

The promotion of democracy in developing countries has been at the top of the foreign policy agenda of most western countries in the last decade. This stems from the liberal sentiment that the spread of democracy is the basis for international peace. However, the continuities of power politics outnumber the novelties of the international environment. This paper argues that processes of democratisation cannot be simply understood in light of the role of new concepts such as international legal norms, liberal ideals and economic globalization. Geopolitical understanding is key to explaining both failures and successes of democratizations. The paper highlights how western promotion of democracy is in fact the pursuit of selfish interests and democracy is a criterion that powerful countries apply to serve their national interest. This can be clearly witnessed when accounting for western policies in the Maghreb where the west supports brutal authoritarian regimes for geopolitical benefits. The connection between western regimes and Maghreb reigning elites are examined to demonstrate how the discourse of democracy is replaced by the practice of repression.

Introduction

The spread of democratic ideals throughout the world has been impressive, at least according to the number of countries represented at a recent diplomatic gathering in Warsaw organized by the US government: 107 democracies were there.¹ While this number does not necessarily reflect the reality (i.e. Turkey, Egypt and Kenya were present, but are hardly democracies), it is nevertheless necessary to underline that democratic principles have been on the rise in the current international environment. In particular, liberal internationalism seems to have been vindicated in its emphasis on democracy and free trade as the bases for international peace. The victory of the liberal democratic side in the Cold War had a tremendous influence in a number of realms within international relations. This euphoric state of affairs, however, tends to hide the fact that national interests and the quest for security still dominate international politics.

This paper is concerned specifically with the policies arising from the interaction between the promotion of democracy by Western powers and the geopolitical reality

within which countries operate. In the first section, the paper argues that the shift in focus in the discipline of international relations away from geopolitical factors is detrimental to the true understanding of how nation-states formulate their foreign policies and therefore how they promote their national interests. Many scholars have been preoccupied with analysing the changes in the international environment, while omitting to highlight the many continuities of the post-Cold War period. These are very relevant in the case of the Mediterranean where the dichotomy between the rhetoric of the promotion of democracy and the policies actually implemented is substantial.

It seems that geostrategic imperatives such as the protection of energy resources, defusing the demographic threat, the necessity to find new markets, the support for Israel, and the elimination of political Islam as a viable governing alternative all play a decisive role in stopping democratic processes in southern Mediterranean countries. Looking at Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and how they interact with their external environment can be a useful test to see if the democratic principles the west promotes are really what drives their foreign policy. The regimes in power in the Maghreb seem to point in the opposition direction.

Geopolitical issues within IR

Since the end of the Cold War, dramatic changes have been taking place within the literature on international politics. These shifts in focus have affected the discipline in two different regards. At a foundational level, the positivist assumptions of IR came under increasing attack and post-positivist concerns about the very theoretical underpinnings of IR have become a prominent feature in the literature. In their efforts to undermine the foundational elements of traditional positivist theorizing, post-positivist

scholars argue that it is necessary to rethink the history of the discipline and to recognize that positivist interpretations are not scientific or objective. The contribution of post-positivism should not be dismissed, but this theoretical debate runs the risk of becoming an exercise in intellectual exchanges that are so rooted in theory and methodology to lead to the detachment of students from the discipline, as the language is increasingly obscure.

The second considerable change in the discipline is the attack on the dominant realist theories for their positivist foundations and for their apparent inability to deal with post-Cold War issues. In particular, liberal internationalism made considerable headway. According to Petras and Morley, ‘today few analysts appear to study the state and the conflict between states, but concentrate instead on nearly everything else such as norms, culture, identity, international regimes and various non-national threats to global security.’² This change in focus rests partly on quite legitimate foundations. Realist theories do suffer from serious problems, as they tend to neglect the relevance of economics, do not fully account for the socializing effects on states when they participate to international fora³, overlook the relevance of cultural issues, and are unable to explain the ‘democratic peace’. Finally, the more radical scholars criticize realism for wanting to uphold the status quo and thereby support the unjust system within which states operate. However, this sharp shift in subject should not be taken as far as obscuring the reality of power politics. While ‘there is a currently fashionable notion that in a globalized, liberal economy co-operation rather than competition is the norm⁴’, rivalries among nation states still drive much of international politics and an exclusivist interpretation of what constitutes the national interest still figures prominently on states’ agendas. In this context, geopolitics becomes a useful tool of analysis for understanding how nation-states form their national interests and how they pursue or defend them.

Geopolitics studies ‘international relations and conflicts from a geographical perspective⁵’ and is preoccupied with explaining the behaviour of states by looking at their physical attributes. The geographical position of a country (i.e. regional context) determines the environment within which it will trade; its demography will have a bearing on economic and social development, and the natural resources it possesses or lacks will have an effect on its pattern of economic development. This context inevitably determines how countries will formulate their foreign policies in order to maximize their security and economic advantages. Furthermore, powerful states’ actions and interests will be even more deeply felt by the neighbouring countries. In the case of the Mediterranean basin, the countries on the southern bank tend to feel the pressure of the international system more than their counterparts on the northern bank, as the latter are the ones that, to a certain extent, determine how the system will operate. In this specific case, the interests and the policies of the US global power and the EU (France in particular) in the area can account for some of the domestic policies undertaken by North African regimes in terms of economic and political arrangements.

This ‘geopolitics’ sub-field of international relations had been on the wane for some time for three main reasons. First of all, geopolitics suffered from its ‘imperialist origins, documenting the entwining of geopolitical visions with imperialist strategy and racist white supremacist thinking.’⁶ The writings of F. Ratzel and K. Haushofer constituted indeed the basis for Hitlerian territorial expansionism and any subsequent mention of geopolitics has been associated to Germany’s *Lebensraum*. The second factor contributing to geopolitics’ oblivion has been the Cold War itself. Having been interpreted as a worldwide conflict between two superpowers, there was no need to discuss how the physical environment affected the struggle. The Cold War was a battle

for world domination between two ideological nation-states and it ‘provided an overarching geopolitical discourse⁷’, which guided Soviet and US policies. The third factor obscuring the relevance of geopolitics has been the failure of the end of the Cold War to ‘liberate’ the field. This is due to the increasing attention paid to non-physical factors that supposedly shape international politics. These non-physical factors are transnational legal norms, economic globalization, decrease in the importance of military conquest and expanding liberal concepts.

The combined effect of the factors mentioned above led Fulvio Attinà to conclude that ‘geopolitics, understood as the study of how the physical environment determines state’s policies, has practically disappeared⁸’. While there is some truth to this statement, Attinà’s conclusion is premature. The liberal New World Order is disappointing in a number of respects, not least from a scholarly point of view. The new tools of analysis and the new concepts that have been introduced to deal with the reality of international politics failed to deliver satisfactory explanations and there is a sentiment that international relations still need geopolitics. While international norms and increased multilateral co-operation feature prominently, the traditional divisions due to the different capabilities that states enjoy remained in place. The search for security may not rely any longer solely on military means, but power politics still dominates the relationships among nation-states. New forms of geopolitics should take into account changes and accommodate new concepts, but to fully understand how states ‘form’ their external behaviour it must be conceded that ‘location, distance, and the distribution of natural and human resources have significant influences on international relations.⁹’

Nation-states are still the central actors in international politics and their attributes still have a role in shaping and defining their national interests. It follows that geopolitics

should be used to highlight how physical attributes dictate, to a great extent, foreign policies. The goal of geopolitics should be to understand why under a set of unchangeable constraints such as regional location, proximity to other countries, and possession or lack of natural resources, nation-states behave as they do. Geopolitics can be particularly useful to account for the short and medium terms foreign policy decisions. Ultimately, 'geopolitics still has a role to play in the modern age of transnational corporations and global markets.'¹⁰ The absence of a world government still forces states to act in a self-help system.

According to many liberal internationalists, the end of the Cold War should have brought about a peaceful and stable international order thanks to the spread of democracy and thanks to the inevitable benefits of free trade. Co-operation rather than competition was seen as the main feature of the new international system, where the workings of multilateral organizations would temper the anarchy of the system. Finally, there was a widespread belief that the foreign policies of the winning powers would finally become truly ethical. The prospects for humanitarian interventions and the upholding of international law were suddenly on the increase. There are indeed signs that the liberal order might be working, but not many of the hopes held in the late 1980s and early 1990s materialized. The reason for this lies partly in the desire of many analysts to move on to 'bigger and better things', neglecting serious studies about the national interest. In the New World Order, many were convinced that the national interest would by and large coincide with the broad interests of the world community. It seems that they had forgotten one of E.H. Carr's most important lessons: when any state speaks in terms of coincidence of interests between its national interest and humanity's national interest it means that the status quo suits them perfectly.¹¹

One of the aspects where the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality¹² is most disturbing among those who defend liberal internationalism is in the relationship that exists between the promotion of democracy in the developing world and the actions undertaken to undermine it when democratizations do not conform to the dominant interests. The gap between rhetoric and behaviour is due to the intervention of geopolitical variables, which in turn determine which foreign policy objectives will be primarily pursued. When representatives of nation-states speak of democratic ideals and the necessity for their dissemination around the globe, democracy fulfils a double role: a foreign policy tool and a 'conditional' objective. As an objective, it is in competition with other goals that a nation-state pursues and therefore it is an object of constant revision. As a foreign policy tool it is used to extract or cut off resources according to how the criterion is applied and for what purpose.

The supreme national interest for nation-states is to ensure their survival through the accumulation of increasing amounts of resources and power. This is also the case for western democratic countries. In this context, the spread of democracy is not the synonym of national interest, but simply a tactic that will be useful at times. By the same token, it will be disregarded at other times if it does not contribute to ensuring the primary objective of accumulation of power. The case of Euro/US-Maghreb relations is paradigmatic in demonstrating this.

The Geopolitics of the Mediterranean

The influence of geopolitical variables can clearly be seen in the Mediterranean basin. The single great factor in determining the formulation of regional foreign policies of Mediterranean countries is the realization that the Mediterranean represents a fracture

zone. Anderson and French argue that countries accept ‘the existence of a global North-South fracture zone, which is perhaps most clearly demarcated as a boundary down the centre of the Mediterranean.’¹³ The differences in demography, governance, resources, and level of economic development between the two sides of the Mediterranean are very stark.

This geographic divide has multiple dimensions and implications, which in turn impact on the policies to be implemented. Thus, geopolitical factors are relevant in narrowing the spectrum of the policy-options open to the nation-states in the area. In the case of the Mediterranean, there is no doubt that its ‘strategic location as a funnel for major oil routes¹⁴’ has the potential of generating a conflict or, at the very least, the potential to be a contentious issue. Furthermore, the many dimensions of the North-South divide contribute to strengthen the perception that the region is a major dividing line. The following are some of the dimensions dividing the Mediterranean:

- The strategic importance of the region in terms of energy resources gains even more relevance when the economic development of beneficiaries is compared to the poor domestic economic situation of the exporting states. This is particularly true for the Maghreb countries, with the possible exception of Libya. Tunisia and Algeria satisfy a significant share of Western Europe’s gas needs, with Algeria contributing with the provision of crude oil. Despite this, both economies are far from developing successfully and liberal reforms only seem to increase social inequalities.
- Maghreb countries are also physically constrained to look southern Europe for trade, migration opportunities, and political recognition, as the rest of ‘Africa remains isolated from North African affairs by the geographic

barrier of the Sahara desert.’¹⁵ This geographical condition renders these countries heavily dependent on the west.

- Demographic data reinforce the economic divide. As the population of southern Europe slightly decreases, Maghreb demography is a time bomb. Birth rates are high and the population is very young. At the same time prospects are bleak due to harsh economic difficulties. With scarce employment opportunities, migration is for many the only way out of a desperate economic situation. Those who stay behind are increasingly attracted by the Islamic political project.
- The Mediterranean also represents a profound cultural divide due to the presence of Islam, Christianity and Secularism. There are deeply rooted fears about cultural western takeover in Muslim countries and this fear is reciprocated in the west where Islam is often misrepresented and equated with intolerant practices and religious fundamentalism.

The geopolitics of the region has therefore a considerable impact on how the Mediterranean states think about their security and on how they attempt to pursue their national interests. On the one hand, the states of southern Europe and the United States have a very conservative vision of what security is and implement policies that coincide with this interpretation. Thus, the key word that has characterised Euro/US-Maghreb relations is ‘stability’, which means that every regime will be accepted and acceptable to the democratic west as long as it is able to deliver in five key areas: a) keep the energy supplies accessible; b) counter Islamic resurgence; c) allow for the liberalization of the economy in order to satisfy the needs of international capital; d) restrict migration; and e) support for, or at least non interference with, the peace process between Israel and the

PLO. On the other hand, Maghreb regimes ask for foreign investment, support in international fora, a free hand in dealing with Islamic parties and movements, and political recognition of the legitimacy of the regime. These arrangements confine democracy to the background. The Mediterranean is a vital strategic interest for both Western Europe and the United States and will remain so for the foreseeable future. This geostrategic relevance does not bode well for democratic developments in the Maghreb, as local authoritarian elites are able to exploit Western interests in order to stay in power and survive the current wave of democratizations by simply implementing token gestures towards internal political opposition without truly liberalizing the system.

The three Maghreb states of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are indeed ‘conceding to global pressures and retreating from the economic sphere, but domestically have resisted calls for socio-political change.’¹⁶ This resistance might have been put under considerable strain if the US, France and the EU had not been there to support them in order to secure stability. This is just as well for the local political and economic elites who thrive thanks to the opportunities offered by the new global economy. They can take advantage of their social position to reap the benefits of globalization without having to pay the costs. The population bears those costs and it is unable to articulate its opposition in political terms, as the system does not allow for openness and dissent.

The promotion of democracy thus takes the backseat when the Maghreb and the Middle East in general are concerned. Some scholars pointed out that France and the United States face a dilemma when they deal with this area of the world. Joffe’ is convinced that in the West ‘there is a normative desire to support progress towards the institution of democratic regimes and towards full observance of human rights.’¹⁷ This desire is however frustrated because ‘there is considerable anxiety over the threat

represented by Islamic fundamentalism'¹⁸ and all the negative consequences that could derive from their coming to power in terms of regional stability. Joffe' is correct in pointing out this dilemma, whose implications reveal the strategy that is being pursued in the area. Western European and American policy makers are quite happy that in the short and medium term their interests coincide with the aim of Maghreb rulers to perpetuate 'the existing power configuration,'¹⁹ as it allows both parties to integrate in the new liberal world economy and ensure that the region is indeed 'stable'. This arrangement is a reminder of the strategy the United States pursued in Latin America up until the end of the Cold War. Support was granted to military regimes in order to keep the left out of power. The objective was to avoid democracy getting in the way of strategic concerns and true democratic reforms were introduced only when the US was able to ensure that any winner would be acceptable. Central and Latin American elections in the 1990s have been reasonably democratic and fair, but the contestants of both the left and the right have no other viable option than to concede to US interests. The 'alternative' had by then disappeared. The hope of repeating this successful strategy of 'constructive engagement' exists in the case of the Maghreb as well. The arguments used to defend support for these regimes are quite similar: a) Islamic parties would be even less democratic than today's rulers, b) the current regimes enjoy some popular legitimacy, c) further economic integration in the world economy will, in the long run, undermine support for the Islamic cause, and d) the situation is steadily improving and there are less and less abuses.

This strategy might indeed pay off even though it might be more difficult in the Maghreb due to the relevance of cultural factors. This however should not prevent from arguing that the national interest is an imperative for democratic nation-states, which the promotion of democracy can be sacrificed to. An interesting trait of EU/US-Maghreb

relations is the necessity for both the West and the local elites to save face and pay lip service to democratic principles and procedures. In order to construct some legitimacy for their actions or inaction, Western countries and domestic elites emphasize the democratic aspects of Maghreb political systems. Thus, if there are elections and openings to the opposition through the signature of 'pacts', the countries in question are deemed to be somewhat democratic. For Maghreb opposition movements, such argument is unacceptable. Elections are routinely rigged, Parliaments or Presidents are emasculated of their prerogatives by the effective wielders of power (the army in Algeria, the security apparatus in Tunisia, and the King in Morocco), the press is under strict control, and the concentration of economic power in a few hands effectively disenfranchises most people. According to Bradford Dillman, 'the elections can be viewed as public displays by the state or limited political barometers, rather than processes which create obligations for the government.'²⁰ Despite all this, Western powers continue to defend the democratic credentials of these regimes. Thus, in the words of Tunisian dissident Mondher Sfar, 'the real face of the new Mediterranean order is an axis linking the old colonial powers to corrupt dictatorships.'²¹ He also argues that 'economic liberalism and globalization are therefore not neutral concepts, but hide specific political projects that conform to the interests of the world powers.'²² Notions such as human rights, democracy, accountability and economic opportunities are utilized to pursue strategic interests and serve the purpose of enforcing Western domination. In this context, the future Euro-Mediterranean agreements for further economic integration will become another tool to extract resources from Maghreb countries²³.

Tunisia

In November 1987 Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, a general and a Minister, carried out a 'medical coup' in which the founding father of modern and independent Tunisia Habib Bourguiba was ousted. After 30 years in power, Bourguiba was out of office and Ben Ali was hailed as a 'liberator.' The arrival to power of Ben Ali coincided with the first attempt at real political pluralism in the Maghreb. Political parties were formed, a free press appeared and the security apparatus decreased its pressure. Furthermore, one year after the coup and six months before the presidential election, all political parties signed a pact to uphold democratic principles and leave religion out of politics. The Islamic party Ennahdha signed the document in the hope that it would be allowed to contest elections and its leader Gannanauchi was received by Ben Ali to discuss these matters. From this point onward, scholars and experts of Tunisian affairs diverge on their interpretation of the political events. Some argue that the 1989 presidential elections were fair and that the authoritarian turn of 1991 had been forced upon Ben Ali by the resurgence of revolutionary Islam, as Ennahdha had failed to gather substantial electoral support.²⁴ Others such as Mahamedou, Beau, Tuquoi, and Sfar argue that the 1989 elections were rigged and that while talks among parties were taking place, Ben Ali was already sabotaging the democratic process. They contend that since the coup Ben Ali had played the part of the reluctant general having to lead the country out of Bourguiba's quagmire when in fact, thanks to his connections with the security apparatus, his personal standing among ordinary Tunisians and his contacts abroad, Ben Ali worked to hijack the electoral process. The evidence given to prove the sabotaging of democracy is that Ben Ali was elected with 99,2 per cent of the votes, his party took all parliamentary seats and all means were used to secure victory. In the words of Beau and Tuquoi 'a historic

opportunity has been lost. Forever.²⁵ According to the two authors, the 1991 authoritarian turn actually took place in early 1989 and it was not a response to the threat of violent political Islam.

France, the EU and the United States responded to the hijacking of the democratic process with enthusiasm. They welcomed Ben Ali within the family of responsible leaders. After all, Ben Ali had studied in an American military school and was a key figure in the anti-Islamic repressive apparatus set up by his predecessor. Since the very beginning, the Tunisian regime played with success the Islamic card to justify repression of political opponents and, after witnessing the rise of the Islamic Front in Algeria, Western diplomats encouraged Ben Ali in its anti-Islamic campaign. The problem with Tunisia is that the Islamic party did not advocate the violent overthrow of the regime, was quite moderate in its stances and was far from supporting fundamentalist views. Furthermore, it had *prima facie* accepted to play the electoral game and its leader never publicly advocated violence. This did not seem to bother Paris or Washington. In fact, the fear of Islam was just the cover that Ben Ali and its allies in the west utilized to allow the Tunisian leadership to get a tight grip on power and set out radical economic reforms that would benefit western enterprises and local economic elites.

While the Tunisian regime was engaged in repressing the opposition, in 1989 France granted Ben Ali one billion francs in economic aid with the promise that French enterprises would soon flock to Tunisia to invest. Investors came, attracted by cheap labour, fiscal advantages and political stability. Following the renewed connections with France, Ben Ali's masterstroke took place in 1995 when Tunisia and the EU concluded a free-trade agreement. This agreement benefited western European manufacturing businesses, while enriching Ben Ali's supporters involved in the profitable import-export

sector. Since the agreement 'is mainly based on eliminating trade barriers for manufacturers'²⁶, the majority of Tunisians living on agriculture will be penalized by the impossibility of breaking through the European market. The agreement has also a political dimension whereby Tunisia promises to speed up political liberalization, but the EU has never asked serious questions in this domain, as 'there are no specific procedures to investigate if these promises are indeed kept.'²⁷ Western European businesses are quite satisfied with the speed of economic reforms in Tunisia and according to French President Jacques Chirac there is a true 'Tunisian miracle.'²⁸ Foreign investment had a positive influence on the growth of the Tunisian economy, but it has exploitative features that do not bode well for long-term growth. Most investments are made within the 'offshore' framework and are 'oriented towards tourism, trade and agriculture where profits are easy and not risky'²⁹. Longer-term investments in technological development, in heavy industry, and in infrastructure are largely absent. Finally, the government's bookkeeping is very questionable and economic indicators might not be as good as it is claimed.

However, the liberalization of the economy benefited those close to the regime. Many Tunisians enriched themselves through system of patronage implemented by Ben Ali, while the rest of the population is heavily in debt and employment prospects remain bleak. Economic aid, political support and international legitimacy continue to this day despite an overwhelming consensus about the nature of the Tunisian regime, invariably described as a repressive police state.³⁰ Evidence of these repressive policies can be found in the sharp increase in military spending undertaken by the regime since 1988. While in 1987 Tunisia spent \$ 269 million for its military, by 1991 it was already spending \$ 468 million.³¹ Far from creating a truly democratic society, Ben Ali was already building up a

stronger and better-equipped security apparatus. Ben Ali is held to be a bastion against fundamentalism, even though no such threat is obvious, as the repressive policies are aimed at every type of dissent be it secular or religious. However, his economic reforms brought Tunisia into the world economy, benefiting European investors. His security apparatus is able to keep migration to the north in check. Finally, his support for Israel and the peace process provides the US with a credible Arab ally. It is not hard to see the reasons for Western reluctance to deal with Ben Ali's lack of democratic credentials.

Algeria

Algeria constitutes another very interesting case when it comes to choose between defending democratic principles and pursuing the national interest. In the geopolitical Mediterranean context, Algeria represents a key country. It is the largest and most populous Maghreb state and it has vast oil and gas resources. During the Cold War, Algeria was a non-aligned country even though it espoused socialist economic ideals and had close military links with the Soviet Union³². In the mid-1980s under the Chadli presidency, Algeria began to abandon the planned economy and hence moved closer to the western model. Despite these changes, the social and economic crisis deepened and the 1988 riots convinced the regime that it was time to open up the political space. President Chadli undertook a series of democratic reforms that resulted in the creation of numerous political parties, in the proliferation of newspapers, and in a widespread popular participation to politics. The military, the real holder of power in Algeria, supported the reforms in order to re-establish some legitimacy for the regime. Among the newly formed parties, the Islamic Front (FIS) was the most prominent. The army and Chadli hoped that the democratic process would result in the co-opting of FIS to power

and that therefore business could go on as usual by making token concessions to the Front. The results of the 1991 elections saw instead the landslide victory of the FIS. The Army decided that it could not take the risk of consigning the country to the Islamic Front, carried out a military coup and began to crack down on the movement. A bloody civil war ensued.

Once again, the democratic rhetoric of the west was put to the test, but failed and support was thrown behind the military junta. From the very beginning of the democratization process, France was particularly worried about the rise of the Islamic Front and the consequences for regional stability if such a party were to take power.³³ The issues worrying Western diplomats were the usual ones: migration, security of investments, the fate of liberal economic reforms, an anti-Western regime at the frontiers of Europe, and the access to oil and gas resources. On the contrary, the Algerian army presented itself as the defender of democracy and as a reliable partner for western interests. The army was and still is able to use the provision of energy resources and the willingness to liberalize the economy to secure support from the west, which in turn undertook a number of steps to ensure the survival of the regime. Cordesman contends that ‘just after the coup, France provided \$ 550 millions in aid to help Algeria import food and a Western consortium provided \$ 1.45 Billion in credits’³⁴. While this financial aid may have been truly destined to relieve the population’s hardship at the beginning of the civil war, it could also be interpreted as a payment to the Algerian military for a job well done.

The general Western reaction to the coup has been one of widespread support for the Algerian military. The first pillar of this support strategy is economic investments. Since the beginning of the 1990s, just prior to and just after the coup, ‘the presence of

American companies has been substantial and it coincides with the first liberalising measures the Algerian regime implemented.’³⁵ While the United States encouraged its oil and gas multinationals to invest in Algeria, the army ‘prioritised the security of the oil and gas production apparatus and the transport infrastructure, leaving the general population to defend itself from the Islamic army’³⁶ through the creation of local militias. American economic interests in the region are not the sole reason for American support and it is claimed that fear of fundamentalism is what drives American foreign policy. Andres Ortega argues, for instance, that ‘fundamentalism’s effect on the Maghreb and the effect of the Maghreb on fundamentalism are probably the main issues of concern for the US.’³⁷ John Entelis argues that in fact ‘economic security and strategy do not compel American action in the region’³⁸ as much as the opposition to political Islam does.

While this may be the official line in Washington, geopolitical control seems to be more relevant than the preoccupation with fundamentalism *per se*. Having Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as close allies does not seem to bother the United States as long as their ‘religious fundamentalism’ is confined to domestic politics. Islamic fundamentalism becomes fearful to the US when it questions the status quo of international affairs and challenges the US dominant position in the new liberal international order. Thus, US foreign policy in the region is more about control and geostrategic goals rather than an affirmation of democratic principles over fundamentalist and intolerant regimes.

The United States has therefore supported the army’s efforts to counter Islamic terrorism. In fact, the second pillar of the support strategy is the deepening military links such as the training of Algerian officers in US military schools and the export of weapons. It is estimated that Algeria spends about 9 per cent of its budget on the military and this is a very substantial sum for a country with deep social difficulties. Furthermore,

the figure might be underestimated, as the sums going to the military and security forces are often channelled secretly. In 1991 before the coup, Algeria spent \$ 1,100 millions on its military and now the spending is estimated to be even higher. The third pillar of the strategy is the backing of the Algerian government in international fora. This support has led the US to sponsor Algerian requests for loans and credits from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund even in the absence of democratic credentials. As with many other countries in the past, 'nearly a decade of civil strife and the deaths of over 100,000 people have not altered America's basic indifference to the Algerian tragedy brought on in part by the unwillingness of influential outside parties to assert moral authority.'³⁹ This behaviour contrasts sharply with American policies in countries where a western democratic model would likely favour American interests such as Cuba.

The other influential outside parties include France and the European Union. They have both adopted the same strategy of the United States. There was a consensus in Western Europe that the FIS would have created an Islamic Republic once in power and therefore the military coup was acceptable in order to defend Algerian secular achievements, even when these were not always evident. A willingly superficial understanding of the Islamic Front served the purpose of justifying the coup and the repression. In turn, the repression and the ensuing civil war justified French and EU support to the regime in order to secure the continuation of oil and gas supply on which southern Europe depends. Furthermore, the Algerian military was a reliable partner when implementing liberal economic policies and stopping migration to the North. The rewards that have been granted to the Algerian regime after the coup include the following: a) international political legitimacy through the inclusion of Algeria to all Euro-Mediterranean partnership initiatives; b) on two occasions the IMF rescheduled Algeria's

debt thanks to intense French lobbying; c) the Algerian military was encouraged to shop for weapons in western Europe; and d) good press was granted to the regime. Other supportive measures are being implemented on a regular basis.⁴⁰

The strategy paid off and the main European objectives have been achieved. The Islamic threat no longer exists in military terms even though ‘the war continues on’⁴¹, the economy has been liberalised particularly in the key gas and oil sectors where foreign companies are heavily investing, migration to the north has virtually stopped, and new pipelines have been opened between Algeria and southern Europe. For its part, the Algerian military is firmly in control of the country. From an economic point of view, those close to the regime are profiting immensely from liberalization and privatization and the generals themselves are becoming very rich. The reforms helped the regime to tighten the grip on society as ‘private monopolies replace public monopolies and are held by those with close connections to the powerful generals.’⁴² From a political point of view, the regime is able to survive thanks to a combination of brutal repression,⁴³ façade democratic procedures and outside support.

Morocco

Despite ‘a long pluralist tradition’⁴⁴ dating back to the 1930s, Morocco has known since its independence in 1956 a ‘brutal absolutism and a permanent violation of human rights.’⁴⁵ King Hassan II anchored his country firmly to the Western camp during the Cold War and in exchange for its allegiance to the Western cause, Morocco always benefited from Western benevolence. In particular, France and the United States were quite pleased to see that the leftist opposition was being ‘cruelly persecuted, its leaders incarcerated or assassinated’⁴⁶, as a leftist victory in Morocco would have destabilized the

Cold War balance in the Mediterranean and the Arab world. The ferocity of the Moroccan regime reached its peak in 1990, when so called 'bread riots' throughout the country were violently suppressed. The King's reaction to the riots and to the calls for democratization in the New World Order was to implement a series of economic and political reforms that would lead the country to political pluralism. The reform plan was to be implemented very slowly, paying close attention to how the left and the Islamic movement might take advantage of the political openings. The slow pace of the reforms seemed to pay off in 1998 when the King appointed a member of the socialist opposition as Prime Minister following the results of quite open elections. This historical event coupled with the death of King Hassan II and the arrival to power of his son Mohamed VI could have meant a new beginning for a country whose economy is in disarray and whose social situation is explosive⁴⁷. In reality, political liberalization has been used to allow the Crown to regain a firm hold on power and rebuild its legitimacy. With the assistance of France, the US and the multinational financial institutions, the hopes for true democratization have been sacrificed in the name of stability in the region, fear of Islam and neo-liberal economic reforms. Thus, the efficacy of the former opposition parties in government is severely limited. At least three constraints exist to curb the work of the new Prime Minister:

- The King still has control on the decision-making process in the realms of security, defence, justice, and foreign policy. It follows that the government has a very limited power in controlling the security apparatus.
- The country's economy is in the hands of World Bank and IMF officials who are implementing rigorous neo-liberal policies.⁴⁸ These policies negatively affect the already precarious existence of the majority of Moroccans, effectively undermining the support basis of the leftist parties in government.

- The co-opting of all political parties to share government responsibilities means that the coalition is loose and disaccords abound. When a particular issue cannot be solved, the King is called in to resolve it. This effectively makes the Crown the real centre of power. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the King is also the supreme religious authority of the country.

The King and his allies in the security apparatus and abroad have effectively hijacked the transition in order to ensure the success of the economic reforms and the stability of the region. Within Morocco itself, the left is quite willing to play the King's game even if it means not wielding any real power, as the primary objective is to keep the Islamists out of power. The dilemma of the left is a constant feature in North African politics and it helps understand how the real wielders of power can manipulate the situation for their own benefit. In Morocco, the Islamic movement prefers not to actively participate in the political game fearing that their success would eventually lead to an Algeria-like situation and it rather focus its work on providing much needed social services, particularly in the slums of the larger cities. On the international scene, France and the US will help Morocco as long as the King supports Israel in the peace process negotiations, as long as the economic reforms go on as planned and as long as the Islamic movement is kept in check.

However, with an explosive social situation, avoiding a serious debate with an increasingly popular Islamic movement might make matters worse in the long run. A few numbers suffice to highlight how the healthy macroeconomic indicators that financial institutions publicize relate to the real state of the country: 50 per cent of Moroccans are illiterate, 30 per cent live in poverty, 10 per cent live in absolute poverty, 63 per cent of the rural population has no running water, 87 per cent of them has no electricity, 93 per

cent has no health care, and 54 per cent of boys and 74 per cent of girls never attend school⁴⁹. In the face of such social misery, it is no surprise that Moroccans increasingly turn to the Islamic movement to voice their discontent. If such a desperate situation is not dealt with, the consequences in the longer term might be disastrous. Furthermore, once again, recent peaceful demonstrations to ask respect for human rights and political accountability have been broken up by the riot police, while newspapers critical of the government have been forced to close down. Despite the widespread discontent of the population, it is estimated that Morocco uses 8 per cent of its budget for military spending.⁵⁰

In the case of Morocco, the European country most concerned with the regime's survival is Spain. The two countries are geographically very close and their borders represent the shortest distance between Southern Europe and North Africa. As 'migration from North Africa is one of the biggest threats to security in the medium term'⁵¹, it is no surprise that Spain is at the forefront of countries rushing to the rescue of the regime. Tension between Spanish and Moroccan migrant labourers is very high, particularly in the poorer regions of southern Spain and more immigrants would worsen the situation. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership is the forum where officials from the two countries discuss their issues. The outcome of such talks is quite straightforward: 'trade and aid, but not migration.'⁵² Accordingly, Spain and the other European countries are willing to open trade (except for agricultural products) with Morocco and financially assist the regime in exchange for stricter controls at the border. Another element of EU/USA-Moroccan relations is western unwillingness to ignore the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. This military enterprise strengthened Moroccan nationalism and served as a unifying cause for many ordinary Moroccans. The illegality of the occupation did not

seem to concern Western countries and the will of the local population was never taken seriously into account. Up to this day over 100,000 Moroccan troops are stationed in Western Sahara. The UN called for a referendum to be held to determine what the locals want, but Morocco has so far dragged its feet. While most European countries and the US never fully recognised the legality of Moroccan occupation and simply ignored the issue, Spain did actually recognise it.

Conclusion

The state of current international relations theorizing has correctly shifted the narrow focus of the past to encompass a number of relatively new concepts such as globalization, human rights, international norms, and the spread of democratic values as a means to ensure international peace. This shift however should not lead us to forget that international affairs are still by and large the realm of nation-states pursuing their national interests given the constraints of the distribution of resources. In light of this, the geopolitical variables are still a central element in determining the foreign policies of nation-states and geostrategic concerns can clash with 'moral objectives' such as the promotion of democracy and human rights. The 'big powers' in today's international system emphasize the role of normative policies, but their pursuit is linked to strategic objectives. The case of the Mediterranean basin is a telling one. The short-term objective of the EU and the United States is to secure the stability of the region even if it means supporting brutal regimes. These regimes can deliver on a number of issues that constitute a primary interest for the big powers. Keeping energy supply open and accessible is a key to understand the politics of the region, but so is the fear of political Islam not so much for the domestic consequences it might have but for the challenges it

would represent to the dominant international political and economic order. Migration and trade are two other areas of importance, whereby migration to the North is severely curtailed and trade agreements are signed to promote free trade. Finally, for the US these regimes are very important in that they support American policies in the Middle East. The long-term objectives are to effectively emasculate any internal radical opposition and create the conditions for a political debate where the actors will inevitably all be pro-Western. The same strategy used to democratize Latin and Central America is at work in the Maghreb.

On their part, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco's elites extract all the benefits from the liberalization of trade and ensure that the opposition is kept in check through a variety of means ranging from physical elimination to restricting free press and from co-optation to exile. They play the Islamic card to justify high level of repression and the lack of progress in the implementation of social and political liberties, often with the blessing of the left caught between co-optation, which favours the real wielders of power, and opposition, which would favour Islamic movements. Western powers in turn pretend to believe in the Islamic threat and support these regimes in their actions, while the real agenda of interests is kept hidden from the public eye. Nevertheless, French and American support for dictatorships cannot be open as it was during the Cold War and therefore Maghreb countries do actually implement token democratic gestures. Their efficacy is limited, but it serves the purpose of international legitimacy. The argument is that eventually these openings will lead to further and deeper democratic reforms. The prospects of success of this strategy in the longer run are debatable, but even if it succeeds what will be its legacy?

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- ² James Petras and Morris Morley, 'Contesting hegemony: US-French relations in the New World Order', *Review of International Studies*, 26, January 2000, p. 50.
- ³ For this criticism, see Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
- ⁴ Patras and Moreley, p. 49.
- ⁵ Kathleen Braden and Fred Shelley, *Engaging geopolitics* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), p. 5.
- ⁶ Gearoid O' Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.
- ⁷ John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 128.
- ⁸ Fulvio Attina, 'Geopolitica', in Norberto Bobbio, Nicola Matteucci and Gianfranco Pasquino (eds.), *Dizionario di Politica* (Torino: TEA, 1990), p. 437.
- ⁹ Braden and Shelley, p. 5.
- ¹⁰ Alpo Rusi, *Dangerous Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 60.
- ¹¹ Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis: 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relations* (London: Macmillan Ltd. and Co., 1939).
- ¹² Scott Burchill, 'Liberal Internationalism', in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, (London: Macmillan's Press, 1995), p. 50.
- ¹³ Ewan Anderson and Dominic French, 'New Dimensions in Mediterranean Security', in Richard Gillespie (ed.), *Mediterranean Politics*, (London: Pinter, 1994), p. 9.
- ¹⁴ Russell King, 'The Mediterranean: Europe's Rio Grande', in Malcolm Anderson and Eberhard Bort (eds.), *The Frontiers of Europe*, (London: Pinter, 1998), p. 118.
- ¹⁵ George Joffe, 'The European Union and the Maghreb', in Richard Gillespie (ed.), *Mediterranean Politics*, London: Pinter, 1994, p.22.
- ¹⁶ Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou, 'The Rise and Fall of Democratization in the Maghreb', in Paul Magnarella (ed.), *Middle East and North Africa: Governance, Democratization and Human Rights*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 210.
- ¹⁷ Joffe', p. 30.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Mohamedou, p. 220.
- ²⁰ Bradford Dillman, 'Parliamentary elections and the prospects for political pluralism in North Africa', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (spring 2000), p. 211.
- ²¹ Mohammad Sfar in video-conference the XVII World Congress of the International Political Science Association, 1-5 August 2000, Quebec, Canada.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ For a detailed analysis of Euro-Mediterranean agreements, see Fouad Zaim, "The Third Generation of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer 1999), pp.36-52.
- ²⁴ See Michael Collins Dunn, 'The Al-Nahda Movement in Tunisia: from Renaissance to Revolution', in John Reudy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1994) and William Zartman, 'The Challenge of Democratic Alternatives in the Maghreb', in John Reudy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1994).
- ²⁵ Nicolas Beau and Jean Pierre Tuquoi, *Notre Ami Ben Ali*, (Paris: La Decouverte, 1999), p. 61.
- ²⁶ King, p. 121.
- ²⁷ Sfar, video-conference.
- ²⁸ For a detailed positive examination of the features of the Tunisian economy, see Valentin Mbougueng, *Ben Ali et le Modele Tunisien*, (Paris: Les Editions de l'Orient, 1999).
- ²⁹ Beau and Tuquoi, p. 160.
- ³⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of how the Tunisian police state works, see Lise Garon, *Le Silence Tunisien. Les Alliances dangereuses au Maghreb*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).
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- ³² Margaret Blunden, 'Insecurity on Europe's Southern Flank', *Survival*, Vol.36, No.2 (Summer 1994).
- ³³ This is discussed by William Quandt in his book *Between Ballots and Bullets. Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

³⁴ Cordesman, p. 49.

³⁵ Remy Leveau, 'Acteurs et Champs de Force', *Pouvoir*, Vol.86, 1998, p. 42.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Andres Ortega, 'Relations with the Maghreb', in John Holmes (ed.), *Maelstrom: the US, Southern Europe and the Challenges of the Mediterranean*, (Cambridge: The World Peace Foundation, 1995), p. 55.

³⁸ John Entelis, "Democracy denied: America's Authoritarian Approach Towards the Maghreb: causes and Consequences", paper prepared for presentation at the XVIIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association, 1-5 August 2000, Quebec, Canada, p. 7.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ For specific details about the relationship between Algeria and France in the last ten years, please see Lucile Provost, *La Seconde Guerre d'Algerie: le quiproquo franco-algerien*, (France: Flammarion, 1996); Martin Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, (London: Hurst&Company, 1997); and Francesco Cavatorta, "The International dimension in Transitions to Democracy...and Back: the Case of Algeria", paper prepared for presentation at the XVII World Congress of the International Political Science Association, 1-5 August 2000, Quebec, Canada.

⁴¹ Lahouari Addi, 'La Guerre Continue', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 553 (April 2000), p. 1.

⁴² Faycal Karabadji, 'L' economie algerienne menacee par la mafia politico-financiere', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 534 (Septembre 1998), p.9.

⁴³ Violence in Algeria is not a monopoly of the GIA. The security forces are implicated in a number of incidents designed to scare the population and maintain the country under curfew. For instance, between 1993 and 1998 Amnesty International denounced the disappearance of over 2,500 people at the hands of the security forces. Extra-judicial executions of journalists and trade unionists are also common. See Amnesty International Reports on Algeria.

⁴⁴ Garon, p. 126.

⁴⁵ Ignacio Ramonet, 'Ou' va le Maroc?', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 545 (August 1999), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For a detailed profile of the new king, see Michael Willis, "After Hassan: A New Monarch in Morocco", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Autumn 1999), pp. 115-128.

⁴⁸ Z. Daoud, 'L' alternance a l'epreuve des faits', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 541, (April 1999), p. 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cordesman, p. 7.

⁵¹ Joffe', p. 29.

⁵² King, p. 120.