never been successfully resolved.

3.3.3 Targui separatist aspirations

Rebellious movements by the Tuareg in Mali and Niger and the separatist aspirations of certain extremist elements among them have been major threats to the political stability of these two countries.

The risk perceived by the Algerian State is that some Tuareg, tempted to secede from Mali and Niger, would try to establish a Targui nationhood transcending the borders of the existing states.

To prevent any escalation of the Tuareg problems in Algeria, the government has adopted the following policies:

- Firstly, they have always treated the Targui community well and as a part of Berber national identity.
- Secondly, they have tried to help the Tuareg to settle in the southern cities by providing them with modern means to improve basic living conditions.
- Thirdly, they have always been prompt to offer to broker peace agreements between the Targui rebel movements and the central governments in Mali and Niger.

Algerian diplomacy brought peace among the belligerents, first in Mali, through the agreements signed in Tammanrasset in 1992, and later with rival parties in Niger, through agreements signed in Algiers in 1995. However, these agreements were to no avail, as the parties to the conflict accused one other of violating them. The cycle of rebellion is still going on, as demonstrated by renewed clashes between government forces and Targui guerrillas in Niger in February 2008.

The possible exacerbation of these conflicts, whether on an ethnic or a social basis, could lead to a NATO decision, dictated by humanitarian considerations, to protect communities and 'racial minorities', in the event of the destabilization of the Sahel-Saharan region and its impact on neighbouring countries. However, the so-called right to intervene on a humanitarian basis should not serve as an alibi for the expression of 'cultural specificities' or ethical 'distinctiveness' based on narrow interests that would lead to the disintegration of states and increase hatred as well as political instability. 'Soft' measures to encourage the democratic process, good governance, respect for cultural diversity and sustainable

development seem to be more effective than 'hard' initiatives, which may prove too adventurous and far less efficient.

3.4 Migration and drug trafficking

Migration

In the Maghreb, migration is a threefold phenomenon: internal exodus, external migration and transitory migration. All three forms can have traumatic repercussions on a state's internal equilibrium and cohesion.

The process of internal migration:

Rural exodus has been accelerated by the rapid industrialization and impoverishment of the rural population as a result of drought, the shortage of fertile land, and the attraction of a better life in cities. This trend has led to the concentration of the Maghreb populations in tiny saturated coastal fringes. In Algeria, 28 million people live within 100 km of the coast, leaving the high plains scarcely populated and the Saharan confines practically uninhabited. The same trend is also seen in Libya and Mauritania. In the Maghreb it has created shanty towns and overcrowded urban areas and generated pressures on the labour market, education, health planning and environment protection. The result has been an increase in social discontent, mob riots and the emergence of social ills such as juvenile delinquency, banditry, illegal activities, smuggling and violent crime.

External and illegal migrations:

Harsh social and economic conditions, terrorism (as was the case in Algeria in the 1990s), restrictions and the attraction of a more comfortable and rewarding life in the Western world may explain the migration of educated people and disenchanted youngsters alike. The departure of elements of the local elite (the brain exodus) and skilled manpower has, to some extent, penalized the Maghreb.

The difficulty of obtaining visas has driven an increasing number of migrants to resort to illegal boats to reach the northern shores of the Mediterranean. Migration is now a real business. Networks of smugglers of human beings have developed, and migrants have to pay a small fortune in relation to their precarious means of living.

Transit migration:

The Maghreb region is no longer just a source of migration but has increasingly become one of the major transit routes for migrants from further south to enter southern European countries illegally. This has been facilitated by:

- the long border line separating the Maghreb from Sub-Saharan Africa where it is difficult to exercise control and surveillance;
- the short distance from the Northern Mediterranean rim. Morocco is only 14 km from Spain, Tunisia only 140 km away from Sicily, and Libya is also at a short distance from Malta. While Morocco traditionally had the largest number of illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, it seems that Libya has now become a key point for clandestine transnational migration to Europe, as greater pressure from Spain on illegal boats (paretas) from Morocco is shifting trafficking from Libya to Italy.

Potential candidates for illegal migration to Europe come mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, but in recent years dozens of people have been coming from countries as far away as Bangladesh and Pakistan and transiting through the Maghreb territories. According to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICPMD), some 100,000 to 120,000 irregular migrants cross the Mediterranean each year, with about 35,000 coming from sub-Saharan Africa³⁷.

In recent years, thousands of irregular transit migrants have tended to stay in the Maghreb countries for the time required to collect the sum to cover their transportation fees across the Mediterranean Sea. And when it is not possible even to find jobs in the informal sphere of the economy, the tendency to banditry and deviant behaviour inevitably increases. This accentuates tensions with the local populations, as was the case in the southern Algerian city of Tammanrasset in the early 1990s, and more recently in Libya, where clashes resulted in a number of victims among the sub-Saharan immigrants, who account for 750,000 to 1.3 million of a total population estimated at 5.5 million³⁸. Furthermore, what is currently transit migration may become permanent in the future, if access to the northern shores of the Mediterranean is rendered more difficult by either the Maghreb countries or the European Union.

³⁷ Cited by Lutterbeck, D: Policy migration in the Mediterranean, in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.11, No.1, March 2006, pp 59-82.

³⁸ According to official figures, 6 people were killed in these clashes. Other sources cite the number as 100. See *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2006, pp 10-11.

Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking helps fuel the black market economy. As revealed in 2005 by an enquiry carried out jointly by Morocco and the United Nations Office against Drug and Crime (UNODC), Morocco had become one of the main hashish producing and exporting countries in the world³⁹. Radical measures to curb drug production and trade were introduced by the Moroccan authorities. In February 1993 King Hassan II announced that the equivalent of \$2 billion over 5 years would be allocated to develop the northern provinces through the conversion of cannabis cultivation, the promotion of the local economy and improvements to the environment and to the life of the local population⁴⁰. In 1994 a specialized Agency for Development and Restructuring of the Rif region was also set up.

To combat the increase in drug trafficking and other related illicit activities, it may be opportune for NATO to contribute to joint efforts with the Maghreb states, since operations to counter these phenomena are complicated and costly. NATO's experience of fighting drug trafficking in Afghanistan is in itself a valuable asset, as narcotics networks operate on a world scale and threaten the security of countries where hashish is cultivated as well as those where it is widely consumed. Joint funding through formulas to be discussed between the countries concerned is advisable. This would alleviate the financial burden, which appears to be largely supported by hashish-growing and transit countries, particularly in Maghreb and southern Mediterranean states.

³⁹ Cited by Beau, Nicolas and Graciet, Catherine: *Quand le Maroc sera Islamiste*, Paris, La découverte, 2006, p. 111.

⁴⁰ Marrakchi, op.cit.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAIN AXES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Prominent partnership with the European community

Relations with the European community have seemed vitally important to the Maghreb states, whether for protection or for economic needs. However, they have been fraught with uncertainty, frustration and criticism, mainly on the Maghreb side.

Since independence, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania have taken steps to establish close ties with the European community in order to preserve their security and reinforce their liberal political and economic policies. Morocco's strategic alignment with Western Europe in particular was clear evidence of its primary liberal options. This country constituted: "one of the advanced fortresses for the defence of a certain conception of society"⁴¹. In line with their pro-liberal stance, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania became strategic allies of the Western world in general. For both ideological and anti-imperialist reasons, Algeria opted for an active non-aligned policy, remaining equidistant from the two former superpowers. After the regime change in 1969, Libya went even further in pursuing a policy resolutely opposed to US designs in the Maghreb, the Middle East and Africa. Because of their oil assets, both Algeria and Libya adopted the policy that 'ideology and business do not mix', as they were able to obtain arms supplies from the Soviet Union and at the same time develop close economic ties with the European community.

Throughout the cold war era, the Maghreb received little attention from Western Europe in the field of security. As East and West confrontation withered away and inter-Maghreb tensions were attenuated, the Maghreb states found themselves in a relative strategic 'vacuum'.

Morocco's strategic importance in the West Mediterranean diminished to some extent, Algeria was left entangled in its violent internal crisis and Libya was isolated by its external behaviour. Furthermore, the Maghreb states, along with other Mediterranean countries, came to be perceived by

⁴¹ Reda Guedira, Advisor to King Hassan II, interview to *Time*, July, 1986.

the European community as a source of new threats to its security (terrorism, illegal migration, weapons of mass destruction and drug trafficking).

At its summit in Lisbon in June 1992, the European Union acknowledged for the first time that the southern and western parts of the Mediterranean were geographically interrelated. These regions also became very important to the EU in terms of security and stability.

A European-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was incepted at the Barcelona conference in 1995, covering three main areas: mutual confidence and partnership, a zone of shared prosperity through economic integration, and cultural links with Mediterranean civil society. Association agreements were concluded on a bilateral basis to prepare for the extended free trade area across the Mediterranean Sea, and financial incentives (Meda programmes) were provided to help the Southern Mediterranean countries upgrade their economies, adjust their legislations and liberalize their trade.

The Maghreb states responded to the EMP with different concerns and expectations and took part in negotiations over the implementation of these agreements.

Tunisia hailed the association agreements as: "our bridge to the status of a developed nation", to quote President Ben Ali⁴². Morocco followed suit in 1988. Both countries had a major interest in anchoring their economies to the European economy and obtaining security protection.

Because of its nationalistic perceptions, greatly diversified foreign trade relations, unsatisfactory level of productivity, and its focus on fighting terrorism at home, Algeria delayed the signing of the Association Agreements until April 2002. Recently Libya was also invited by the EU to participate in the EMP, provided it accepts the Euro-Mediterranean 'acquis'.

Despite tangible progress, neither the EMP nor the New Neighborhood Policy incepted by the EU in 2003 lived up to the expectations of the Maghreb states. Conflicts in the Middle East worsened; the Western Sahara issue reached a stalemate, and the establishment of EUROFOR and EURAMFOR in 1996 increased fears in the Maghreb region.

In addition, the Maghreb states, Algeria in particular, were disappointed by the reluctance of some of the EU member states to help them fight

⁴² Geyer, Georgie Anne: Tunisia: a Country that Works, *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 1998, pp 9-15.

terrorism⁴³ and were very worried about the emphasis on democratization and respect for human rights⁴⁴. These issues were seen as sensitive in the Maghreb states, where hastily conducted experiments with political pluralism and free elections had threatened their internal political stability.

After the tragic events of 9/11 leading to the US-led war on terror, and the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, the EU became more involved in coordinating its security efforts with the Maghreb states.

The Maghreb states, deeply concerned by terrorist activities at home, tensions between Arabs and Muslims, the deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations and the invasion of Iraq by the United States, reacted differently to the new policy incepted by the EU in 2003. This initiative, known as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), was presented as a complement to EMP and was intended not only for the Southern Mediterranean states but also for countries emerging from the disintegration of the Soviet bloc.

Morocco and Tunisia adopted the same stance with regard to the EMP and accepted the ENP Action Plans, which came into force in 2005. Algeria displayed great reluctance, in contrast to its neighbours, who favoured a security-based alignment with the EU.

In Algeria's view, the New Neighbourhood Policy was proposed by the EU with no prior consultation with its southern Mediterranean partners and did not bring any added value to their country. "What is proposed by the ENP NEP", its Ambassador to Brussels asserted, "is already covered by our country with the European Union".

The human dimension and economic interests, mainly energy, will probably remain the backbone of the Maghreb-European relationship in the foreseeable future.

- The human factor: For historical reasons as well as economic needs, there have always been flows of immigrants from the Maghreb to Western Europe. Despite the tough immigration policies and patrolling operations pursued by EU member states, and the efforts of the Maghreb states to curb illegal migration,

⁴³ The UK, Germany and Spain became safe havens for terrorists involved in violent activities, notably in Algeria, and turned a blind eye to the propaganda and fund-raising activities of radical Islamist groups living in these countries. Tunisia's relations with the UK deteriorated after the granting of asylum in 1994 to the leader of the Nahda movement, Rashed Ghannushi.

⁴⁴ The European Parliament passed a resolution on 27 May 1996 expressing its worries about 'the deterioration of human rights in Tunisia'.

this trend is likely to continue in the future for the following reasons:

- The strong community of Maghreb origin living in EU countries, which is estimated at more than 3 million, not including the large numbers of illegal migrants.
- Europe's declining population and aging workforce may also result in a need for migrant workers from the Maghreb, where there is considerable youth potential. 70% of the population in the region are under the age of 30. Of these, a sizeable portion is made up of educated people and skilled manpower who speak French (and Spanish, in the case of those living on Morocco's north-western coastal fringe) and whose life-style and behaviour are close to the Mediterranean way of life.

There is hope, then, for the Maghreb states that the migration issue will not be a bone of contention between the two sides.

- The gas issue: the European Union may continue to rely on gas supplies from the Maghreb in the future, for the following reasons:
 - Potential: gas reserves in this region are estimated at over 200 trillion cubic feet. More than three quarters of this amount is held by Algeria, which has the seventh largest reserve of gas in the world, is its fourth biggest exporter of natural gas and its second main exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG).
 - Proximity: Algeria and Libya are geographically closer to the European markets than their potential competitors, such as Russia, Iran or the Gulf countries. The current Russian pipelines (like those planned by Iran and the Gulf states) pass through highly unstable Middle and Near Eastern regions.
 - Pipeline connections: Algerian gas fields are linked to European markets through the Maghreb-Europe pipeline to Sicily (Italy) via Tunisia, and through the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline to Spain via Morocco. Two projects for doubling the existing connections have been initiated: Medgas to Spain, due to be completed in 2008, and the Galsi pipeline to Italy, both financed by

Sonatrach, as well as Italian, Spanish and French energy corporations⁴⁵.

- Extension projects: A project to supply the European Union with Nigerian natural gas through a pipeline across Algerian territory has recently been incepted.
- Security: Algeria's supplies to the EU have never been altered, not even during the terrorist insurgency.

Algeria and Libya (when its gas exports increase) could therefore be a durable, safe and less costly source of gas supplies to European markets, given the EU's policy of diversifying its sources of energy in order to find a substitute for oil, which may well become scarce. Gas consumption in the EU is expected to rise substantially in the near future, partly because this form of energy is less polluting than oil or coal and less risky than nuclear energy in the long term⁴⁶.

4.2 Relations with the USA

The Maghreb's relations with the USA, from ancient links to the present time, can be seen in the light of the need to maintain a strategic ally for security reasons (particularly in the case of Morocco and Tunisia) and to ensure a source for markets and trade diversification (Algeria). Libya and Mauritania continue to be specific cases.

4.2.1 The importance of ancient links

In 1777, to counter the threat to his country posed by European powers, the Moroccan king requested a treaty of friendship with the US. On 23 June 1786 the US signed a treaty with Morocco and promised an annual grant of \$10,000. This was followed by the opening of an American Consulate in Tangiers in 1797, which was the oldest asset owned abroad by the USA.

The Ottoman regencies in Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis signed similar treaties with the USA in 1795, 1797 and 1799 respectively.

⁴⁶ Gas consumption in the Mediterranean region has increased three times more rapidly than the world's total energy consumption in the last three years. In 2005, the gas share in the total consumption of energy in the Mediterranean was 26 % against a mere 6 % in 1971.

During the colonial era, relations with the US were distant because the Americans did not urge France to meet Maghreb nationalist movements' demands for political emancipation.

4.2.2 The US as a strategic ally

Once independence had been gained, Morocco and Tunisia sought a strategic alliance with the 'old American friend', to defend their political options and ideological orientations. Although the US accorded less importance to the Maghreb than to the Middle East, they were nonetheless in search of reliable allies to contain the spread of communism and reinforce liberal values throughout the world.

Tunisia permitted the USA to use a base (until 1978) considered as a vital link to the 6th Fleet. It also approved the deployment of a small US military presence on its soil. Morocco granted the US access to air bases, and allowed NASA to use the airbase at Benchir for emergency landings. It also participated in joint military exercises with the US on several occasions, provided facilities to the US Rapid Deployment Forces during contingencies in the Middle East and North Africa, and coordinated its policies with the US on the Middle East peace process. Most important of all was Washington's decision to lift the ban on arms sales to Morocco. After King Hassan II's visit to Washington in May 1982, the US agreed to deliver radar-equipped aircraft to enable Morocco to monitor troop movements and track down Polisario guerrillas. Tunisia received arms and financial assistance from the US, in recognition of its political moderation and its need of support to contain the spread of Libyan revolutionary ideals.

Because of its ideological divergences with the US and active third world policy aimed at challenging 'Western hegemony', Algeria maintained a certain distance from the superpower. Mauritania's close relationship with France left no space for the US.

Libya was perceived by the US as a serious asymmetric threat to its interests and to those of the Western world in general. Libya was accused of supporting radical, separatist and 'subversive' movements in many parts of the world, in addition to possessing a huge military arsenal beyond its security needs. Libya came under direct threats from the US following the clash over the Gulf of Syrte in August 1981, and endured a raid on Tripoli in 1986 that targeted the life of the Libyan leader. Moreover, Libya came under a US oil embargo and a ban on export of a wide range of technological products. It also faced sanctions from the

United Nations in 1992 in retaliation for the bombing of a civilian aircraft and for the Lockerbie affair.

The rise of terrorism and its escalation in Algeria increased threats against the Maghreb states and widened the security gap in the region, following pressure on them to achieve political liberalization and hold pluralistic, free elections in line with the values of the 'new world order' advocated by the US.

The 9/11 events allowed the Maghreb states to make the Western world admit that terrorism was a transnational phenomenon, not the result of lack of democracy, and helped them cement an agreement on shared security interests with the US.

The Maghreb states responded favourably to the new Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) which replaced the US-North African Partnership.⁴⁷ This new policy, incepted after the US war against Iraq, aimed at supporting democratic, socio-economic reforms and emancipation in the broader Middle East and North Africa, resolution of long-lasting disputes, and partnership aimed at economic progress. In this framework, the Maghreb states received financial assistance for the implementation of political and economic reforms and the development of a civil society. A MEPI office was opened in Tunisia, responsible for coordinating the Initiative's activities in the Maghreb and Egypt.

Its commitment to fight terrorism alongside the US resulted in Tunisia being regarded as a 'good friend' by State Secretary Colin Powell during his visit to Tunis in February 2004, while Morocco was designated as a 'major non-NATO ally' by President Bush in June 2004, a month before King Mohammed VI's visit to Washington. The 2004 settlement, through the good offices of the US Secretary of State, of the Leila-Perejil conflict between Morocco and Spain, and American encouragement for the 'autonomy' project in the Western Sahara highlight Morocco's desire to maintain a strategic partnership with the US. The US promised military and financial assistance to both Morocco and Tunisia, though the American leader made some remarks on Tunisian restrictions on the freedom of the press during President Ben Ali's visit to Washington in February 2004.

Algeria became a 'pivotal state' in the US fight against terrorism in the Sahel-Saharan confines, following the drive by Al Qaeda to establish a new operational base in those areas from which to infiltrate West Africa.

⁴⁷ President Bouteflika was invited, along with the Jordan, Bahrein and Yemen leaders, to attend the G8 Sea Island summit in 2004, during which the MEPI initiative was extensively discussed.

The threat became more tangible as the region came to be considered a danger to US interests (notably oil supplies)⁴⁸. Following confirmation of Al Qaeda-GSPC connections, Algeria coordinated efforts with the US to combat the GSPC groups operating within its Sahara confines.

Algeria joined Mali, Chad and Niger in operations against GSPC groups in March 2004. It contributed to Operation Flintlock, providing military equipment and expert advice and taking part in joint exercises during the first stage of the Pan-Sahel initiative conceived by the US. In June 2005, it participated, as a member, in the 'Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorist Initiative', which included Mauritania, and Nigeria as observer.

However, Algeria declined US demands related to the installation of US bases in the Saharan desert and the hosting of the Headquarters of the US Command in Africa (AFRICOM)⁴⁹.

After its 'redemption', Libya moved to secure a close relationship with the US in order to ensure a smooth political transition and increase its energy output. Mauritania was praised for its remarkable transfer of power to civilians and started to benefit from subsequent financial aid from the US.

4.3 The quest for further diversification: Russia and China

The Maghreb region had no significant ancient links with either Russia or China⁵⁰ but both Moscow and Beijing have supported the Maghreb independence process.

Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania kept their distance from the two Asian powers in order to forge a closer relationship with the Western world. However, to ensure a better East-West balance in world politics, together with Algeria and Libya they supported China's accession to the United Nations Security Council in 1971.

For pragmatic reasons, Morocco signed the 'contract of the century' with the Soviet Union in 1978. Regarded at that time as the biggest commercial agreement between the Soviet Union and a developing country, the contract concerned a fishing deal and phosphate supplies from Morocco against a loan of \$ 2 billion, covering technical assistance for the development of the phosphate industry. Morocco was satisfied

⁴⁸ The Sahel-Saharan areas were becoming the "melting pots for the disenfranchised of the world — terrorism breeding grounds", according to General James L. Jones, US Marine Corps, the NATO Commander who headed US European Command: Stewart M. Powell: Swamp of terrorism in the Sahara, *Airforce Magazine On line*, Vol.87, No. 11, November 2004.

⁴⁹ Kamel Abdelmalek, Alger, l'OTAN et les USA in *Liberté* (Algeria)5-6 /10/,2007 p.4.

⁵⁰ In the early 1920s, Tunisia was a safe haven for the Russian emigrant community. An Orthodox church was built in this country.

with the Soviet 'passive' attitude to the question of the Western Sahara and Moscow was eager to have a foot in a Maghreb country on the southern flank of NATO providing access to the Atlantic Ocean.

Although Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania did not have significant economic relations with the Soviet Union, Algeria and Libya sought Soviet ideological and diplomatic support as well as arms deliveries. Algeria's arms purchases from the superpower amounted to \$11 billion during the period 1962 to 1989.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Maghreb's relations with Russia were cool, but in later years they improved as Moscow attempted to recover its status as a major power. Relations with China were also enhanced, thanks to the country's increasing involvement in Africa.

The renewal of both Chinese and Russian interest in the Maghreb region and by extension in Black Africa stems from their desire to alter the logics of a 'unipolar' world they regard as dominated by US economic and military capabilities and its decisive influence on world affairs.

Despite problems related to the nature of their political regimes, both powers are striving to build a 'multipolar' world in which they could be among the leading pillars, given their huge economic potential, military assets and credentials in the southern hemisphere.

Threatened by EU and NATO enlargement eastwards in Europe, the possible rapprochement of Ukraine and Georgia with these two blocs, the US-led missile network over Europe and the fact that it is no longer the main oil transit route to the Western world through the Caspian Sea, Russia seems to have made efforts to restore its image as a superpower and demonstrate its presence everywhere in the world.

In contrast, China, which also aims to be a superpower, seems to be giving priority to increasing its status as a result of booming exports. And if Russia is looking for potential reliable allies, Beijing seems eager to secure its energy supplies, since — unlike Russia— it has no oil, gas or raw materials.

While sharing the same desire to alter what they consider a US-led world order, both Russia and China are involved in a fierce competition to secure alliances, diversify their economies and look for promising markets abroad. It is in this context that the recent interest of Russia and China in Africa in general should be understood.

The Chinese President made three trips to Africa in three years and in 2006 he visited 17 African countries. On each occasion, trips were made to the Maghreb region. The Algerian leader paid visits to Beijing, and Mohammed VI was the first Moroccan King to visit China.

China, as a southern hemisphere country with a past 'anti-imperialist stance', is paying crucial attention to the African continent, which has been neglected by other powers such as the United States and the EU. This interest is underlined by the organization of regular Chinese-African summits attended by President Bouteflika.

President Putin paid visits to Rabat and Algiers before the end of 2006. He received the Moroccan king in October 2002, and the Algerian leader in 2005 and in January 2008. During his visit to Moscow, King Mohammed VI signed a declaration on a strategic partnership with Russia, and Algeria did the same during the Russian President's visit to Algiers in September 2006. Algeria also signed a declaration on a strategic partnership with China, and was the second country after Egypt in the Arab world to do so.

Given its geostrategic and economic assets, Algeria seemed to attract the attention of both Moscow and Beijing. During his stopover in Algiers in February 2004, the Chinese leader Hu Jin Tao stated that Algeria was important to his country because of "its significant role in the region and its great influence among the developing countries"⁵¹. After President Bouteflika's visit to Moscow in January 2008, President Putin hailed Algeria as "the key partner of Russia not only in Africa but in the whole Mediterranean region"⁵².

However, the competition between Russia and China indicates that they both aim to be a strong presence in the Maghreb region. In a similar fashion, the Maghreb countries want to play off world powers against one other, in order to achieve the political and economic gains necessary to preserve their independence, increase their bargaining power and enhance their political status in the world.

Russia's overall volume of trade with the Maghreb and Egypt represents only 74 per cent of its overall flows. In contrast, exchanges between the Maghreb and China have substantially increased over the last years. Algeria ranks fifth, between China and Africa, in trade volume, and China is the third supplier of both Morocco and Algeria. Chinese trade with Morocco rose to \$2.5 billion in 2005, and its trade with Algeria neared \$4 billion in 2007. In contrast, Tunisia's exchanges with China during the same period were estimated at \$400 million. These trade figures do, however, show a balance in favour of Chinese goods, especially textiles. In view of their highly competitive prices aimed at

⁵¹ *El Watan* (Algeria), 20 February 2008.

⁵² *China Daily* (China), May 2004.

gaining a foothold in markets in the Maghreb region, it is not surprising that nearly 30 per cent of Chinese enterprises tend to focus on this region.⁵³

Nor is it surprising that China had adopted measures to enhance its cooperation with Africa in general, through the adoption of incentives such as loans at preferential rates, exemption from customs tariffs, support for African goods shipped to China, and even by whipping out payments of parts of the external debt of some of these countries. Despite these measures, the Maghreb countries fear an unbalanced competition with China. For example, Morocco and Tunisia joined Egypt and Jordan in a common action plan aimed at liberalizing the textile sector in order to contain Chinese outflows in this particular domain.

The need for energy and mineral resources explains Chinese economic involvement in Africa and in the Maghreb region.

It is evident that China is looking for new oil supplies to complete its nuclear energy programme and meet the needs of its growing industrial process.

In Mauritania, the Chinese National Petroleum Company has begun drilling oil wells and has been granted three other permits in the oil prospecting area.

Undoubtedly, Chinese expertise in the nuclear domain may also present an alternative or a diversification of partners for the nuclear programmes the Maghreb countries want to promote (Morocco) or pursue (Algeria and Libya) for civilian purposes, especially in view of recent offers in this domain by Russia, the US and France.

Russia does not seem interested in investing in the energy sector in the Maghreb region. The promising cooperation between Russia's oil giant Gazprom and Sonatrach did not live up to expectations, since it was believed that Moscow intended to gain sizeable advantages from its Algerian partner in exchange for coordination in gas policy and the conclusion of arms deals⁵⁴. On the other hand, Algeria's reluctance to set up a gas OPEC with Russia, Iran (and perhaps Libya) has clouded the Algerian-Russian energy partnership. Indeed, Algeria has raised not only technical but also strategic problems concerning the implementation of such an initiative. The Maghreb country's implied concern is to pursue an independent policy on gas strategy, given its long experience in gas processing and marketing, its traditional clients and the possibility of

⁵³ *Afkar-Idées* (France), Winter 2008.

⁵⁴ *Liberté* (Algeria), 13 December 2007.

diversifying its energy exports through the increase of Liquefied Natural Gas supplies, notably to the US, the EU and Turkey.

Despite these wishes, cooperation between the Maghreb countries and Russia is still limited. Imbalances and differences in interests are clear from the parameters linked to trade exchanges, energy and the arms trade.

4.3.1 Arms trade: another field of cooperation with Russia and China

The 5.6 billion dollar arms deal signed by Algeria and Russia in 2006 and the negotiation of another agreement worth 7 billion dollars may highlight differences in perspectives on the strategic partnership agreed upon by the two sides during the Russian President's visit to Algiers in September 2006. These deals initially evinced the importance that Algeria seemed to accord to its relations with Russia, as they made it one of the largest recipients of Russian military hardware in the world⁵⁵. However, according to the Moscow-based *Kommersant* review, Algeria decided to return 15 MIG 29 SMT and 6 MIG 29 UB to Russia because of manufacturing faults, and in retaliation, Russia announced that the debt contracted by Algeria in the past by will be wiped out only if contracts for industrial products and arms are honoured by Algeria⁵⁶. In Russia's opinion, the reversal of Algeria's engagements was due to French pressure, as explained in the *Kommersant* review⁵⁷, but in Algeria's opinion, cooperation with Russia should be "important but not exclusive"⁵⁸. It seems that the Algerian President's visit to Moscow in January 2008 and the understanding reached over the arms deal in late March of the same year had eased relations between the two sides. Algeria and Libya have the means to pursue the policy of diversifying their sources of arms supplies, as Morocco has also shown, following the cancellation of the purchase of Rafale jet fighters from France in favour of US-built F16 warplanes.

Nevertheless, both China and Ukraine may be possible markets for Maghreb purchase of armaments⁵⁹. China has the right to export the FC1 jet fighters it bought from Russia. The Algerian Chief of Staff visited Ukraine in late December 2007 and an agreement to sell military transport carriers, engines and missiles to equip MIG and Sukhoi jet

⁵⁵ *El Watan* (Algeria), 6 February 2008.

⁵⁶ *El Watan* (Algeria), 20 February 2008.

⁵⁷ *El Watan and Liberté*, 19 February 2008.

⁵⁸ Ait-Hammadouche Louisa, interview to *ElWatan* (Algeria), 19 February 2008.

⁵⁹ *Liberté* (Algeria), 27 December 2007

fighters was envisaged. China's increasing involvement in Africa in terms of trade and energy purchases may also offer the Maghreb states another potential market.

It is clear that the Maghreb states are attempting to benefit from the competition between the foreign powers, and that, for obvious reasons, they attach greater importance to their partnership with the EU.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRAGMATIC COOPERATION WITH NATO

When the Atlantic Alliance launched a dialogue with the Southern Mediterranean countries, the Maghreb states seized the opportunity to benefit from this strategic partnership, despite the misconceived image of NATO they had inherited from their past. Their participation has proved active and useful, and whatever disappointments there may have been have not substantially altered their initial engagements.

5.1 From misperceptions to Dialogue

In Maghreb past memory, the North Atlantic Alliance was regarded as a military instrument backing up colonial domination in the region. In Algeria in particular, it was widely believed that the Algerian wartime liberation army (Armée de Libération Nationale – ALN) was fighting not only French troops but also the NATO forces behind them. These images are still vivid, as many former ALN officers are alive today and some of them hold high positions in the national decision-making process.

From independence until the end of the cold war, the Maghreb had no direct contact with the Atlantic Alliance⁶⁰, whose energies were concentrated on the confrontation with the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. When East-West tensions were alleviated, NATO started to search for a fresh identity and to adapt to the new security context in order to reinforce peace and stability.

The Mediterranean region, plagued by all kinds of political and social instability, was turning into a fertile ground for terrorism, WMD proliferation and illegal migration. It became one of the focuses of the Atlantic Alliance, since several of NATO's Southern European members border the Mediterranean Sea. The Alliance saw a clear link between the

⁶⁰ With the exception of Libya, whose army fired a single missile at the NATO base on the island of Lampedusa at the height of the clash with the US. Sanchez E Mateus, *Libya's return to the international scene* (Mediterranean Politics, Vol.10, No. 3, 2005, pp 434-445).

security of Europe as a whole and the security and stability of the Mediterranean region⁶¹.

In order to tackle these new security issues more efficiently, at its Ministerial meeting in Brussels in December 1994 the Atlantic Alliance launched the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) with six countries of the southern rim of the Mediterranean (SMCs), among them Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania. Because of its internal situation, Algeria was left on standby and Libya was excluded because of its alleged support to terrorism and the WMD programme.

5.2 NATO's Dialogue and Maghreb participation

The aims of the MD were to: "reach a better and mutual understanding with the SMCs, dissipate any misconception about NATO among the Dialogue Countries and contribute efficiently to security and stability in the Mediterranean region". It intended also to complement other efforts such as the EU's Barcelona process and the Middle East peace process⁶².

The MD was based on 5 'baskets': the fight against terrorism and WMD proliferation, crisis management, defence reform and cooperation between armies. To fulfil these objectives, non-discrimination, self-differentiation and flexibility were defined as the key principles for the dialogue process, allowing it to gradually enlarge participation and diversify its activities. The MD offers its partners the same basis for discussions and joint activities, but the level of participation differs from one partner to another according to needs and wishes. On a practical level, the dialogue was conceived as bilateral meetings, a principle which did not rule out a multilateral basis in due course.

The MD became more structured with the creation of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG) at NATO's Madrid meeting in April 1997. It was recognized as an integral part of the Atlantic Alliance's security cooperation after its subsequent meeting in Washington in April 1999.

Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia promptly responded to the invitation and joined the MD in 1995, in line with their search for security protection through strategic partnerships. Algeria was invited to join the MD in 2000, and President Bouteflika paid two visits to NATO Headquarters in 2001 and in late December 2002, the second visit taking place only two weeks after the Atlantic Alliance's Prague summit, where

⁶¹ See *NATO Transformed*, Brussels, 2004 p.28.

⁶² *NATO's Nations*, 1/2000, p.87.

it was decided to enhance the MD's political and practical dimensions. At a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, the President declared that: "our dialogue with NATO is a strategic option"⁶³, while Lord Robertson hailed Algeria as "one of the most active MD partners"⁶⁴.

By joining the MD, the Maghreb states aimed to gain a variety of benefits:

On the political level, they sought:

- Political support for the democratization process they had embarked upon, which was sometimes painful, as in the case of Algeria. In general, the progress made in this domain, as illustrated by the policy of national reconciliation and concord in Algeria and the peaceful handover of power to civilians in Mauritania, deserved to be encouraged by the Atlantic Alliance in the knowledge that peace and stability in the Maghreb would help to alleviate the threats to the Mediterranean region and European security.
- Legitimization of their own struggle against terrorism and easing of Western pressure (mainly from NGOs) to speed up and increase democratic reforms and practices.
- The opportunity to express their views, through the dialogue process, on regional issues and the prevailing situation in the Middle East.
- Support for the Euro-Maghreb relationship, since NATO's MD had initially stressed its desire to complement other international efforts such as EU's Barcelona process.

On the military level, they aimed to:

- Efficiently contribute to the strategic debate in the Mediterranean and to the refoundation of the regional landscape⁶⁵.
- Coordinate efforts to fight transnational terrorism, as they believed that the terrorism they faced internally had exogenous roots (in Afghanistan) and connections with terrorist networks in Asia and the Middle East.
- Exchange intelligence information on terrorism. In this respect the Maghreb countries, and Algeria in particular, have built up a rich data base of terrorist psychological profiles, networks and

⁶³ Joint press conference, Brussels, December, 2002 (<http://www.nato.in/doc/speech2002/5021210> (accessed on 19 November 2007)).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Benantar: Nato, Maghreb and Europe, in *Mediterranean Politics*, 11:2,2006, pp 167-188.

logistic supports. In return, they need information on terrorist cells of Maghreb origin in Europe, and on logistic support to remnant terrorists in the Maghreb region.

- Have access to military equipment, especially for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. It is worth mentioning that before 9/11, despite its repeated requests, Algeria did not receive from its European partners the satellite imagery analysis to help it fight more efficiently against terrorism⁶⁶.
- Diversify sources of military equipment⁶⁷ in order to reduce dependency on a single major source of arms supplies, exchange parts, ammunition, maintenance and uplift operations.
- Train and recycle both civilian and military cadres in defence strategy, conflict management, emergency rescue and humanitarian operations.
- Hold further consultations in the field of "navigation safety, armed conflicts, arms control, foreign debt, tourism, migration", as stated by Moroccan officials⁶⁸.

Like other MD countries, the Maghreb states participated in several activities:

Educational and technical:

- Participation of officers in courses at the NATO Defense College in Rome and the Mobile Education Training Team course at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, which runs tactical level courses on peace-keeping issues, arms control, WMDs, environment protection and civil-military cooperation in civil emergencies. In November 2005, a seminar organized by NATO in Algiers was attended by senior officers and officials, and scholars and personalities from both sides.
- Participation in the more operational aspects of the programme's military dimensions, enabling officers to observe PfP (Partnership for Peace) exercises and attend courses and seminars.
- Involvement in peace keeping missions. Morocco sent 1,250 soldiers and a field hospital to Somalia in 1993. It also contributed 1,250 troops to NATO's UN-mandated Multinational Implementation Force, deployed to Bosnia Herzegovina (IFOR) in December 1996. By May 2000, only Morocco still had soldiers serving in SFOR. In line with its

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Amara.

⁶⁸ Rachid Bouhhal (Morocco's Ambassador to Belgium): Morocco and the 50 years of NATO seen from the Mediterranean region, in Maurizio Cocchia (ed.) The 50 years of NATO seen from the Mediterranean Region, Rome, Rubbettino SRL, 1999, 112-113.

policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, Algeria does not participate in peace-keeping missions linked to internal conflicts. However, it has participated in UN missions, though in humanitarian relief operations only (as in Cambodia).

- Exchange of information on terrorism, mainly with Algeria and Morocco.

- Operation Active Endeavour (OAE)⁶⁹: In his visit to Algeria in late November 2004 (the first ever by a NATO leader to this country and described as 'historic' by the Algerian media), NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer explained the objectives of OAE and requested Algeria's participation as well as that of Morocco, which he visited in February 2005. Encouraged by the readiness of the MD countries to participate in OAE operations, he carried out substantial coordination efforts during his April 2005 tour of the seven MD partners. And at the April 2006 meeting (NATO 7+1), Morocco, Algeria (and Israel) agreed to participate in NATO's maritime monitoring missions to prevent terrorist attacks in the Mediterranean Sea. The extent of the contribution to these operations will be "tailored according to the specifics of the country concerned and optimized on the basis of the offers received and the needs of the operations", according to the Commander of Operation Active Endeavour⁷⁰.

At parliamentary level: Morocco and Algeria were granted the status of 'Associated Mediterranean Delegation' by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in May 2005⁷¹. NATO Parliamentary delegations paid visits to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria in 2004 and 2005.

In addition, Maghreb states involved in the MD have also been involved since 2001 in other activities such as visits by military delegations from the Atlantic Alliance and visits to their harbours by NATO ships. The Atlantic Alliance has also developed scientific cooperation with the MD countries, and influential personalities from civil society, academics and journalists have benefited from cultural exchanges.

⁶⁹ These operations were launched in the context of article 5 of the Washington Treaty. They began with the patrolling of the East Mediterranean and monitoring of merchant shipping. They were extended in February 2003 to include escorting civilian shipping through the straits of Gibraltar and compliant boarding of suspicious vessels. The geographical scope of these operations extended to the whole Mediterranean region.

⁷⁰ See Vice-Admiral Roberto Cesaretti, Combating terrorism in the Mediterranean, in *NATO Review*, special issue, Winter, 2005, pp 32-34.

⁷¹ A Sub-Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly visited Morocco much earlier and this country was granted observer status in NATO's Assembly in 1994.

At its Summit in Istanbul, NATO upgraded the Mediterranean Dialogue to a genuine partnership on a case-by-case basis and extended it to the countries of the Broader Middle East. This initiative, known as the ICI, aimed to strengthen political dialogue, achieve interoperability, develop defence reforms and encourage participation in counter-terrorism operations. A Partnership Action Plan aimed at fighting terrorism, with a programme of exercises and training activities, was proposed to the ICI's potential partners by the end of 2004.

It seems too early for the Maghreb states to appreciate fully the results of their participation in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the objectives they expected to achieve through partnership with the Atlantic Alliance. Some limitations have already been perceived, though they do not lessen Maghreb determination to contribute to NATO's efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Mediterranean region, nor do they prevent them from participating in further actions such as the consolidation of nation state building.

5.2.1 Some perceived limitations

These shortcomings are listed solely to provide ideas on how to improve the mutually beneficial partnership with the Atlantic Alliance:

- Initially the dialogue did not concern the Maghreb states, and was launched with the aim of implementing the peace process in the Middle East region.
- NATO's objectives are regarded as mainly *hard* security-oriented, while the issues confronting the Maghreb states seem to be more related to problems of political stability, border conflicts and socio-economic development.
- The lack of institutionalized structuring of the MD: for this reason, at the December MD meeting, Algeria proposed the setting up of a permanent Mediterranean Council at ministerial level.
- The feeling that initiatives seem to be imposed, as was the case with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: the Southern Mediterranean countries were not consulted during the drafting of proposals, the agenda and implementation policies.
- The inception of the ICI may create further confusion over the objectives of NATO's overall strategy. The ICI initiative was intended to be separate from the MD, but participation in both programmes on similar principles (flexibility, non-

discrimination and ownership) may create an overlap with geographical and strategic considerations.

- The multiplication of initiatives proposed by the Western world to Southern Mediterranean countries could seem quite erratic. Indeed, an array of complex networks, interconnected issues and numerous diverse partnerships have arisen from the co-existence of the EU's Mediterranean Partnership, the Mediterranean Forum, the Atlantic Alliance's MD and the ICI, as well as the US-led Peace Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa, and the 'Mediterranean Union' project recently endorsed by the EU. From a Maghreb point of view, it is not clear whether these initiatives are complementary or whether they are dictated by conflicting interests and competition between the initiating parties. It may be difficult to reconcile the interests and concerns of countries as diverse as those of the West Mediterranean and those of the broader Middle East.
- Clearly, the management of hard as well as *soft* issues of security in the Mediterranean is not the responsibility of the Western partner alone, as the Southern Mediterranean countries themselves have stated. Security issues could also be discussed and managed on the basis of their geographical settings because the concerns are different and the ways to tackle these issues also differ in scope and perception. Algeria, for instance, seems to accord great attention to the Barcelona process and the 5+5, as well as other initiatives which it regards as complementary to past agreements⁷². And for all Maghreb states, the revival of the Union of the Arab Maghreb may also offer a suitable framework in which to tackle the common issues linked to stability and economic progress.

5.2.2 Current issues and further prospects

- From the Maghreb point of view, a holistic approach is needed to counter common threats, which are not confined to the southern countries. Up to now, the Western world seems to have linked the threats of terrorism either to Islamic Jihad or to the notion that the Arab and the Muslim worlds, among them the Maghreb countries, are breeding grounds of transnational terrorism, religious fanaticism and extremism stemming from

⁷² See statement by Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs (In El Watan, 17 July 2007).

social and economic problems, bad governance, lack of democracy and poverty. These perceptions have led to increasing disappointments in the Maghreb region and have deepened frustrations at all levels of government and civil society. The Atlantic Alliance's linking of Europe's global security to the Mediterranean⁷³, therefore, however legitimate this may seem to the European states and other NATO members, has given rise to a number of misunderstandings.

The Maghreb states regard terrorism as a transnational phenomenon, alongside illegal migration, drug trafficking and small arms smuggling. Local public opinion blames these ills, particularly terrorism, illegal migration, inter-state conflicts in Africa, instability in the Middle East and insurgencies, on the colonial legacy, interference by foreign powers, the injustices of an unequal world, and rampant globalization, which makes the rich countries more powerful and exacerbates problems in the poorer ones.

Similarly, the increase in world-scale terrorist activities and the official link between the Al Qaeda organization and terrorist groups in the Maghreb region should also be viewed from a broader perspective. Many new recruits of the terrorist groups in the Maghreb are well educated. Some of them are middle-aged and therefore far from being disenchanting youngsters, victims of social exclusion, poverty, unemployment or expulsion from school. A realistic approach, therefore, to the causes of instability, particularly in the Mediterranean region, would help dispel the misunderstandings and misperceptions which both the Barcelona process and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue have tried to overcome progressively.

- So far, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and cooperation in the field of combating terrorism, illegal migration and exchange of information have proved efficient. A better understanding of conflicting perceptions and interests is required, in order to consolidate the Dialogue. There are questions still to be addressed. Should NATO deal with political matters outside of Europe? Should the European Union defend its strategic interests outside the North Atlantic Alliance?

⁷³ NATO Transformed, Brussels, 2004.

There is fear of a NATO push beyond its geopolitical anchoring in Europe and its strictly military vocation. NATO's involvement in Afghanistan and Darfur has raised the issue of a possible expansion of NATO's role to settling border conflicts and civil wars, such as in Africa, and to other 'soft' issues such as human rights and nation-state building.

Afghanistan is an important example, since it was regarded as a field of operations outside NATO's traditional area of intervention. It is a crucial test not only for the North Atlantic Alliance but also for the relationship NATO wishes to strengthen in the framework of its MD and ICI initiatives. NATO's current entanglement in Afghanistan, the recent call for more troops to help the US-led coalition of Operation Enduring Freedom, and the escalation of guerrilla activities, call into question the effectiveness of a military solution to ensure the stability of Afghanistan, despite the efforts made to reconstruct this country, where NATO "has not the civil means to push forward".⁷⁴

The complexities of Afghanistan and other hotbeds of instability, like Africa, and continuous fighting of the kind we have seen in Iraq and Palestine seem to go beyond mere military actions or reconstruction assistance and programmes. They raise the question of ambivalent interference by foreign powers and world inequalities and injustices. Success depends not on 'military victory' in the traditional sense but on the creation of a secure environment for political and economic development.

In this context it might be interesting to see how the Mediterranean Dialogue would react if the North Atlantic Alliance were to engage, on the basis of a Security Council resolution, in a preventive or a coercive strike whose announced objective is mainly to bring about a regime change. If this were the case, the symbiosis between public opinion and its governants – an essential guarantee for the long-term evolution of the Mediterranean Dialogue – would be at risk. Voices

⁷⁴ Jaap Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO, Key Speech on: "NATO and the EU: Time For a New Chapter", 20/01/2007.

<http://www.eu2007/news/speech-interview/january/0120AAZ/SVP/Scheffer.html>.

within the Alliance would eventually be heard, maintaining that the governments with which NATO has relations have no democratic legitimacy. In the Southern Mediterranean countries, cooperation with NATO would inevitably be criticized.⁷⁵

By extension, interference in border conflicts may raise the issue of the integrity and sovereignty of states, a principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. It could also fuel separatist aspirations and jeopardize the security of established political units.

- Clearly, given their common history, close economic and strategic cooperation with the European Union and hopes for a more balanced and equitable world order, the Maghreb states would not disagree with "a Europe that assumes its responsibility on the world stage, a Europe that forges an even stronger foreign policy to promote peace and human security"⁷⁶. Yet the fact remains that Europe is still in search of a unified defence and foreign policy. The continuous enlargement of the EU and NATO, which are both increasingly preoccupied with Eurasia, the Middle East and the US-incepted Broader Middle East initiative, would diminish the prospects of the Barcelona process and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, should the EU-USA-NATO competition prevail over complementary and supportive actions. For this reason, NATO needs to adapt to its environment and take into consideration the specificities of the new partners.

These specificities concerning the Maghreb area would "restore a coherent geographic framework (and) the MD's final framework will, therefore, be very similar to that of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. This would mean a clear added

⁷⁵ Halim Benattallah, *Une vision pour l'avenir du Dialogue Méditerranéen*, in Contribution de l'Algérie au Dialogue Méditerranéen, 5th Research Seminar organized by the IDRI and the NATO Defense College, Rome, 27-30 October 2002.

⁷⁶ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, speech in the Berta-Von Suttner building, Brussels, 08/03/2006. http://cc.europa.eu/external-relations/us/intro/foreign_policycoop.htm#neighbourhoodpolicy

value in terms of security for NATO, enabling it to specialize in areas where the EU does not wish to intervene;"⁷⁷

In line with these underlying concepts, the Mediterranean Dialogue has to move forward to a real and privileged strategic partnership and should be open to all the partners in the Southern Mediterranean, including Libya.

A renewed Mediterranean Dialogue would go hand in hand with common ownership and with tailored bilateral cooperation targeting the needs and ambitions of each partner from the Maghreb region. Currently, there seems to be a military gap that needs to be filled by sustained efforts to achieve closer rapprochement and build political and military convergences.⁷⁸ However, without ownership and close association with its partners in the definition of the framework of cooperation, political means and operational mechanisms, the Mediterranean Dialogue will be hard to achieve. There is no doubt that the Maghreb countries could benefit from the Dialogue, providing that it remains an integral part of the Mediterranean relationship and that cooperation on a military basis is not pursued at the expense of high level political dialogue.

In their relationship with NATO, it might be more profitable for the Maghreb states to work on their security identity by reinforcing the mechanisms of the Union for the Arab Maghreb. This would result in a fully integrated, comprehensive approach that would complement both EU and NATO defence and security policies.

⁷⁷ Laure Borgomano-Loup: NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Prospects for Development, Research Paper No. 21, June 2005, Academic Research Branch, NATO Defense College, Rome.

⁷⁸ Halim, Benattallah: *Une vision pour l'avenir du Dialogue Méditerranéen*, op cit.

CONCLUSION

The strategic interests of the Maghreb states seem to be closely linked to the preservation of their basic foundations: territorial integrity, cultural cohesion and economic development. 'Hard' security, strictly speaking, mainly concerns border disputes and the rise of religious extremism, which often takes violent forms. The 'soft' aspects of the security paradigm concern unbalanced economic development, which breeds social ills and discontent as well as illegal migration and drug trafficking. In order to restrict the scope of the study to the pressing needs of the Maghreb states and the major threats to them in recent years, other potential threats, such as those related to environmental issues, have not been discussed at length.

In dealing with the requirements of strategic policies, the Maghreb states have looked for strategic partnership with the European Community for obvious historical, economic links and geographical considerations. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has offered them a framework to enhance their status and coordinate their efforts on common issues concerning new threats. There are expectations that NATO's Mediterranean initiative could be upgraded to a genuine, high-level political dialogue that takes into consideration specific needs on a bilateral basis. Both this dialogue and any European initiatives that are undertaken would need to stress the specificities of the Maghreb region and its close relationship with its Northern Mediterranean partners.

The Maghreb states wish to be an integral part of all these initiatives, and to be treated as reliable partners, not potential sources of the new menaces that are sometimes depicted in discourses and declarations. These new threats are common to all states and their solutions should be sought together in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

It is clear, however, that the Maghreb states need to acquire the necessary means to ensure sustainable economic development and political stability for the whole region. The regimes in the Maghreb region will reap tangible gains by opening up their political systems, strengthening the democratization process, reinforcing the rule of law and a market economy, and attending to the needs of the poorer sectors of their population.

Even if the Maghreb states are still influenced by historical links, public opinion and pragmatic considerations, the task of building coherent

societies and stable political entities is a challenge that can be faced, especially in the framework of the new needs and expectations arising from globalization. The Maghreb states must push ahead with the Maghreb Union, in order to counter the reinforcement of regional groupings and international competition in the economic sphere. Unlike many other regional groupings in the world, the Maghreb has all the ingredients for a sound and stable Union. Indeed, many achievements have been made in this arduous but exciting process. The region has great economic potential and formidable human resources, mainly open-minded young people with professional expertise. By combining all these efforts, the Maghreb can look forward to a stable and promising future.

Belkacem Iratni (Algeria) is currently a Professor at the Faculty of Political Science and Information at the University of Algiers, and has taught at the National School of Administration and at the Institute of Diplomatic Studies. He holds a B.A. in Politics from the University of Algiers, and an MA and a PhD in Politics and International Studies from the University of Warwick (England). He has conducted numerous research works and published several articles in Arabic, French and English on Algerian domestic and foreign policies, Maghreb politics, Mediterranean security and emerging capital markets.

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