

Religious Diplomacy in the Foreign Policy of the Moroccan Kingdom

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Abstract: This article tends to examine the religious diplomacy of the Moroccan Kingdom and its impact on the position of Morocco in the region. In the beginning, the author tries to examine the models of religious governance in the country by presenting an overview of the main religious organizations used to regulate domestic religious sphere in Morocco. Further, the author analyzes various tools and initiatives which are used by the kingdom to implement its religious foreign policy. In conclusion the article argues that Morocco is pursuing a more successful religious diplomacy than its regional rival Algeria. The research tempts to emphasize how Morocco uses the religious identity as a resource in its external policy towards especially Muslim African countries.

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scholars tried to introduce aspects of religion in international relations studies. In this context, quite a number of academic works has appeared, including Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* [1], Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. Mc World* [2], and Mark Juergensmeyer's *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* [3]. These researchers were among the first to note the surge of religious identity in the international arena at the end of the cold war [4]. However, as Anne Marie Wainscott noted in her article "Religious regulation as foreign policy: Morocco's Islamic diplomacy in West Africa" that most of the researches have clustered around few topics including the role of religion in U.S. foreign policy, the influence of religious groups on state foreign policy, and the policy of state towards religious freedom. She stressed that many researchers of international relations followed this idea and studied the role of religion in the foreign policy of the non-secular state. In this regard, this article highlights the circumstances in which the inactive religious identities of a state for decades can be activated to support foreign policy goals especially when this identity is a resource for the regime [5].

Islam in North Africa

In order to study the Islam features in North-West Africa, it is necessary to take into consideration the presence of special forms of "people's Islam" in this region and specific forms of some organizations such as Sufi brotherhoods [6]. Islam in the Maghreb and particular in Morocco was strongly influenced by local traditions and cultural elements. It includes original concepts and phenomena, among which the Marabout phenomenon which exists exclusively in the western part of the Maghreb, and it is a complex set of institutions, rituals and Sufi beliefs closely linked to popular Islam and the faith of ordinary Muslims, in

which researchers discovered traces of pre-Islamic local religions [7]. According to the French geopolitical expert Yves Lacoste "The identity of West-North Africa within the Muslim world has been further strengthened by the spread of one of the most severe jurisprudence school in Islam - Maliki, as well as by the preservation of Berber dialects and the emergence of the Maghreb dialect of the Arabic language, which is significantly different from the literary Arabic language" [8]. In general, in the Maghreb, more than 95 percent of the population is Sunni, although it has wide differences in their religious practices comparing with the Sunni population in other parts of the Muslim world. Sufi traditions and saints are a characteristic feature of the Maghreb, as well as syncretic and mystical interpretations of Islam [9].

Interior religious policy in Morocco

The Moroccan model of domestic religious governance differs significantly from other models in the Islamic world. The Monarch and the Makhzan have consistently defended their priority in the disposal of Islam as a means of political mobilization. In addition, the religious legitimization of the authority of the Moroccan sovereign placed him above all other political figures and institutions made by Hassan II words [10], "the shadow of God on earth". According to some experts [11], under the leadership of King Hassan II, the role of the Institute "Lord of believers" in the religious sphere has been significantly reduced.

However, when the young sovereign Mohammed VI succeeded his father, tremendous changes took place. In order to legitimize his political authority, Mohammed VI introduced the concept of Sharif used in the political-religious level, which allowed him to take control of the religious sphere. The title of Sheriff, implying a direct relationship with the Prophet, embodies a unique power that fills the content of the relationship of obedience (obedience) and partially transforms their meaning. The reference to genealogy is a constant and regular practice that gives a special place to the monarch in the Muslim world. Politically and religiously, the Sheriff is the most revered figure in society. This special position is based on high social status, gift (talent), divine blessing (Baraka), and supernatural inherited power. The Sheriff is not an ordinary person; he has the status of a Saint (according to the supporter of this concept. By the royal order of December 4, 2003, two new central branches have been created in the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs: the central branch of mosques and the central branch of traditional education. The task of the first branch was to take under control of all mosques in the country, including those that were in the hands of the Salafi movements during the reign of Hassan II and at the beginning of the reign of Mohammed VI. The second branch focused on the renewal of the traditional education system. King Mohammed IV also attempted to organize the field of Islamic legal opinion (fatwa) by appointing the Supreme Council of Scholars as the only body authorized to issue official fatwas. After 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in Casablanca and Madrid in 2003, the role of religion in the political life of Morocco has changed dramatically, shifting its focus from the goal of legitimizing political authority to the sphere of security issues both on regional and global levels [12].

All existing institutions and newly formed bodies, such as the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the High Council of Scientists and the League of Moroccan Scientists were controlled by the "commander of the believers". The Supreme Council of Scholars was formed in 1981 by King Hassan II in order to prevent the influence of the Iranian revolution. Therefore, the king himself was to head the council, but the council was never convened during the reign of Hassan II. The League of Moroccan Scholars emerged under the reign of the young king as a new version of the league of scholars formed in 1960, when scientists lost their influence and power in the religious sphere in favor of the royal palace.

In addition to the organizations mentioned above, there are other religious organizations with an informal character in Morocco, for example, the oldest Sufi tariqat such as Tidjaniya and Darqawiya. Besides the two informal characters, there are also quite a number of other small Sufi brotherhoods. After September 11, Sunni Sufism became one of the pillars in the official religion and political thought. Together with Malikite and Ash'arism, it formed the main basis in the religious identity of Morocco.

The external usage of religion

Morocco is actively using the above-mentioned religious organizations in its continuous struggle for hegemony in the North-West African region with Algeria. The country has developed its own religious diplomacy, covering different geographical regions and religious areas. One of the main areas of this diplomacy is the struggle for the right to influence the Sufi orders operating in the Maghreb and other regions.

In the struggle for leadership over the Sufi orders, special attention is paid to one of the famous tariqa – Tidjaniya. The founder of the order is Ahmed Al-Tijani. His tomb, located in Fés became a place of pilgrimage for his many followers living in Morocco, Algeria and the other African States like Sudan in the West and Cameroon in the South [7] (more than 300 million murids). Ahmed Al-Tijani was born in 1737 in the South of Algeria in Ain Madi. According to the tradition of that time, he had visited many important scientific centers starting with the one in Morocco in Fés, then he went to Mecca through Egypt, where he met with many religious scholars. Later he returned to Algeria to create his own order in a small town called "Boussemgoun". After the invasion of the Ottoman Bey of Oran into his city, Ahmed Al-Tijani decided to move to Fés where he lived until he died in 1815.

Subsequently, there were disputes between Morocco and Algeria about which country the order belongs to. The rivalry between the two countries over the control of Tidjaniya was acute because the tariqa itself is a transnational community that exists in all the countries of North and West Africa. Morocco was the first state to pay significant attention to the role of Tidjaniya by expanding relations with West African countries. The Royal Palace has always maintained close ties with Sufi movements, including Tidjaniya, while the Algerian political regime, after the country's independence, has treated various Sufi orders as unwelcomed movement because of their interaction with the French colonialists, who used Tidjaniya and other orders as effective tool for strengthening French rule and control in Algeria.

Bakari Sambu, an expert in international relations, has been devoted to the role of religion in world politics for many years, wrote “it seems that the Algerian authorities have belatedly understood the importance of Tidjaniya and its networks. In 1983, the repatriation of the remains of Sheikh Mohammed El Habib, the son of the founder Sidi Ahmed Al-Tijani, was a notable event in Algeria. The President of Senegal then, Abdou Diouf, attached even greater political and diplomatic importance to the event when he proposed his own aircraft to the Sheikh of Tidjaniya” [13]. In 1984, a meeting of Tidjani murids from sub-Saharan countries, Egypt and Tunisia was held in Algeria. During the rally, the President of Senegal announced the recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and the Polisario, in return Algeria offered financial assistance to Senegal in the amount of 20 million USD. Beside this event, Algeria has not paid any great attention to the Sufi brotherhood. In response to the Tidjani Congress in Algeria, Morocco organized another congress in 1985 in the city of Fés. The congress was important not only for the leaders of tariqa who gathered at the religious capital of Morocco but also for the Moroccan authorities, which achieved considerable success by receiving support from the main leaders of Tidjaniya in Morocco's claims to Western Sahara. Only in 2006, after a brutal confrontation between the Algerian authorities and Islamic radicalism, Algeria turned toward Sufi orders, including Tidjaniya. Then a congress of Tidjaniya was held in the city of Laghouat, which was not far from the birthplace of the founder Ahmed Al-Tidjani. During the meeting, Algeria called for the recognition of Ain Madi as the world capital of the Tidjani order. It should be noted that Algeria has been actively interested in the Sufi orders after the president Abdel Aziz Bouteflika arrived in power who was a member of one of the tariqats (Al-quadiriya). President Bouteflika called on the Algerian authorities to pay more attention to the role and the importance of these religious institutions in the fight against extremism.

The second area of the religious diplomacy of Morocco is the training of imams and religious leaders. The country has developed its own training programs for imams, who are then sent to work in other countries, primarily in West Africa and France, as well as in the countries of the Sahel. In 2013, King Mohammed VI proposed to train Malian imams in public religious institutions for training. In response, more than 13 West African countries have declared their readiness to send their imams to Morocco for

training [5]. According to this, in 2014, the Institute of Mohammed VI was opened in Rabat, which was engaged in the training of both male and women imams. In 2016, foreign students accounted for about 75% of the total number of students, among them, 97% were students from West Africa and 3% from France (French with Moroccan origin) [14]. Thus, the purpose of establishing such an institution becomes clear: Morocco plans to take under control the religious orientations of the countries in West Africa through the institute graduated imams, to create a special class that could support the interests of the political regime in Rabat, as well as to increase Pro-Moroccan sentiments among the religious communities in those countries. In addition to the Mohammed VI Institute, there is another educational institution - the Institute Mohamed VI for African scholars whose headquarter is in Rabat. The institute was founded by the Royal order of 24.06.2015. The purpose of this institution is to create a network and links between scholars of Morocco and those scholars from other African countries. The institute maintains links with thirty (30) states from different regions in the African continent. It should be noted that Algeria is not one of those states.

The League of Moroccan and Senegalese Scholars is also an instrument of religious diplomacy, chaired by King Mohammed VI himself. This organization was founded to promote and develop cooperation between the two countries in the management of religious issues.

The Mohammad Institute and the League of African Scholars, help each other to carry out their tasks. The league works with scholars who have great influence in their regions so that they can introduce young students to quality religious education in the Mohammad VI Institute. And the role of the institute is to create a new generation of scholars who will become members of the league in the future.

Conclusion

By analyzing the bilateral relations between Algeria and Morocco, we can observe the increasing role of the Islamic factor in shaping the foreign policy of the two rival countries. In the last decade, religious institutions have become used more and more by the two states to achieve a geopolitical advantage in the North-West Africa region. However, it should be noted that Morocco has capitalized its religious potential much more successfully. This factor contributed to the acquisition of economic and political benefits in the world and the African arena. The religious nature of the political regime helps Morocco to present its Islamic model at the expense of the religious model of Algeria, although it is difficult to distinguish between the two models. It must also be stressed that Morocco's lack of financial and military resources, which Algeria has, has forced the kingdom to develop soft power based diplomacy, which includes religion, as a factor in mobilizing international support for Morocco's position on the question of Western Sahara, which is the central issue in Morocco's foreign policy.

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