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Security policies in the Maghreb from the perspective of offensive realism

Abstract

The Maghreb is a regional system in which two states, Morocco and Algeria, both potentially dominant in terms of geographical size, population and the size of their economy, their military power and their ability to influence, are competing for a position of regional leadership. The hegemonic ambition of both states in regional context takes precedence over security policies, which makes them to adopt expansionary policies while ignoring the fact that, in doing so, they pose a security dilemma to their adversary aggravated by the problem of perception. Although the Maghreb constitutes a balanced bipolar security system with a low risk of military confrontation, nevertheless lack of information about the security policies of the other stakeholder feeds regional competition and increases the possibilities of conflict.

Keywords

Maghreb, Morocco, Algeria, Sahara, System, Dilemma, Security, Competition, Leadership, Confrontation.

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Realistic security foundations in the Maghreb

Political realism is based on the idea that international politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature; so if we know these laws, and are able to develop a general theory that explains them, we can understand how politics works¹. Within the realm of security policy, this involves examining the activities and behaviours of states and ascribing a political meaning to them through reason so that we can understand their predictable consequences. In other words, states define rational security policies because this is the only way to minimise risks and maximise benefits in a way that fulfils “the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success”².

Realism views security policy from the perspective of national interest in terms of relative power, in other words, the amount of power one state has in relation to others. But this relative power does not have a fixed and unalterable character over time; it depends on the structure of the international system and on the greater or lesser conformity of states to its distribution. Power relationships thus acquire three geopolitical dimensions³: relative power understood as the power-sharing that a state possesses in comparison with others, both globally and regionally; the different attitudes of acceptance or denial of states towards its distribution and the ways of increasing or maintaining it, or preventing it from diminishing and using for that purpose either confrontation or cooperation. Herein lies the difference between defensive realism and offensive realism – both structural – allowing us to understand why in the Maghreb the latter prevails. While defensive realists would be satisfied with an “adequate” level of power, without trying to excel at the expense of the interests of the other states since, if that were to happen, there is a risk that they would react with a counterweight strategy⁴, the offensive realist standpoint explains why the dominant powers, in this case Morocco and Algeria, base their security policies on the principle that the only “adequate” level of power consists in being significantly superior to the other. As Mearsheimer succinctly puts it: “for defensive realists the international system provides few incentives for states to seek additional increases in power; instead, it pushes them towards maintaining the existing balance of power. Preserving power, rather than increasing it, is the primary objective of states. Offensive realists, on the other hand, believe that world political powers are rarely found to favour the status quo, because the system creates powerful incentives for states to seek opportunities to gain power at the expense of their rivals and to take advantage

1 MORGENTHAU, H (1950). *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, p.4.

2 *Ibid*, p.8.

3 WALTZ, K (2001). *Man, the State and War*, New York, Columbia University Press. p.12.

4 SNYDER, J. (1991). *Myths of Empire. Domestic Politics and International Ambitions*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, pp.123-28.

of such situations when profits outweigh costs. The ultimate goal of a state is to be the hegemon in the system”⁵.

Therefore, deducing to what extent each of these two states tries to impose itself on the other is fundamental when considering their security policies, given that their strategic lines of action are determined by the characteristics of their opponent. Any mistake in the assessment of the security environment by one or both states could trigger the possibility of an underestimation or overreaction with potentially disastrous results.

In the case of the Maghreb, the security policies of its main actors, Morocco and Algeria, are closely linked to geography, since the main concepts on which they are based, such as the fundamental “Greater Morocco” or Western Sahara, have a strong territorial character. This means that the realistic offensive vision in the Maghreb area offers greater advantages in explaining regional security since both states, Morocco and Algeria, aspire to be the territorially dominant power, opposing the other being, because this is what guarantees their own security⁶.

This leads to relationships marked by “continuous competition” in which each party seeks to impose itself on the other, so that this state of permanent conflict is but a “by-product of competition”⁷. From this perspective, competition between these two potentially dominant states becomes an inevitable reality and the levels of aggressiveness are determined by the incompatibility of their interests, with the additional input of the aggressiveness of their leaders and the expansionary principles of their security policies.

In this sense, the security policies of Morocco and Algeria are guided by the competition that can lead to war characterised by the use of violence rather than by the existence of an authority and international law⁸. This does not mean that war is a permanent and inevitable phenomenon, nor that competition is limited exclusively to the military arena, but it does reinforce the idea that each state decides which course it thinks best serves its interests. Each state decides for itself whether or not to use force and when or how to do so, which means that war can break out between the two at any time.

In these circumstances, the possibility of either state using force is always present not only as a last resort, but as a constant threat⁹, albeit a restricted one, given that

5 MEARSHEIMER, J (2014). *The Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, New York, W.W. Northon & Company, p.21.

6 JORDÁN, J. (2018). *Un modelo de análisis geopolítico para el estudio de las relaciones internacionales*, Documento Marco, DIEEEMo4-2018), Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, p.5.

7 WALTZ, K (2001). *Man, the State and War*, New York, Columbia University Press. Cap. XI.

8 *Ibid*, pp.80-85.

9 WALTZ, K (1979). *Theory of International Politics*, Illinois, Waveland Press Inc., p.113.

both are rational states and, therefore, subject to what Ortega y Gasset called “the prior submission of force to the methods of reason”¹⁰.

This realistic offensive view of international relations in the context of the Maghreb means that we see Morocco and Algeria as two states seeking to become the hegemonic power in their geographical region, which makes them antagonists. In this process of seeking and consolidating regional hegemony, both states try to impose themselves on the other, while at the same time resisting all interference from other regional powers in their area of influence¹¹. For that purpose they employ expansionary security policies leading to continuous competition that could lead to confrontation.

A systemic view of Security Policies in the Maghreb

Structural realism offers a systemic view of international relations centred on the structure of the international system and the relations between states as main actors interacting with each other (what is known as the third image of International Relations), as opposed to the reductionist view that focuses its attention on the individual and the internal characteristics of the state, i.e. the first and second images¹². This systemic approach to international relations has the advantage of explaining armed conflicts not as a consequence of the aggressiveness, megalomania or malice of state leaders, but of the nature of the international system itself¹³. As Kenneth Waltz states: “the pressure of competition (between states) weighs more heavily than ideological preferences or internal political pressures”¹⁴.

Thus, external conditioning factors derived from the structure of the international system, and not internal particularities, are those that most influence the security policy of states, including their external behaviour¹⁵. This circumstance is even more evident in the case of Morocco and Algeria, which are regional powers given that, unlike the great powers that adapt their external strategies to their external circumstances,

¹⁰ JOHNSON, Ch. (1966). *Revolutionary Change*, Boston, Little Brown, p.13.

¹¹ JORDÁN, J. (2018). *Un modelo de análisis geopolítico para el estudio de las relaciones internacionales*, Documento Marco, DIEEEM04-2018, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, p.5.

¹² WALTZ, K (1979). *Op.Cit.*, p.19.

¹³ SPIRTAS, Michael (1996). *A House Divided: Tragedy and Evil in Realist Theory*, *Security Studies*, vol. 5, No.3. pp.387-400.

¹⁴ WALTZ, K (1986). *Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics*, in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York, Columbia University Press, p.329.

¹⁵ JORDÁN, J. (2013). *Enfoques teóricos de los Estudios Estratégicos*, Javier Jordán (Coord.), *Manual de Estudios Estratégicos y Seguridad Internacional*, pp15-43, Madrid, Plaza y Valdés.20.

the opposite is true of the small powers: they adapt their internal circumstances to the dictates of the international environment¹⁶.

But these same external conditioning factors also explain why there are analogous results (for example, analogous security policies), in spite of the fact that the moments and circumstances in which they occur may change (for example, different historical periods), which is most interesting when studying the validity over time of the security policies used in the Maghreb.

From this perspective provided by the third image, Morocco and Algeria form part of a regional security system –the Maghreb– in which they act as its main interrelated and interdependent elements, so that any action carried out by one affects the other, although this does not prevent the existence of other internal variables that also affect the power relations and security policies of states. This could be the case with terrorism or the personality of leaders.



Figure 1. Prepared by the author

The regional system of the Maghreb, as well as the international system of which it forms part as a sub-system, could be considered anarchic in the sense that the states

16 SNYDER, J. (1991). *Myths of Empire. Domestic Politics and International Ambitions*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, p.318.

that form it are sovereign and, therefore, free to act according to their national interests, and not subject to any superior authority. Imposition is not possible, since the states concerned have no obligation or incentive to accept it, nor does the system exert sufficient coercive pressure to invite cooperation through the signing of treaties, or the establishment of regional supranational institutions and, therefore, the dominant states, Morocco and Algeria, can easily hide and avoid fulfilling their acquired commitments. This does not mean, however, that the functioning of the Maghreb as a regional system lacks any form of order, nor that its member-states can do whatever they want, but it does mean that the order is created by the states themselves and is normally made up of a set of power relations and agreed rules of behaviour - *status quo* - to which they voluntarily adhere¹⁷.

The fact of belonging to the structures of the macro-system made up of international organisations such as the United Nations, or the African Union, as well as the influence of major powers such as the United States, or the Soviet Union in the past, and even new actors such as the European Union or China, serve to condition the behaviour of Morocco and Algeria, which look upon their usefulness in order to reward their own behaviour and punish the behaviour of others, without implying that they necessarily agree to adapt their behaviour to the guidelines demanded by these organisations. International institutions such as the United Nations, the AU or the EU are not capable of imposing their authority coactively¹⁸ to protect Morocco from Algeria and vice versa. These organisations serve to moderate the most perverse elements of their security policies, but they are not sufficient to modify them. The two states accept these patterns of behaviour only because they understand that they are beneficial to them and offer them a greater likelihood of “rising to the summit and staying there”¹⁹.

Hence, international law and standards can only be applied with the consent of states, and for this it is required that they have a direct material interest in the result of their application. It is not the rules themselves that determine how the Maghreb states behave; their behaviour is determined by their geopolitical interests and by the relative power relations between them. It is precisely this useful form of selfish behaviour that explains how Morocco’s and Algeria’s security policies work from an extraordinarily pragmatic, realistic perspective. International law thus becomes a symptom of the behaviour of both states, and not its cause. Consequently, the inability of the international system to regulate cooperative relations between Morocco and Algeria, in view of the desire for power on the part of both states, reflects a pessimistic view of international institutions, since they neither restrict nor condition their behaviour in relation to one another.

17 BULL, H. (2012). *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp.97-156.

18 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* Pp.3.

19 WALTZ, K (1979). *Op.Cit.* P.21.

The Maghreb as a simple bipolar security system

The Maghreb is a system with a very small number of member-states (Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia and Libya), so the foundations of its security policies are simpler to design than if the number were high, in which case relations would become extraordinarily more complicated. Because of its geographically compact nature and the marked difference in relative power between its actors, the Maghreb acts as a bipolar system in which the two great regional powers, Morocco and Algeria, are dominant. Both are sovereign, but also dependent states, which means that they cannot do what they want, or cease to be influenced by the other, or achieve whatever they propose, although they act with greater independence from each other than would be the case in a multipolar system.²⁰.

The relatively large size of these two main actors gives them a greater capacity and incentive to try to control the system, while isolating them from the effects of others, thus giving rise to a power balance situation with a low level of interdependence between the two states. This allows Morocco and Algeria to design autonomous security policies without taking into account the considerations of the other party since they are not dependent on them. Their objective is the search for regional leadership and their security policy is based on the continuous questioning of the balance between the two.

On the other hand, since the Maghreb is a bipolar system, its functioning is reduced to the interaction between its main actors, which reduces the probability of an armed conflict between Morocco and Algeria, since it is more difficult for calculation errors to occur²¹. However, given that Morocco and Algeria only accept the conventional rules of the game that define the functioning of the international system (for example, the United Nations resolutions on Western Sahara) insofar as they benefit their respective interests, the balance of the Maghreb regional system becomes unstable, since it does not depend on the willingness of the two states to deal with each other in accordance with the rules governing the international community the direction of stabilisation and peace, the Maghreb tends towards instability and confrontation²².

20 Sovereignty is understood as their respective ability to deal with their own problems according to their size, wealth, power and physical configuration.

21 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* Pp.4. Also JORDÁN, J. (2013). *Enfoques teóricos de los Estudios Estratégicos*, Javier Jordán (Coord.), *Manual de Estudios Estratégicos y Seguridad Internacional*, 15-43, Madrid, Plaza y Valdés. 2013, pp.31-32.

22 KISSINGER, H. (1957). *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, New York, Harper. 1957:316-20. KISSINGER, H. (1964). *A World Restored*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap.1964, pp.1-6. KISSINGER, H. (1968). *The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck*, *Daedalus*, vol.97, 3, Massachusetts, MIT Press, pp.899.

Relative Power and territorial expansion

Morocco and Algeria behave in the Maghreb as rational actors seeking at least their own preservation and, at most, to become regional hegemons and so their respective security policies obey a logic that seeks to maximize their opportunities, starting with their own survival. Survival is “the top priority”²³ and only when it is assured can both states prioritise other objectives such as improving economic prosperity or strengthening democratic rights. Rather than a realistic description of the momentum behind their actions, survival is a prerequisite of the security policies of both Morocco and Algeria, with invasion by the other and the occupation of their national territory constituting the main threat to which they have to respond.

This means that Morocco, the same as Algeria, has to ensure that it has sufficient power to defend itself, even if domestic interests, strategic culture, or their commitment to non-negotiable international principles (e.g. Morocco’s possession of Western Sahara), lead both states to accept a reasonable set of benevolent and cooperative international norms of behaviour.

Within the regional security system of the Maghreb, Morocco and Algeria are positioned according to their national power and this is estimated by comparing one against the other. Rather than the particular qualities of the two states and their specific connections (their sentiments of friendship and hostility, their diplomatic exchanges, the alliances they form and the extent of contacts and exchanges between them), what defines their security policies is the picture of the prevailing situation between them and the distribution of power within it; that is, their respective share of regional power in relation to the other²⁴. Both Morocco and Algeria design their security policies based on “maximizing their relative position of power. The reason is straightforward: the greater the military advantage they hold over the other state, the more secure it is”²⁵ and, consequently, better ensures its survival.

Power means four things to Morocco and Algeria. Firstly, it provides them with the necessary means to maintain their respective strategic autonomy and prevent the other from dominating. Secondly, greater power means greater freedom of action for territorial expansion, even if the outcome is uncertain. Thirdly, the more powerful they are, the greater the margins of security they enjoy in relation to the other and the greater their capacity to establish the rules of the game advantageously in the geographical area of the Maghreb. Finally, greater power provides those who possess it with a greater voice in the international system and greater possibilities of reaching allies and advancing their positions.

23 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* p.31.

24 JORDÁN, J. (2018). P.3.

25 ” MEARSHEIMER, J. (1994-95). *The False Promise of International Institutions*, *International Security*, Vol, 19, 3, 11–12. Massachusetts, MIT Press, pp.11–12.

Given that both Morocco and Algeria are seeking to become regional hegemon within the regional security system that is the Maghreb, the only level of power acceptable to both consists of being significantly superior to the other, since it is the only way of holding sway²⁶. The consequence is intense competition in which both seek to maximize their own power or, on the contrary, reduce that of their adversary. The more powerful Morocco is vis-à-vis its rival, Algeria, and vice versa, the greater its chances of success, starting with survival and ending with hegemony. This explains why Morocco, like Algeria, has sought every opportunity to tip the balance of power (for example, through the occupation of Western Sahara in the case of Morocco) to its advantage or, conversely, to the detriment of its rival (for example, through support for the Polisario Front, in the case of Algeria).

The maximization of power materializes for both states through territorial expansion. Both powers follow the guidelines of what realistic authors such as Glaser call “greedy” states; that is to say, they behave like states whose expansionist eagerness do not correspond to security reasons, but reflects an attempt to maximize their relative power²⁷. For Morocco, the culmination of the ultimate objective of its geopolitics embodied in the concept of “Greater Morocco” would allow it to control most of the western Maghreb, becoming a *de facto* hegemonic regional power. Morocco would act

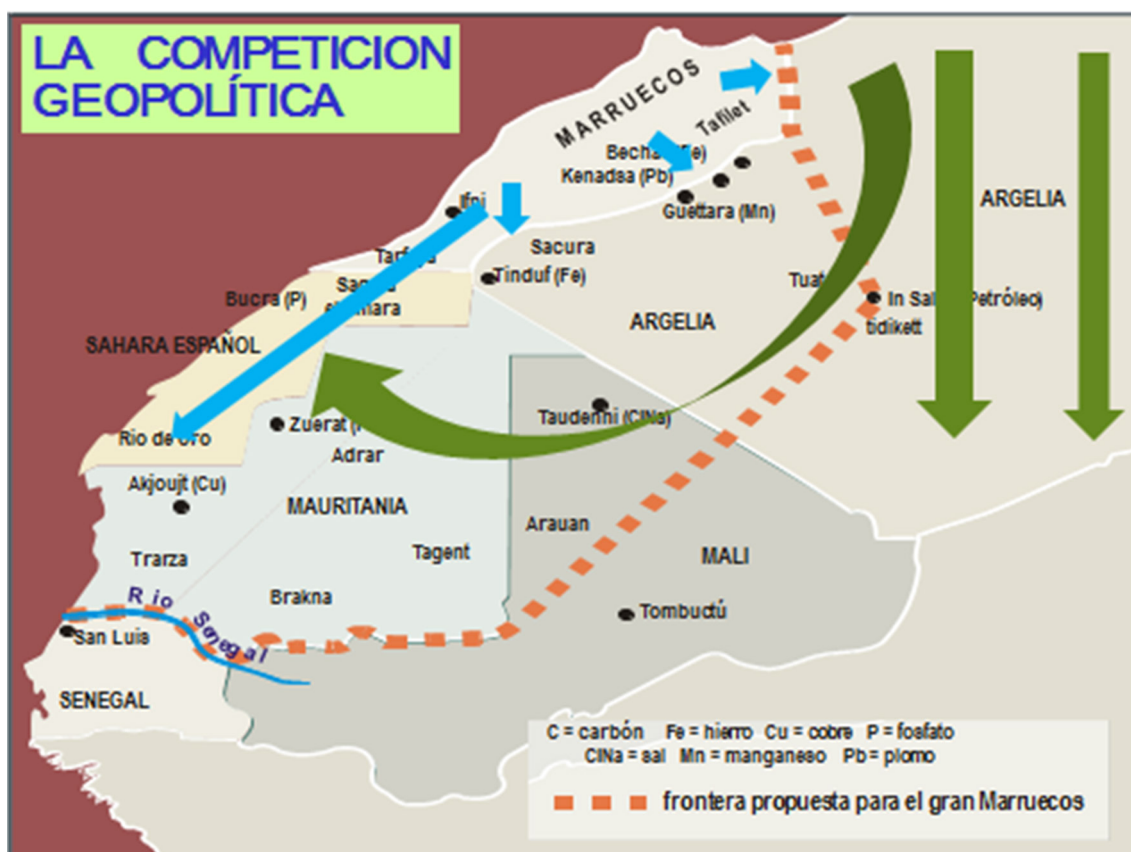


Figure 2. Prepared by the author

26 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* pp.30-32.

27 TANG, S. (2009). The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis, *Security Studies*, 18:3, pp. 587-623,613.

as a “revisionist” power questioning the existing *status quo*, including Algeria’s sovereignty over provinces such as Bechar or Tindouf that Morocco considers as belonging to it.

Thus, with the occupation of the Western Sahara since 1976, Morocco fell into the error of considering that territorial expansion meant greater security²⁸ without realising that expansion brings about gains and losses and that both are cumulative. Expansion is attractive to Morocco as it allows it to acquire new resources that increase its national power to compete with Algeria, while preventing those resources from falling into the hands of its adversary. But this form of reasoning is opposed to the balance of power and is based on the erroneous conviction that the other party, Algeria, would not react. By adopting it, Morocco took the risk that an eventual defeat, which it came close to suffering in the 1976-1988 war in the Sahara, would seriously affect its status as a regional power through the depletion of its economic and military resources, loss of strategic depth, or the country’s internal and external deterioration²⁹.

Algeria, for its part, bases its security policy on the consolidation of the immense territories of the Sahara granted by France at the time of its independence, and would endeavour to complete with the opening of a maritime corridor through the Western Sahara to the Atlantic, thus encircling Morocco and attaining a dominant position in the Maghreb. In this sense, the geopolitical imperative of holding onto the relative power acquired through independence makes it crucial that its security policy contemplates a second imperative derived from the previous one, that of “defending borders”³⁰, opposing actively and, if necessary, violently to any attempt to question its territorial integrity, as was made clear in 1963 during the “Sand War” against Morocco.

The fact that the competition between the two Maghrebi powers materializes in the territory of the Western Sahara has strategic advantages for both states since the confrontation takes place in this external territory avoiding doing so in the territories of sovereignty. It would indicate that both states would have fallen in what Snyder calls “myths of the empire”³¹, understood as the commitment to territorial expansion as a way to increase their power and ensure their safety. In this way, although the ultimate goal of the expansion would be to obtain greater security, its actual behavior on the road to achieving this goal would be virtually indistinguishable from the simple and pure territorial aggrandizement³².

28 SNYDER, J. (1991). *Op.Cit.* pp.1-20.

29 JORDÁN (2013), pp.25-26.

30 JORDÁN, J. (2018). Un modelo de análisis geopolítico para el estudio de las relaciones internacionales, Documento Marco, DIEEEMo4-2018), Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, p.14.

31 SNYDER, J. (1991). *Myths of Empire. Domestic Politics and International Ambitions*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press. Pp.1-20.

32 SNYDER, G.H (2002). “Mearsheimer’s World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security.” *International Security*, vol. 27 no. 1, pp. 149-173.

Balance of power and compensation mechanism

The structural anarchy inherent in the system and the absence of an international authority capable of coercively enforcing commitments means that neither state can be considered absolutely secure, or permanently secure. Both states are insecure in one way or another; the only thing that varies is the degree of insecurity. Consequently, Morocco and Algeria have to assume security policies based on mutual distrust.

The success or failure of these policies depends on the responses that each of them provides to the actions of the other, though certain common behavioural characteristics can be identified, which are repeated and remain constant over time. These elements are characteristic of *Realpolitik*: the interests of the state prevail over any other consideration and the needs of security policy arise from permanent and unlimited competition between the two states³³.

This means that national security and the political issues deriving from continuous competition constitute if not the only purpose, at least the main focus of both Moroccan and Algerian politics. In this sense, both states are revisionist as they will only be satisfied with the *status quo* when they become predominant in their region. However, as neither of them has, in practice, the capacity to do so, their relationship is bound to permanent competition, in which each one seeks to maximise its potential comparative advantages over the other.

The fact that Morocco and Algeria present similar characteristics in their behavior as states, regardless of the structural differences (political, economic, social, etc.) between the two, means that the socialization of the regional system ends up consisting of its policies of security imitating each other, in a process of mutual adaptation³⁴. If Morocco rearms, so does Algeria, and if the latter expands, so does Morocco. Interaction between the two states provokes similarities in the patterns of their international behaviour due to the disadvantages derived from not using the successful behaviour employed by their adversary. In this way, both states determine their security policy on the basis of their security needs in comparison with the other power, and the success of these policies depends on their capacity to preserve, expand and strengthen the state. *Realpolitik* thus provides rational security logic for both Morocco and Algeria and this logic extends over time regardless of the different historical periods to which it applies since their constitution as modern states.

As states, Morocco and Algeria have offensive military capabilities superior to the other states of the region (Tunisia or Mauritania), but not with respect to one another, which establishes a situation of true balance of power in the Maghreb between two powers vying for regional dominance. Their equivalent geopolitical weight means that

33 WALTZ, K. (2001). *Man, the State and War*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp.210-217.

34 BARNARD, Ch. (1948). *On planning for world government*. Organization and Management. Cambridge, Harvard Press University, pp.148-152.

the policy of balance of power would be the only useful way of explaining security in the region by preventing one power from holding sway over the other.

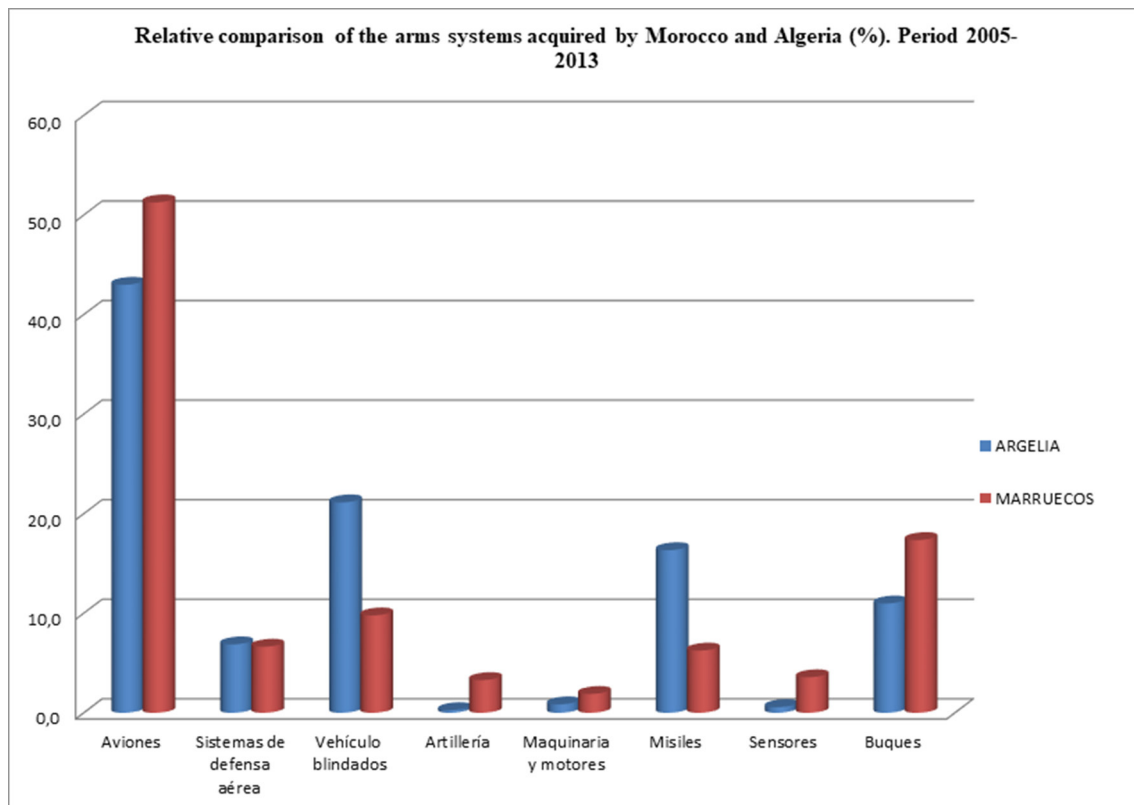


Figure 3. Source: Prepared with SIPRI Data, Trend Indicator Value

The balance of power between Morocco and Algeria, the only two states with the potential to become leaders in the Maghreb, constitutes the normal state of the regional security system and is based on the following two propositions: firstly, both Morocco and Algeria are players acting within a security margin whose minimum is self-preservation and whose maximum is to achieve regional domination. Secondly, both states endeavour to achieve the objectives they pursue by all possible means. These objectives fall into two categories: internal efforts to increase their economic capacity and military power and develop sound security strategies, as well as external efforts to strengthen and extend their own alliances and territorial dominance, or to diminish and reduce those of its adversary.

If the balance is broken and one of them appears as an eventual winner (as occurred, for example, during Morocco's invasion of the Western Sahara in 1976), the imbalance is compensated by the damaged state intensifying its efforts to reestablish it (for example, on Algeria's side by supporting the Polisario Front), all without the need for a superior agent that favours, or prevents any of them from using all the instruments of national power at their disposal to achieve their aims for or against re-establishing the equilibrium.

Both powers, Morocco and Algeria, have a vested interest in winning against each other because this makes them dominant and neither has an interest in the other winning, which favours equilibrium. Having equivalent national powers, both un-

derstand that, if the balance is broken and one of them is winning, the loser is at the mercy of the stronger, so the incentives to prevent it by the eventual loser are very large.

On the other hand, the absence of an international authority to coercively order the anarchy of the system and provide confidence to regional actors, allows Morocco and Algeria to interpret their own measures as defensive and the measures of the other as a potential threat following a spiral model³⁵. The result is that any action taken by one of them aimed at increasing its security – such as increasing its military strength, territorial expansion, or seeking alliances – leads the other to respond with similar measures. When one of them potentially appears to be the winner, the other tends to “compensate” by increasing its own capabilities or forming alliances with other regional actors (Tunisia, Mauritania) or extra-regional actors (the United States, France, Spain). This is what realists call *offshore balancing*³⁶. In these circumstances, balance becomes the most logical behaviour, given that it avoids endangering the security of the system.

If the compensatory mechanism is not sufficient to restore balance, this can trigger an increase in tension that could lead to conflict, even if neither party really wants this. The reason is that both Morocco and Algeria consider that any reinforcement of each other’s security policy is motivated, not so much by the need to increase its security, but by its expansive “voracity”³⁷ and they assume that the real motives of their adversary are more aggressive than they might have initially thought³⁸. From this subjective perspective, both states mistrust one another to such an extent that their security policies are built on a worst-case scenario of reciprocal intentions. Rather than identifying with each other’s security problems, Morocco and Algeria have a self-centred vision of their security that makes them indifferent to each other’s problems. Thus, the policies of Morocco and Algeria aimed at satisfying their security needs tend, paradoxically, to produce growing insecurity.

It could also happen that a secondary regional actor (Mauritania, Tunisia, Libya) views the eventual triumph of one of the two powers, Morocco or Algeria, to be inevitable and prefers to sit on the fence (for example, Mauritania with respect to Morocco until 1979 during the war in the Sahara against the Polisario Front), rather than building new coalitions aimed at preventing anyone from rising as a winner. In these circumstances, *bandwagoning* becomes the main and most sensible behaviour of the

35 JERVIS, R. (1976). *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press. Pp.167–174. Also JERVIS, R. (1978). *Cooperation under the Security Dilemma*, *World Politics* Vol.30, 2, pp.58–113.

36 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* pp.235-266.

37 GLASER, Ch. (1997). *The Security Dilemma Revisited*, *World Politics*, Vol.50, 1, 171-201, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.178.

38 SNYDER, G. (1984). *The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics*, *World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. pp. 468-70.

remaining states, since it guarantees gains for all, while at the same time ensures that the security of the weakest is not put at risk³⁹.

Cooperation versus confrontation in the Maghreb

As countries of equivalent geopolitical weight that have adopted expansionary security policies, each perceives the other as a state that should feel secure – there is no intention of threatening it– but which nevertheless has an aggressive security policy, while they see themselves as potentially insecure states – they feel threatened by the other – exercising a defensive security policy⁴⁰.

As a result it is very difficult for both of them to simultaneously enjoy high levels of security, since when either of them adopts measures tending to increase its own security levels, the other responds in a similar manner seeking to recover its capacity to defend itself. Cooperation becomes more difficult, while, conversely, competition through the arms race and territorial expansion becomes more intense.⁴¹

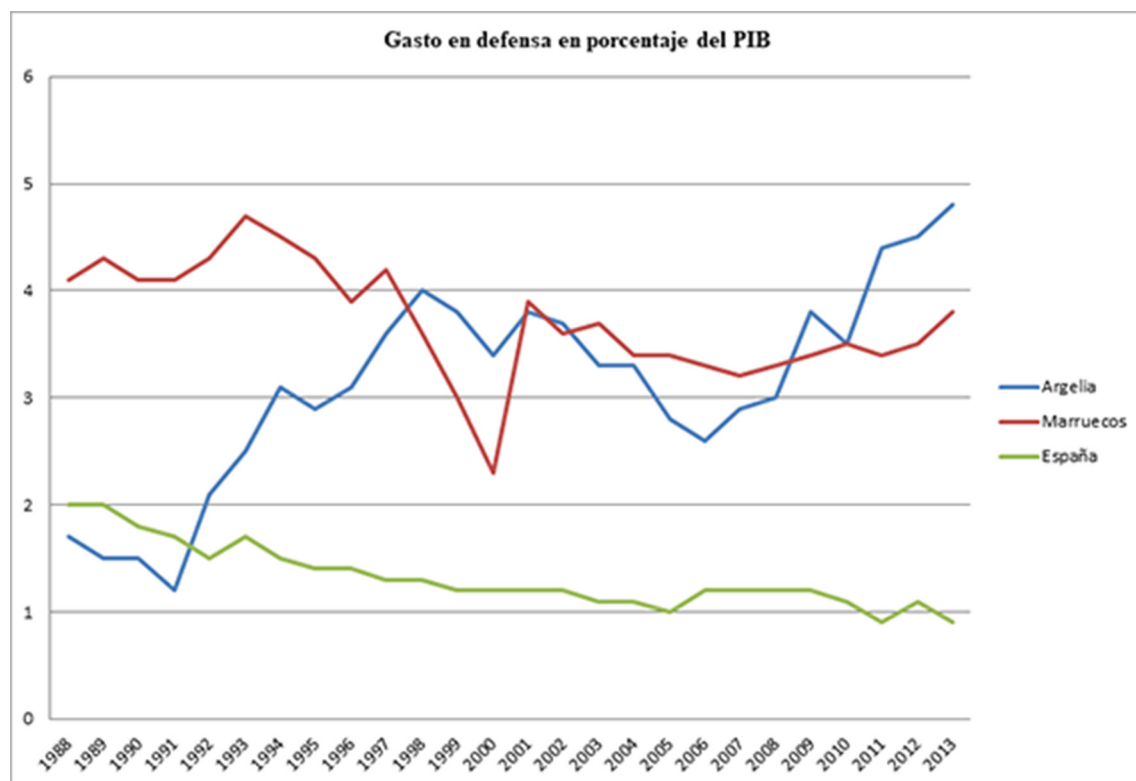


Figure 4. Source: Prepared with SIPRI data

39 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op. Cit.* pp.162-164.

40 GLASER, Ch. (1992). Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models, *World Politics*, Vol.44, 4, Cambridge University Press, pp.501-505.

41 HOAG, M. (1961). On Stability in Deterrent Races. *World Politics*, 13, 4, Cambridge University Press, pp.505-27.

In view of this reality, we cannot expect the two strongest states, Morocco and Algeria, to ally with each other, but we can expect them to look for other weaker states to reinforce them. For a strategic cooperative alliance to be established between the two potentially dominant states, Morocco and Algeria, it would be necessary for both states to have convergent, similar or compatible economic, political or ideological systems, which is not the case in the Maghreb. This is the thesis defended by Raymond Aron who agrees with Kissinger when he states that only when there is a sufficient level of convergence on the basis of peaceful coexistence and mutual trust it is possible to establish a strategic alliance⁴².

In order for cooperation to come about, it would also be necessary for both states to agree on the achievement of common objectives, such as maintaining the stability of the Maghreb, or regional integration, which would allow a common minimum of trust to be created. It is precisely the difficulty of achieving compatibility on its major strategic objectives that provides the best justification for why its relations are based on competition and confrontation rather than cooperation⁴³.

Aside from this, there are several other specific difficulties in the relations between Morocco and Algeria that favours confrontation over cooperation. On the one hand, to cooperate both states should accept the *status quo* based on regional equilibrium, which is very difficult due to the fear of each of them that, in case both accept it at a given moment, the other part could change it in the future. Both states, Morocco and Algeria, understand that there is no guarantee that a cooperative attitude would be maintained indefinitely over time.

It is from this perspective that we must understand the failure of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), arising from the Maghreb summit in Algiers on 10 June 1988, whose intention was to create a "Greater Maghreb", based on the Arab-Islamic civilisation of its members⁴⁴. Although numerous protocols and cooperation agreements were signed prior to 1994, the limitations of a cooperative security policy in a regional environment where the two major powers continued to compete for leadership by advocating expansionary territorial security policies soon became apparent. Mutual mistrust of each other's intentions turned the intentions to create the AMU into rhetoric, with the result that the last high-level conference, which should have taken place in 2005, was cancelled due to Morocco's refusal to participate because of Algeria's verbal support for the independence of Western Sahara.

However, the failure of this project showed that the balance sought was unstable, because its effects were circumscribed to the temporal space Morocco required to

42 ARON, R. (1966). *Peace and War. A Theory of International Relations*, New York, Doubleday, pp.672-75.

43 FEARON, J. (1995). *Rationalist Explanations for War*. *International Organization*, 49, 3, Massachusetts, MIT Press, pp.379-414.

44 BALTA, P. (1990). *Le Grand Maghreb. Des indépendances à l'an 2000*, Paris, La Découverte, pp.236-251.

consolidate its occupation of the Western Sahara and Algeria needed to bring an end to the civil war against the terrorist insurgency of the Islamic Front of Salvation (FIS). As a regional integration project, the AMU could not function as long as the regional states that formed it, mainly Morocco and Algeria, did not have sufficiently strong common interests to favour their membership and both questioned the balance of power seeking to increase their relative power.

If they had truly been seeking their own security based on cooperation, it would have been enough for them to renounce territorial expansion and accept a certain parity in military capabilities that would guarantee the maintenance of the *status quo*. model of regional security based on cooperation would require both Morocco and Algeria to make mutual concessions to correct the exaggerated feeling of insecurity of the other side without risking too much of their own and would have included measures such as unilaterally accepting defensive military doctrines, or modifying the capabilities of forces deployed in favour of defensive ones (Glaser, 2002:501), something that neither state was willing to accept.

An additional factor is the expansionary attitude of both states which could not be justified by on grounds of security⁴⁵, but rather the ideological conception of their security policies. Algeria would have achieved its territorial expansion at the time of independence when, by chance of history, France transferred to the Evian Agreements a considerable portion of the Sahara that had never been part of its territory, placing it in an advantageous geopolitical position. For its part, from the end of the protectorate, Morocco designed a conception of the state based on the idea of “Greater Morocco”, which sought to expand its borders to territories that have never belonged to it.

For both states avoiding over-expansion and limiting their territorial ambition to Western Sahara is a sign of “strategic common sense”⁴⁶ since any attempt to dominate the region by force could lead to a painful defeat in the face of a foreseeable coalition of the rest of the states. More than reinforcing security, it is a question of increasing national wealth, regional position, international prestige and strengthening the state through the control of areas or resources outside historical territories.

Thus, expanding the area of territorial control would be preferable to opting for the maintenance of the *status quo* based on cooperation, since it provides both with greater advantages. Even if a mechanism of close cooperation between the two states could be established (such as the failed creation of the Arab Maghreb Union in 1989), neither actor would be willing to cooperate unless it considered the other to be acting similarly⁴⁷ which, in a climate of mistrust such as the Maghreb, is very difficult to attain.

The result is that neither accepts that stability in the Maghreb based on equilibrium should be the ultimate goal of the *status quo* and both assume that they should use any

45 GLASER (1992). *Op.Cit.* p. 501.

46 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op.Cit.* p.210.

47 JERVIS (1978). *Op.Cit.* pp.167-68.

opportunity presented to them to modify it for their own benefit. It can be argued that the territorial advantages obtained by Algeria's independence and the Moroccan aspirations contained in its "Greater Morocco" project have created, in a limited regional context such as that of the Maghreb, the structural conditions that favour confrontation; in these circumstances the balance of power is not sufficient to curb the aspirations of the two states, since both are revisionist and aspire to regional hegemony⁴⁸. The only reason neither state has so far achieved hegemony is because both know that, in a situation of balance of power, "the costs of expansion generally outweigh the benefits"⁴⁹. Only if one of them has a substantial power advantage over the other will it behave more aggressively because it would then have "the ability, as well as the incentive, to do so"⁵⁰.

A further problem arises with the very concept of the *status quo*, seen as something more than conservation of territory. This would include the defence of interests, the influences on other states and regional alliances, the free access to the resources necessary for the country to function, the citizens' approval of government policies, economic development, the prestige of the country, and so on. In other words, all those non-territorial aspects that both states see as affecting their own security. If Morocco and Algeria had the same conception of what the *status quo* means and gave equal importance to all the aspects that make it up, it would be relatively easy to achieve a consensus that favours equilibrium, as discrepancies could be minimised. But when the interests they have to protect are very great and the ideological conceptions on which each state is based are different, it is more difficult for each of them to maintain the *status quo*, as the security dilemma increases and, with it, the potential for conflict between the two states, which requires greater efforts to maintain the equilibrium.

The problem of maintaining the *status quo* becomes insoluble when one state thinks that guaranteeing its security requires it to threaten or attack the other. When both states, Morocco and Algeria, share this belief, or when each of them thinks that the other favours it, there is a spiral of rearmament in which "whoever stops growing, begins to rot"⁵¹. The same situation could also arise if one or both states think that, when the other feels completely secure, it will seek to capitalise on its advantageous position by attacking the other's territory or interests.

Managing the security dilemma

The security dilemma explains that, in a context of uncertainty, the state finds itself in the worst-case scenario, that is, in a situation where adjacent states may be

48 JORDAN (2013). *Op. Cit.* p.24.

49 MEARSHEIMER, J (1990). Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War. *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p.10.

50 MEARSHEIMER, J (2014). *Op. Cit.* p.37.

51 ULAM, A. (1968). *Expansion and Coexistence*, New York, Praeger, p.5.

more powerful than it is; therefore, it tries to increase its power to feel secure. The increase in power of this state increases the insecurity of others who, in turn, increase their power thus giving rise to a cycle of insecurity that can lead to war, even if states do not want to harm each other. As Butterfield states, “the greatest war in history can take place without the intervention of great criminals willing to do harm deliberately: it could be produced between two powers that are desperately anxious to avoid any kind of conflict”⁵². It is the uncertainty and anxiety about one’s neighbours’ intentions that Herz regards as the simple instinct of self-preservation⁵³ which produces the vicious circle of the security dilemma and leads states into competition for greater power.

For his part, Jervis, the author who has made the greatest contribution by introducing the security dilemma into the doctrinal body of international relations theory, indicates that the dilemma occurs in the anarchic context of international relations, when “the means by which a state attempts to increase its security reduces the security of others”⁵⁴. Although the term “means” tends to refer to the ability of a state to carry out military missions rather than the size of its Armed Forces⁵⁵, the logic of the security dilemma is much broader and includes the decision to expand territorially or to form or participate in alliances⁵⁶.

The logic of the security dilemma thus explains why reinforcing security policy in the case of one of these states can be provocative for the other. The advantages that one state acquires by arming or expanding can be counterproductive, since if one state becomes too strong and, therefore, more difficult to dissuade, the other one feels more insecure, which provokes it to react, thus leading to a decrease in the security of the state that is rearming or expanding⁵⁷. On the other hand, if one state is too weak it may assume “great dangers” with regard to the other, if the latter has aggressive intentions⁵⁸. The consequence would be a process of action and reaction along the lines of what Glaser calls the “spiral model”, a process of progressive deterioration, which translates into a situation of growing tension between the two states as the product of a self-enforcing mechanism⁵⁹.

52 BUTTERFIELD (1951), Herbert. *History and Human Relations*, New York, Collings. Pp.19-22.

53 HERZ, J (1951). *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p.157.

54 JERVIS (1978). *Op.Cit.* p.169.

55 SNYDER, G. (1996). *Process Variables in Neorealist Theory*, *Security Studies*, 5, 180-183. Oxford, Routledge, pp.180-183.

56 GLASER, Ch. (1997). *Op.Cit.* Pp.175.

57 GLASER, Ch. (1997). *Op.Cit.* Pp.174.

58 JERVIS (1976). *Op.Cit.* P.58.

59 TANG, S (2009). *The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis*, *Security Studies*, Vol. 18, 3, p.616.

In this sense the spiral model applied to the to the regional area of the Maghreb obeys a true security dilemma between two states with irreconcilable expansionary interests and its severity is conditioned by physical and material factors, such as technology and geography, and by psychological factors, such as erroneous perceptions⁶⁰. It is precisely the severity of the security dilemma, in the case of Morocco and Algeria, which best explains their propensity to over-expand⁶¹.

In this environment, when an attempt is made to create a zone of expansion in a geographical space, as it happened with Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara in 1976, this fuels an expansionist security policy that constantly needs to protect what is being acquired, as it grows the intensity with which the other regional power opposes it. Expansion thus creates a cycle of power that entails greater responsibilities and greater commitment, which in turn requires greater power and wear and tear on both sides which have to use an ever-increasing volume of their national power to consolidate gains or to maintain territorial expansion, rather than employing it on other area, such as the country's domestic development. Entering into this perverse dynamic runs the risk of falling into over-expansion⁶² meaning that the cost of the additional territorial gains outweighs its benefits⁶³. It's a process that is very difficult to break because any withdrawal or abandonment, even in a space that is not considered strategic, is interpreted in the competitive context of the Maghreb, as a symptom of weakness, which in turn gives the rival power an incentive for its own expansion.

Thus, although Morocco and Algeria constitute a paradigm of the security dilemma, both states have traditionally ignored this axiom and have tended to establish very high levels of security for their own country, believing that politics is fundamentally security policy and that it is reduced to a simple question of military capabilities. Not understanding that any attempt to increase their own security normally translates into reducing it - due to the reaction of the other regional contender that interprets it as reducing its own - both states have come to assume that, in the face of any doubt, a higher level of rearmament and a greater commitment to territorial expansion are sufficient to increase their own security.

In this sense, Morocco and Algeria understand that if they were too sensitive to the security dilemma, they would run the risk of interpreting the aggressive behaviour of their regional competitor as that of a state that feels insecure but that, nevertheless, only seeks to maintain the *status quo*. The result would be disastrous as they could be defeated by their adversary. No government that considers a war possible, even if it does not want it, said Bismarck, "would be so foolish as to leave to the enemy the

60 TAGLIAFERRO, J. (2000-2001). Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited, *International Security*, Vol. 25, 3, 159. Massachusetts, MIT Press Stable, p.137.

61 SNYDER (1991). *Op.Cit.* p.317.

62 Ibid, p.24.

63 GILPIN, R. (1981). *War and Change in International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Ch.4.

choice of time and occasion and to wait for the moment which is most convenient for the enemy”⁶⁴. By failing to understand the reasoning behind the security dilemma, the result is a situation of greater tension between Morocco and Algeria, resulting from higher levels of rearmament than it is objectively required to maintain the *status quo*.

The reason why both states design their security policies on the basis of the security dilemma is the difficulty they have in expressing their peaceful intentions given the risks involved in doing so in a context such as the Maghreb, where the concept of security is so deeply pronounced. The reality is that both Morocco and Algeria would find it very difficult to change their security policies and use a policy of external signs to express their peaceful intentions and avoid competitive relations. Achieving an adequate security balance between the two states at low armament levels is very difficult to get given the high risks of an inadequate calculation of the chances of success. This explains why both Morocco and Algeria have traditionally tended to calculate in a very conservative manner, accepting levels of rearmament higher than those objectively required to guarantee their security vis-à-vis the other.

From this perspective, if we were to admit *a priori* that the security policies of Morocco and Algeria are guided by the security dilemma, and given that both have similar geopolitical weight, it would be possible, in an environment of trust and non-expansive security policies, to achieve an increase in the security of both over lower levels of rearmament, in accordance with the proposition of the security dilemma.

The problem is that both states behave in accordance with the proposition of offensive realism and make a security analysis based on the worst-case scenario and adopt expansionist and rearmament policies. Consequently, cooperative measures that seek to reduce the level of confrontation between the two states tend to be side-lined despite the fact that both have an objective interest in the mutual restriction of their armament levels through arms control⁶⁵.

The consequence is that Morocco and Algeria seek to satisfy their interests and ensure their security in a way that produces continuous competition between them. When one of the states adopts an expansive security policy and equips itself with military forces that are larger or more threatening to the other than necessary, a negative spiral on reciprocal intentions ensues ending up in reducing the security of both. This happens because both are of the opinion that it is military power that ultimately guarantees the security of the state and they base their security policies on this concept.

These conventions are what define the security policies of Morocco and Algeria and make it very difficult for both states to develop compatible and cooperative security policies aimed at maintaining a stable *status quo*, as both tend to believe that their

64 FISCHER, F. (1975). *War of Illusions*, New York, Norton, p.461.

65 SCHELING, T., HALPERING, M. (1961). *Strategy and Arms Control*, Twentieth New York, Century Fund, p.2.

security is based on the principle of the insecurity of the other. Unlike other regional security systems such as the European Union, in which security between states is achieved through foreign and defence policies characterised by moderation and the resignation of expansion⁶⁶, in the Maghreb, on the contrary, it is more difficult to negotiate and give in to achieve mutual security⁶⁷, which makes the security dilemma seen from the perspective of offensive realism very difficult to manage.

“Territorial greed” and the security dilemma

As noted above, both Morocco and Algeria seek to increase their security by maximising their national power, so that the more military advantage one has over the other, the more secure it feels, which favours rearmament and territorial expansion, regardless of the influence this has on the other state’s perception of insecurity.

This conception of the offensive realism of the security policies on the part of both regional powers diminishes the importance of the security dilemma, which considers that military advantages can be counterproductive, since they make the other state more insecure and, therefore, more difficult to dissuade, leading to a decrease in their own security as an end result. The severity of the security dilemma thus depends on the “greedy” nature of each state. As the Maghreb is a regional system in which the two potentially dominant states are “greedy” and have expansive security policies, the security dilemma is less important, given that both are more concerned with their own security through rearmament and expansion than with the insecurity of their adversary.⁶⁸

Moreover, in a second sense, when trying to reduce one’s adversary’s security one state invariably ends up reducing its own, by increasing the value that the adversary attaches to its own territorial expansion as a way of increasing security. This makes it more difficult for them to be deterred⁶⁹. An adversary who feels weak might find that expansion is desirable, as it strengthens security at its borders by providing strategic depth and, at the same time, greater access to resources are added to its national power⁷⁰.

The combination of both perspectives in the context of the Maghreb, makes both Morocco and Algeria seek, in general, to maximize their national power behaving as expansive states, rather than as peaceful states that seek simply to guarantee their

66 TALIAFERRO (2000-2001). *Op.Cit.*, p.159.

67 TANG (2009). *Op.Cit.* Pp.587-623.

68 GLASER (1997). *Op.Cit.* p.190.

69 *Ibid*, p. 177.

70 LIBERMAN: (1996). *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, p.16.

own security, avoiding any rearmament or expansion that makes your neighbor feel insecure. In doing so, they end up achieving the opposite effect as it is a decrease in it.

Nevertheless, the security dilemma continues to have a substantial usefulness in the regional system of the Maghreb in order to explain why states whose security policies follow selfish patterns of behaviour of an expansionist nature can, despite this, have a positive interaction. Given that the policies of both states are geared towards security interests, the security dilemma applies irrespective of the expansionary intentions of both states⁷¹.

The security dilemma is so exacerbated in the Maghreb that it can be considered a flawed one that follows the pattern of a growing cycle of action and reaction. Both sides fear one another both as a consequence of the uncertainty and fear generated by their security policies and external behaviour that both states end up feeling insecure.

As this is a particularly intense security dilemma, both states may decide that their security requires them to pursue an expansive policy so that their intentions become aggressive, forcing them to become realist offensive states. In this way, the security dilemma is transformed into a spiral that takes the form of a “mutual threat, or stalemate”, a situation in which both states become mutually aggressive⁷². This indicates that the security dilemma, applied in this case to the Maghreb, is universal and not merely conditional⁷³. There is no dichotomy according to which Morocco and Algeria seek to increase their security and, at the same time, try to maximize their relative power since “there is no possibility to draw a dividing line between the will-to-live and the “will-to-power”⁷⁴. As history shows, the security dilemma, rather than a moderating element, has in many cases been the main cause of conflicts. Many preventive wars that have been justified on the basis that the security dilemma conceal expansionary intentions⁷⁵, as they really resemble expansionary wars motivated by the security dilemma itself⁷⁶.

Imperialist security dilemma versus deliberate security dilemma

The Maghreb represents a situation described by Snyder as an imperialist security dilemma in which “at least one of the states in the system wants to expand, even if this

71 ROE, P (2001). Actors' Responsibility in Tight, Regular, or Loose Security Dilemmas, *Security Dialogue* 32, nº 1, pp.103–16.

72 TANG, S. (2009). The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis, *Security Studies*, 18:3, p. 618.

73 GLASER (1997). *Op.Cit.*, pp.174, 190-91, 199-200)

74 NIEBUHR, R (1960), *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, New York, Charles Scribner' Sons, p.42.

75 TAGLIAFERRO (2000-010), pp.147-49.

76 Of the ten cases identified by Taliaferro as security-motivated aggressions, only the Chinese intervention in the Korean War was basically motivated by a security dilemma. In the rest of the cases, at least one of the parties had aggressive intentions.

implies some risk to its security”⁷⁷. This “imperialist security dilemma” arises in the Maghreb as a consequence of a limited regional competition between Morocco and Algeria over territorial interests (Sahel/Sahara) that do not derive from security needs, but are the product of conflicting geopolitical conceptions. To achieve their political goals, the two regional competitors develop offensive military forces with the purpose of intimidating the adversary.

The result is an arms race in which both opponents try to demonstrate that they have sufficient capabilities to achieve their objectives. In this sense, the “imperialist security dilemma” in the Maghreb constitutes a real security dilemma because in a context of acute competition “both competitors may prefer some kind of compromise to a great war, although they are unable to achieve it because the dynamics of the arms race and risky politics make their interests incompatible”⁷⁸.

From a complementary perspective, and quoting other authors such as Wheeler and Booth, one could also speak of a “deliberate security dilemma” to explicitly differentiate it from the unintended security dilemma as originally defined by Butterfield, Herz and Jervis⁷⁹. From this perspective, the Maghreb would resemble a scenario in which a state that initially accepts the *status quo* deliberately adopts offensive security policies to deter another, because it sees itself as bound up in a confrontational relationship with it. This would be the case of Algeria, satisfied with the status derived from the territorial benefits obtained with independence, but in confrontation with Morocco over regional hegemony.

The conventional formulation of the security dilemma explicitly contemplates the possibility that states that accept the status quo (i.e. realistic defensive states) when threatened may deliberately adopt “offensive” strategies to deter alleged aggressors (and even eventually start a pre-emptive war against them). Therefore, this situation of “deliberate security dilemma” would not be a distinctive form of security dilemma, but simply a possible result of the dynamics of a deep or highly exacerbated security dilemma, such as that existing in the Maghreb.

An intermediate solution between the imperialist security dilemma and the deliberate security dilemma is the one defined by Alan Collins that arises when a power that accepts the *status quo* (but is a hegemonic aspirant) pursues a deliberately aggressive policy with its neighbours to intimidate them.⁸⁰. This is a “state-induced” security di-

77 TANG (2009). *Op.Cit.* p.610.

78 JERVIS, R. NED LEBOW, R. GROSS STEIN, J. (1985). *Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914, Psychology & Deterrence*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, p.166.

79 TANG (2009), p.611.

80 COLLINS, A. (2000). *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia*, New York, St. Martin's Press, pp.10-13.

lemma whose aim is not to overturn the existing *status quo*, but rather to consolidate it by making others too afraid to challenge it. This aggressive policy is not a precursor to war; instead, it is designed to provide security to the state by requiring others to feel insecure. The state seeks a position of hegemony, and the security dilemma can arise in this situation because it is unlikely that other states can distinguish this approach from that of a revisionist state that harbours evil intentions.

As Collins mentions the security dilemma can still operate between an aspiring hegemon aggressively seeking hegemony and its neighbours if the hegemon does not seek war but simply the submission, or the weakness of those⁸¹. Such would be the case of Algeria, whose deliberate aid to the insurgency in Western Sahara would be aimed at weakening its adversary, Morocco, with the ultimate aim of becoming a hegemon in the region.

Regardless of how we wish to qualify the security dilemma in the Maghreb, the region presents a scenario in which two potentially dominant states, Morocco and Algeria, act as antagonists competing for regional primacy, with the ultimate aim of becoming hegemons. To this end, they adopt expansionary security policies that ignore the fact that, with their implementation, they pose a security dilemma to their adversary that is aggravated by the problem of perception. The lack of information on the intentions of the other party feeds regional competition and diminishes the possibilities of cooperation. As a consequence the risk of conflict is maintained as long as the competitive foundations of their security policies persist.

Conclusions on the application of the theory of offensive realism to the Maghreb

The realistic offensive vision of international relations makes us contemplate the Maghreb as an anarchic regional system in which its member states define their security policies according to their national interests without being subject to higher instances capable of forcibly imposing their authority. International institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union or the European Union act as a moderating factor on their security policies, but they are not sufficient to modify them. Both states are sovereign, but also dependent, which means that they cannot do what they want, nor cease to be influenced by the other, or get everything they propose. And both assume that their level of strategic autonomy depends on their size, wealth, population and territorial extension.

At the same time, the Maghreb constitutes a balanced bipolar system in which two potentially dominant states, Morocco and Algeria, seek to maximise their power to become hegemons in the same geographical region. Both try to impose themselves on the other, while at the same time opposing the other regional power from interfering in the area of action they consider to be their responsibility. The relatively large size of

81 COLLINS (2000), pp. 10-13. COLLINS, A. (2004). Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association. Vol. 39(1), pp.32-34.

these two regional powers gives them a greater capacity and incentive to try to control the system to their advantage, and so they both design their policies autonomously without taking into account the security considerations of the other regional competitor. The result is increased competition for regional leadership and a continued questioning of the balance of power.

In the regional security system of the Maghreb, Morocco and Algeria are positioned according to their national power and this is estimated by comparing one against the other. Given that both states have greater capacities than the other states in the region (such as Tunisia or Mauritania), but not one with respect to the other (their geopolitical weights are comparable), the more absolute power they have and the greater the relative power gradient with respect to the other, the more secure they will feel. Thus, both Morocco and Algeria assume that the only acceptable level of power is to be significantly stronger than the other.

Maximising their position of relative power becomes the “supreme national interest” of both states⁸² and their security policies are focused on achieving this, which means that the relationship structure of both powers is characterized by continuous competition. If Morocco rearms, so does Algeria, and if it expands, so does Morocco. In this way, security policies are determined on the basis of the calculation of their individual needs in comparison with the other competing power and the success of this policy is defined on the basis of its capacity to preserve, expand and strengthen the state. *Realpolitik* thus becomes the foundation of security policies in the Maghreb for both states, Morocco and Algeria, and its logic extends over time regardless of the different historical periods to which it applies.

Because of their similar geopolitical weight, the result is the existence of a real balance of power between two powers competing for regional primacy, so that a policy based on the balance of power is the most useful one in order to guaranty security in the region. The balance of power between Morocco and Algeria, the only two states that can potentially become leaders, is the normal behaviour of the Maghreb’s regional security system, as their power in relation to the other is the key to their survival⁸³. As soon as one of them appears as a winner the balance of power is broken, as it happened when Morocco occupied the Western Sahara in 1976. The imbalance is compensated for by intensifying the damaged state its efforts to re-establish it, (as Algeria did by supporting the Polisario Front in its armed struggle against Morocco), all without the need for a superior agent to prevent any of them from using all the tools at their disposal to achieve their aims for or against the re-establishment of equilibrium.

Both powers, Morocco and Algeria, have an interest in winning because this makes them hegemon and neither has an interest in the other winning because this would place them at their mercy. This situation favours equilibrium, since by having com-

82 WALTZ (2001). *Op.Cit.* p. 37.

83 Abide, p. 210.

parable national powers, both understand that, if one of them breaks the equilibrium and is defeated, the winner takes all and the loser becomes subjected to the stronger.

In this way, the balance between these two states, each with a leadership vocation, means that when one of them potentially appears to be the winner, the other tends to “compensate” it, expanding territorially, increasing its own capacities, or forming alliances with other regional actors (Tunisia, Mauritania) or extra-regional actors (United States, France, Spain). In these circumstances, *balancing* becomes the most logical behaviour, given that the cost of alliances are low and the security of the system is not put at risk.

In the Maghreb, the main cause of regional competition that can eventually evolve into confrontation between the two states is their territorial voracity – the singular expression of which is the conflict in Western Sahara – and not their sense of insecurity as advocated by the security dilemma. However, the fact that both states have expansionist desires does not mean that the security dilemma has disappeared. This would require for both of them that their security policies be peaceful and aimed at defending their own national territories and also each of them be convinced of the benevolent intentions of the other.

But this is not the case in the Maghreb, not only because of the expansive nature of their security policies, but also because both states behave like a sort of “black boxes” that do not provide enough information on the internal processes that regulate their security policy: therefore each state can only deduce the intentions of the other through its observable external behaviour. Morocco and Algeria are never sure of each other’s intentions⁸⁴ and so they have to move in the realm of uncertainty and design security policies based on mutual distrust.

The result of such a high degree of uncertainty about each other’s intentions is the negative mutual perception based on mistrust. That explains the decisions of both states to initiate expansive security policies and arms races, thus giving credibility to the postulates of the most offensive realism. As Randall Sweller points out “States acquire more weapons not because they misperceive the security efforts of other benign states, but because aggressive states really want to harm them”⁸⁵.

The hegemonic ambition in a regional context that guides the security policies of Morocco and Algeria serves to explain the confrontation between the two much better than the approaches to the security dilemma, the advantages of the offensive security policy, their perception of insecurity, or the permanent arms race taking place in the Maghreb. In an environment in which each of them has a high degree of uncertainty about the intentions of the other, mistrust, rather than the ideological difference between Morocco and Algeria’s political regimes, becomes the main obstacle to improv-

84 MEARSHEIMER (2014). *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

85 SCHWELLER, Randall L. (1996). Neorealism’s Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma? *Security Studies*, Vol. 5 (3), p. 104.

ing regional security, generating expansionist policies that maintain and perpetuate tension in the region over time.

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