
In July 2002 a Spanish special forces operation resulted in the removal of a small Moroccan contingent that had been sent to Parsley Island, near Ceuta. The event occurred during a lengthy crisis in Spanish-Moroccan relations, which challenged a key assumption of Spanish and European security policy officials: namely that the building of interdependence (as between these two Mediterranean neighbours since the 1980s) would favour regional stability and put an end to a historical pattern of periodic crisis in Hispano-Moroccan relations.

Aims and objectives

The project aimed to explain the origins of the crisis, compare the respective security priorities of the two countries, examine the actors involved in Hispano-Moroccan relations and consider the potential for future cooperation, particularly in view of the emergence of new security issues on the policy agenda and the evolution of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in response to them.

During the fieldwork, over one hundred elite interviews were conducted in Spain, Morocco and Brussels, mostly with policy practitioners or with civil society actors seeking to influence policy. Regional perspectives were obtained by interviewing in Andalusia, Catalonia and Northern Morocco and not just in Madrid and Rabat.

Research results

Contrasting security priorities were found to be central to the deterioration in Hispano-Moroccan relations in 2001-2003, with concerns about irregular migration much more prominent in Spain, while the Moroccan resort to pressure tactics resulted primarily from territorial ambitions concerning the Western Sahara. Beyond specific motives, Moroccan disenchantment with Spain arose from the country being blamed by the second People's Party administration for a variety of security problems at a time when Aznar's government seemed to be pandering to anti-Moroccan sentiments in Spanish society.

While the research did not refute the broad thesis about interdependence favouring stable international relations, it did point to the still limited degree of Hispano-Moroccan interdependence, the additional importance of cultural factors (persistence of negative stereotypes of the 'other'), the significance of political factors (contrasting regime structures) and the way in which interdependence can be undercut by the presence of alternative international partners (e.g. France for Morocco, Algeria for Spain) or by new international developments (increasing northward migration, post 9/11 developments), affecting perceptions in each country of 'dependence' on the other.

In the origins of the crisis, migration proved a source of antagonism owing to inadequate border policing, a widening economic gulf between Spain and Morocco, and the way in which the economic benefits of immigration were overshadowed by traditional anti-Moroccan prejudice within sections of the Spanish population. However, migration emerged eventually as a potential basis for strengthening interdependence, particularly with Morocco becoming a country of transit (not just
origin) and the area of common interest growing, facilitated by a growing EU implication in policy

The challenge presented by 9/11 initially brought forth different Spanish/Moroccan regional security ambitions that contributed to bilateral tensions. Eventually, there was a degree of anti-terrorist cooperation in the aftermath of the Casablanca and Madrid bomb attacks, but this remains limited by common mistrust which finds its roots in historical experiences and misconceptions about the neighbouring country.

The hypothesis that bilateral relations might be becoming more difficult to manage owing to the emergence of new non-state actors found only partial verification, and this only on the Spanish side, where the activities of the Sahara solidarity movement and media coverage of Morocco proved to be an irritant for Rabat; moreover, the intransigence shown by the second Aznar government towards Morocco owed much to the fact that this played well with the Spanish electorate.

At the multilateral level, the EMP proved unable to prevent the partners from clashing yet it did provide an arena for relatively normal Spanish-Moroccan relations that was largely unaffected by the crisis at the bilateral level. Indeed the EMP experienced some partly Spanish-led innovations at this time, which reinforced its capacity to address new security challenges and reinforce its cultural component.

**Academic achievements and dissemination activities**

The project has already given rise to a number of papers and articles and further journal articles and a book are planned. Dissemination of the results has included presentations in Bologna, Madrid, Ifrane (Morocco), Oxford and Liverpool. Spin-offs from the project include: a workshop intended to help bridge the divide between International Relations and European Integration scholars with a view to the enrichment of research on European-North Africa relations; and further projects intended to advance research on Euro-Mediterranean region-building by focusing on key North-South Mediterranean bilateral relationships.

**Political impacts on policy and practice**

Policy conclusions arising from the case study point to the need to expand the economic dimension of interdependence but also to further broaden the agenda for cooperation and dialogue, eliminate taboo subjects, appreciate and invest in cross-cultural cooperation, and seek ways of placing bilateral relations on a more pluralistic basis, over time (i.e. involve new actors less dependent on core government).

Another impact of the research will be better-informed activity to raise awareness among European diplomats and officials about issues involved in securing effective security cooperation with southern partners. This case study should counsel against any complacency surrounding existing European policies since it shows how even a favoured country like Morocco, traditionally seen as more 'stable', 'open', pro-European, pro-Western and reformist than most of the other Mediterranean partner countries, may actually come to use pressure or act in a 'hostile' manner under certain circumstances. European engagement with Morocco needs to be informed by a clearer understanding of internal political realities