

**The Maghreb and the
New Euro-American
Security Agenda**

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Abstract

The article gauges the significance of the Maghreb region for the Euro-American security agenda in the post-Cold War era and notably since September 2001. It examines the different trends and dynamics behind the region's different mutations, whilst identifying some policy leads for both Europe and the United States, especially with regard to the economic and military intercourse and resources. The ways in which the U.S. and the E.U. could engage their assets to help political opening in the region keep apace with economic liberalization are also identified. Explaining the dynamics behind such socio-economic and political transformations is essential to the understanding of the risks or threats that could potentially emerge. The study also underlines the relevance of the region to the overall Western military strategy in the Mediterranean basin as part of the new role for NATO. The article rounds up the analysis by suggesting some policy options for both Europe and the US vis-à-vis the Maghreb in the wake of the tragic events of September 11 and their profound ramifications for the world's geopolitical map.

Résumé

L'article mesure la signification du Maghreb pour la stratégie sécuritaire de l'après-guerre froide des Etats-Unis et de L'Union Européenne. Il souligne l'importance du bassin Méditerranéen en tant qu'agent principal du nouveau rôle de l'OTAN à l'égard de la stratégie militaire occidentale. L'étude examine la nouvelle dynamique derrière les différentes mutations que la région a connues ces dernières années tout en essayant d'identifier les choix politiques de l'Europe et des Etats-Unis, notamment dans les domaines économiques et militaires. Les manières dans lesquelles

les Etats-Unis et l'E.U. pourraient engager leurs ressources dans le processus d'ouverture politique et économique de la région du Maghreb sont également identifiées. Ainsi, l'explication de la dynamique derrière de telles transformations est essentielle au discernement des risques ou des menaces qui pourraient potentiellement émerger. En conclusion l'article suggère quelques options politiques à entreprendre par l'EU et les USA à la suite des événements tragiques du 11 septembre et leurs profondes ramifications géopolitiques mondiales.

Introduction

As the Cold War drew to a close with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the United States and its European allies began to alter their security strategy towards the western Mediterranean region where Europe meets both the Arab World and Africa through the Maghreb. The considerable multiform mutations ensuing the end of the Cold War and the wider spectrum given to the meaning of "security," positioned the Maghreb and the whole southern shore of the Mediterranean at the centre of the Western security strategy. Security considerations centred around the internal political transformations in the Arab World, including the Maghreb, and were to emerge as central to Western security preoccupations in replacement for the fears that the now extinct Soviet Union used to provoke. Western strategic planning was to move from the primacy of territorial defence to that of security concerns which are not necessarily military in nature.

The countries of the Maghreb, hitherto considered insignificant to Western security, are now placed at the core of Western policy planning under American leadership, as they are considered a potential source of worries for Europe in particular and for the West in general. In this article, I examine the risks, real or imagined, that the Maghreb might pose to European security from a number of perspectives: political, economic, and military. I also assess the different contentions that are quite recurrent in both the United States and Europe with regard to the encounters between the countries of the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Of Political Ideals and Economic Interests

Southern Europe, which had been for years actively involved in European plans to lay down the foundations for new security arrangements as a result of developments in central and eastern Europe, is now expected to pay more attention to the issues of political stability and socio-economic development in the Mediterranean basin, with special interest in what has been unfolding in the Maghreb. The Mediterranean European countries are active players in initiatives like the CSCM (Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean), the “Five + Five” grouping in the western Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean Forum.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Barcelona of November 1995, from which the US was almost completely excluded because of French apprehensions, and the resulting Barcelona Declaration which comprised a series of political incentives for regional integration, was aimed at promoting dialogue in the region on cultural, economic, and political concerns. As a direct result of this conference, the EU prepared a five-year package of financial aid to the countries in the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean basin. Such a package remains however below Maghrebi expectations and is likely to shrink further as the EU welcomes more members from the ex-Warsaw Pact that will inevitably be entitled to more aid. This is especially because of the absence of a real integration between the countries of the region, as the Maghreb Union project has so far remained only on paper. The intra-Maghrebi trade amounts to only 3% of the total trade, at a time when Maghrebi exports to Europe are estimated at 70% of the overall exports, whereas the imports are estimated at 60% (Joffé 252-3).

The failure of integration is due—amongst other reasons—to the non-settlement of the Western Sahara conflict, given Morocco’s persistence in its refusal to comply with the UN resolutions. The European Union is well placed to act impartially to help broker a solution between the two parties (Morocco and the Polisario Front) along the decolonization line and away from France’s continued complete list over to the Moroccan position.

The adherence of the Eastern European countries into the EU would mean that immigrants into Western Europe from these countries will have the legal right to move and work freely throughout the countries of the Union, while immigrants from the Maghreb

countries will see their freedom more and more restricted which will entail a diminution of money transfers to their native countries, leading hence to more poverty (Doucet). Such transfers are today larger than the overall foreign investments in the Maghreb countries. In reality, the new Euro-Mediterranean policy strategy seeks first and foremost to promote the EU's own prosperity through an economic partnership with the Maghreb based on free trade. Yet, a minimum level of prosperity is required on the southern shore of the Mediterranean as the best guarantee against the flow of migrants.

All the partnership agreements concluded by the EU with Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt in 1995 and with Algeria in 2002, have remained far below expectations (Kienle 51). EU officials are confident that economic reforms in the Maghreb countries with European assistance would automatically bring about prosperity and therefore political openness. Likewise, the United States sees in economic prosperity the key to democratic progress (A National Security Strategy...). The Eizenstat Initiative launched in 1999, now renamed "the American Economic Program for North Africa," aimed at forging an economic partnership between the United States and an integrated Greater Maghreb (McMillon) to rival with the European partnership projects. This conviction remains however only within the realm of theory and needs to be confirmed in reality, especially when we know that the prosperous Gulf States, which share with the Maghreb countries the same historical and political background, are far from being politically liberal.

In showing readiness to help the Maghreb countries achieve stability through economic growth based on the encouragement of investment, both from inside and from outside, and which could create jobs and therefore bring down the number of economic migrants for Europe, European officials must be aware of the fact that political harmony is inseparable from socio-economic cohesion. Reticence to embrace profound reforms stems from the apprehension that these might lead to social unrest and to political destabilization. First, one can mention the increase of unemployment as a direct consequence of the potential closure of the state-run companies. The latter would be unable to face up to the fierce competition imposed on them in terms of price and quality by the products that foreign companies could potentially throw into the market. Second, the consolidation of the private sector, which generally lacks the required business know-how,

often serves only as a relay for foreign-produced goods (Ghiles). And third, the disappearance of subsidies for the basic commodities could prove devastating for the low-income majority of the population. Europe should not, in this regard, be distracted by the enlargement process to its east at the expense of the Maghreb. The latter's internal social and economic difficulties could easily spill over to seriously challenge its security, given the geographic proximity and the presence of a large expatriate Maghrebi community on its soil.

Before creating a Euro-Maghrebi free trade zone, as the partnership agreements signed with the Maghreb countries on a bilateral basis seek to achieve by 2010, the Europeans should first assist the countries of the region to develop an export-capable industry, to promote inter-Maghrebi trading, and to uplift the educational standards. Despite the fact that all the prerequisites for the rise of a Euro-Mediterranean zone based on solidarity and an equitable partnership, the EU has not yet devised the necessary mechanisms for a coherent programme of economic assistance that would enable the countries of the southern shore to implement the necessary reforms. The \$6 billion or so that these countries expect to receive in terms of aid from the EU, represent not more than 1% of the world flow of aid. For a Euro-Mediterranean partnership to succeed, aid to the countries of the southern shore must substantially be increased (Ghiles).

In fact, it has been demonstrated that the structural readjustment reforms financed by the World Bank and sustained by the partnership agreements with the EU, have not succeeded especially in terms of attracting foreign investments (Kolbo). Stability on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, which is essential to any credible effort to reduce immigration into Europe, cannot materialize without a real economic growth and without viable mechanisms for an adequate redistribution of wealth (Rodrik 30). More than eleven years since the Euro-Mediterranean Barcelona Process was launched in November 1995, the European policy towards the Maghreb has so far lacked real engagement. Its attention has mostly remained geared towards issues that concern the security of the northern shore of the Mediterranean, namely the fight against illegal immigration and international terrorism. The Mediterranean—instead of being a bridge between Europe and the Maghreb—has turned into a frontier separating the two sides.

Given its important role in the region, the US has always sought to be involved in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. The US policy-makers, who have become more aware of the increasing diplomatic role of Mediterranean Europe in the European policy strategy, have maintained their support for the notion of EU-MED dialogue. Yet, the US continues to see European initiatives of assistance for the countries of the region almost exclusively from the perspective of security for Israel and the so-called "war on terrorism."

The Energy Link

The US and the EU must have a common strategy with regard to aid to Maghrebi countries through the promotion of investment. This could help bring about socio-economic stability and, thus, help combat economic migration across the Mediterranean deemed a threat equally to the European and Mediterranean security interests. Despite the fact that the US is still far from competing with the EU in terms of commercial and financial relations with the Maghreb, recent multi-billion American oil and gas investments in the Algerian South have given the US considerable economic weight in the region. The US is today Algeria's top customer and third supplier ("Les Etats Unis, premier client...") as well as its biggest investor mainly in hydrocarbons ("Background Note..."). Sustaining energy supplies from the Gulf and North Africa have made the Maghreb figure high on the transatlantic security agenda.

American officials are aware of the dependence of the southern European countries on natural gas supplies from North Africa, especially from Algeria which has become Europe's leading supplier through the Europe-Maghreb pipelines that connect the Algerian South with Europe through Spain and Italy. This dependency is tipped to increase in the near future with the construction of more trans-Mediterranean pipelines. Threats to gas or oil supplies are highly unlikely to come from a direct governmental decision to halt exports to Europe. The newly inaugurated pipelines have in fact increased Euro-Maghrebi interdependence outdoing the commonly feared Western dependence on Algerian gas.

The Military Dimension and the NATO Connection

The Maghreb is also gaining more importance in the Western security agenda as part of the increasing NATO defence plans in the Mediterranean which is considered Europe's "near abroad" (Lesser iii). It was the NATO summit held in Rome in November 1991 that redefined the mission of the alliance along a broader concept of security based on an American strategic conception that is geared towards preserving what some European observers see as "American hegemony over Europe" (de la Gorce). The United States— through its influential role within NATO and because of its heavy military presence in the Mediterranean basin, Europe, and the Middle East— has become a pivotal player in the European security agenda, achieving the status of an essential European and Mediterranean military power.

The US is actively involved in the dialogue which the Atlantic alliance inaugurated with the Maghrebi countries: with Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt in 1995 and with Algeria in 2000. The American-led NATO joint crisis-management operations which have been taking place in recent years with the armies of the Maghreb countries, in addition to the different NATO programmes for the training of Maghrebi defence personnel, are quite revealing as to the new Western strategy towards the region. The Mediterranean is seen as an "extension of the European environment"; and what happens within its basin is perceived from the perspective of its effects on European security and on relations between the US, already the dominant "security actor" in the Mediterranean and Europe (Lesser iii). The more developments—seemingly affecting transatlantic security— take place around the Mediterranean region, the more the Pentagon consolidates its military presence in Europe and, hence, further confirms the latter's dependence on the US for its security. But, in seeking to promote cooperation with the Maghrebi countries, NATO officials must be careful lest they should be accused of interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign countries (Larrabee et al. 19).

The western Mediterranean has been given considerable importance in the US policy towards the so-called Greater Middle East. From the American perspective, the Mediterranean, with its European and Maghrebi flanks, is at the

gates of the oil-rich Gulf and is therefore indispensable to the US strategy in the region. American policy makers keep reminding their allies that 90% of the troops, arms, and equipment that the Pentagon mobilized in the first Gulf War flew over or sailed through the Mediterranean (Menarchik).

Europe has seen in recent years its role growing in Maghrebi and Middle-Eastern affairs given the respectable degree of credibility that it still enjoys as it is perceived as a comparatively more impartial peace broker. With this, a Mediterranean dimension has been added to the Arab-Israeli peace process. The declared objective of the American-sponsored initiative to create a Middle East / North African Development Bank is hoped to promote socio-economic stability in the region. This is deemed essential to the political dimension of the peace process as it widens the scope of commitment to peace in the so-called Greater Middle East. Because of its strong economic ties with the EU and to the middle-of-the-road political role played by its governments in the Arab arena, the Maghreb could potentially occupy a prominent position in this process.

On another score, Mediterranean Europe is liable to become the first target of possible retaliatory actions coming from the Arab World as a result of possible American or Western heavy-handed involvement in the Middle East. The tension which France for example witnessed as a result of the Maghrebi community's opposition to its participation in the anti-Iraqi coalition during the first Gulf war is a case in point. Another example is the Israeli onslaught on Palestinian towns and the resulting massacres of hundreds of civilians which provoked large anti-Israeli demonstrations across Europe. These clearly show the strong ties that Maghrebi migrants maintain with their countries of origin. However, such a kind of popular mobilization is more often than not viewed as a threat to the political stability of the host countries and is controlled by binary logic standards and by an excessive fear of the "other."

The European-American security cooperation in this regard is governed by three major considerations. First, the opposition of Maghrebi public opinion to Western involvement in the Middle East or to anti-Arab Western policies (especially with regard to Palestine and Iraq) may deter European countries from playing a greater role in time of crisis involving the US. The continuing heavy-handed repressive policies of Israel in the Occupied Territories and Western

indifference to the suffering of Palestinian civilians, together with the Bush Administration's complicity with the successive hawkish governments of Israel, will continue to fuel Maghrebi suspicion of the West. Such repressive Israeli policies have also mobilized European public opinion in favour of the Palestinian cause, calling on the European governments to press for a negotiated settlement. This new state of affairs has led the Europeans to try to seek a more independent role from the United States in the Middle East.

Yet, so far the European role has been quite unassertive and often subordinate to an absolute American bias for Israel, especially with regard to the manifest indifference in the implementation of the UN resolutions that condemn Israeli aggression. The continued EU boycott of the Hamas-led democratically elected government is an illustrative case. The Europeans, however, continue to reiterate their conviction that peace and security in the Middle East will remain a utopia unless the Palestinians achieve their right to an independent state along the pre-1967 borders, together with a settlement to the questions of the status of Jerusalem and the future of the refugees (Neyts-Uyttebroeck).

Second, the European countries continue to be wary of the potential acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation by countries of the southern flank of the Mediterranean. This is to be added to the exaggerated worries about the risks of terrorist or criminal activities that could expose the security of the southern European countries to serious threats. This has in a way signalled the end of the traditional "sanctuarization" of southern Europe. The third, and perhaps the least plausible consideration, is related to the threats that political and socio-economic instability in the Maghreb might pose to Western energy security.

Yet, with regard to the purely military domain, it is clear that neither the Maghreb countries nor the immigrant community represent a real threat to European security. Given the evident disparity in the military capabilities between the two shores of the Mediterranean, none of the five Maghrebi states is even close to representing a serious hard security hazard to the countries on the northern shore. Fears of the potential deployment of ballistic missiles or the development of nuclear weapons that could subsequently imperil Europe's security, are quite unfounded if not fantastic. Such an endeavour would require

colossal financial and technical assets that are simply far beyond the means of all the countries of the region (Dokos).

On the other hand, the plans of NATO's southern European members to set up "readily deployable" forces (with priority for air power) capable of mounting expeditionary operations in the Mediterranean region, is today a source of worry for the countries of the Maghreb. The latter consider dialogue and measures of rapprochement and confidence-building as the key to stability, away from the predominance of the purely security approach in the Euro-American post-9/11 strategy.

Conclusion

The growing American interest in the Mediterranean region in fact stems partly from Europe's own worries about changes and crises on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and partly from the Maghreb's strategic location as a pathway to the energy supplies from the Middle East. The significance of the Maghreb for Mediterranean security and therefore for Western and American security concerns, also stems from its direct relevance to what is known as the "Third Pillar" issues (terrorism, international crime, migration and refugee flow, and drug trafficking) which figure highest on the US security agenda. The considerable effort and attention which America has been investing in the Maghreb region since the fall of the Berlin Wall also has other objectives: to counter-balance the traditional French dominant role, given France's strong historical ties with the countries of the Maghreb, to prevent the rise of anti-Western and anti-American local political orders, and to protect increasing American business investments and financial interests in the region.

From the European perspective, the challenges which the Maghreb poses are more political and socio-economic than military. The European Union, especially its members in the southern flank of the continent, have traditionally had large-scale socio-economic and cultural interactions with the countries of the Maghreb, and are therefore more qualified than their American allies to spearhead a Western strategy towards the region. In devising a more assertive policy, southern European officials will find out more about the direct link between the economic and political dimensions of stability across the Mediterranean. Yet, Europe will still need American assistance in this respect. The US is in fact required to continue to grant

considerable attention to efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean basin deemed vital to its security strategy in the post-Cold War era. Security arrangements could be workable only if the different parties (Europe, the United States, the Maghreb, and the Middle East) behave as equal partners committed to dialogue and confidence-building.

All things considered, the threats, that the southern shore of the Mediterranean might represent to Europe and to the West generally, remain internal to the countries of the Maghreb. In addition to the acute socio-economic deficiencies from which most of these countries suffer, and which accentuate the disparities between the two shores ensuing the threat of uncontrollable migration, the region is threatened by disputes between neighbours that continue to hamper the emergence of a really integrated entity.

In the name of globalization, Western political and economic circles tend to exert excessive pressure on the non-Western world to impose the type of modernization that suits their own interests. This has provoked a rather intense global divergence of positions regarding the notions of “national identity” and “internal public order.” Coercion and bullying can only engender deadlock and confrontation. Dialogue and genuine consideration of the inevitable common future for the two worlds are alone apt to ensure an egalitarian prospect for peace and stability for any new political order—regional or international.

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