



Is it Possible to Get Along with Morocco?

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Spanish foreign policy towards Morocco is bogged down by deficient analysis and an erroneous approach. The two major analytical deficiencies affect the concept of neighborhood and the identity of the neighbors. Regarding the approach, the choice has been impossible appeasement instead of most needed respect.

In order that the relationship with Rabat stops being bad or detrimental for Spain, to say the least, it is necessary that bilateral ties are based on the right postulates that allow us to reach objectives more in line with our interests.

In the first place, the relationship with Morocco has been based on the erroneous idea of how the word "neighborhood" is interpreted. It is amazing that, when speaking of Morocco, no one considers even as a hypothesis that "neighborhood" can mean something different from "good neighborhood."

It does not seem necessary to make a list of border countries experiencing troubled relations. Far from representing an exception, the Spanish-Moroccan case is nothing out of the normal, especially when the borders are not only political, but cultural, religious or economic; for example the cases of Greece and Turkey, Turkey and Iraq, India and Pakistan, Russia and Ukraine, United States and Mexico, Israel and Syria, to mention just a few.

As in real life, the neighborhood between countries does not have to be harmonious. Good neighborhood presupposes that the parts follow and respect the same rules in the relationship. Besides, it has to do with neighborhood, not submission; the rules are not imposed by one of the parts, but they have been agreed upon by both parts.

It is evident that this is not the case when one speaks of Spanish-Moroccan

relations. Rabat continues failing to fulfill the agreement on the repatriation of immigrants coming from third countries signed in 1992, with a Socialist government at the helm in the Spanish La Moncloa Palace. In the same fashion, Rabat fails to comply with its obligations under international law when refusing to delimit its sea borders with Madrid. And, as if all that were not enough, it pretends to veto the access of Spanish politicians to a territory whose sovereignty is undisputed and unquestionably Spanish under international law.

The conclusion is evident: as long as Morocco does not accept the rules of international law in its foreign policy, it will never be able to become a good neighbor.

Therefore, it is false to say that the administration of Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero maintains “good relations” with Morocco. For starters, the administration would have to explain how it can have “good” relations with a state that refuses to comply with a subscribed emigration treaty; that has occupied part of the Spanish territory in Melilla; and that has granted oil concessions in waters next to Melilla, a city that does not belong to Morocco.

The relationship with Morocco is bogged down – as it has already been pointed out at the beginning of this article – by deficient analysis. To begin with, Morocco is not “the” Southern neighbor, but one of them. Like it or not, Spain has three more neighbors in the South: Besides the land border with the United Kingdom (the British colony of Gibraltar is there), we have sea borders with Algeria and Western Sa-

hara. The question is strategically important. In fact, proper relations with North Africa have to start off from that reality: Since Morocco is not the “only” Southern neighbor; it is not convenient to keep a North African foreign policy granting privileges to Morocco over the other neighbors.

Zapatero’s policy to establish “special” relations with Morocco, different from the ones Spain has with Algeria or the Polisario Front (and Mauritania,) has proven detrimental for Spanish interests. Therefore, Spanish former President José María Aznar’s policy was much more adequate, focused on maintaining balanced relations with all the Southern neighbors: Morocco, Algeria and the Polisario – as well as Mauritania.

If an incorrect analysis inevitably bogs down our foreign policy towards Morocco, the problem becomes more serious; the approach to reach the pretended objectives is wrong.

During many years, (during most of the Franco era, almost all of the transition to democracy, and, notably, during the Zapatero administration,) Spain has suffered an inexplicable complex in its relationship with Morocco. The pressure exerted on Spain seemed to work, and it was deeply pathetic to see how Morocco – being the weakest country in military, economic, social and political aspects – could scare the daylights out of Spain every time it used its threats.

In Spain, nobody seems to understand that our military superiority is unquestionable (as it was seen during the crisis over Isla Perejil.) It is odd not to accept that we are much richer than

Morocco, and that our economy can work perfectly well without Morocco. However, Morocco's economy would not be able to function without our input.

It is pertinent to remember that, since 1994, the Moroccan-Algerian borders remain closed: Morocco has lost more than Algeria as a result. And it is also pertinent to remember that Spain is the second largest market for Moroccan production, as well as the passageway for most of its products. Closing the Spanish borders would utterly and simply mean Morocco's road to ruin.

Besides, Spain is member of NATO and the European Union, and all that entails.

Knowing all of the above, it is inexplicable that Spain wants to have a foreign policy whose only objective is to "appease" the Sultan's "wrath." It is an otherwise impossible policy because it ignores the faddist character of the person that means everything in Moroccan politics. This appeasement policy - analogously applied with ETA - carried out by the Zapatero administration has evidently failed. The following examples serve as illustration:

- Spain remained silent when, a month after the Socialist Party came to power, Morocco objected to solving the Sahara conflict through the enforcement of the Baker Plan, unanimously described as "the best political solution" by the UN Security Council.
- Spain refused to make the appropriate diplomatic protest when, some

months after Zapatero came to power, Morocco granted oil concessions in Spanish waters close to Melilla (July 2004.)

- Spain refused to protest forcefully when Morocco pretended to blame on the Spanish Guardia Civil the murder of several black Africa emigrants at the Spanish-Moroccan land border.

However, it can be said that Spanish-Moroccan relations reached their best days during the Marrakech Summit in December 2003. When Spain proposed a mutual relationship based on respect and not on a sellout or on appeasement, Morocco indeed took its Northern neighbor more seriously.

The experience leads to unquestionable conclusions. Nevertheless, the persistence to make the same mistake time and time again is still in there. Why? Finding the answer is only possible by analyzing the pro-Moroccan lobby operating in Spain. This lobby group is cross sectional and permeates all spheres of influence and decision-making: Political parties, think-tanks, institutions of higher learning, finance institutions, companies, mass media... Its basic ideology is the so-called "mattress of interests."

It did not help that the crisis over Isla Perejil translated in the resounding failure of this ideology: The pro-Moroccan lobby's sponsors are sticking to their guns. For them, "neighborhood" can only mean "good neighborhood." At any cost, even if the one always footing the bill is Spain.

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