Parsley Island and the intervention of the United States

Abstract
On 11 July 2002 a dozen Moroccan armed police occupied Parsley Island, a rocky outcrop off the north Moroccan coast. Five days later Spanish armed forces intervened to ‘liberate’ the island and repatriated the Moroccans. On 20 July, following the intervention of the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, the State Department drew up an agreement acceptable to both sides and Spain withdrew. This article examines why Morocco occupied the island, why Spain used force in reply and why the US became involved. As with many territorial disputes, the occupation and the responses to it were symptomatic of more deep-seated grievances between the disputants, while the involvement of the Bush Administration was inspired by its own self-interest in the aftermath of 9/11.

Around midday on Thursday 11 July 2002 some fishermen from the Spanish North African enclave of Ceuta reported to the Civil Guard headquarters there that about a dozen Moroccan armed police had occupied Parsley Island (“la Isla Perejil” in Spanish but known in Morocco as “Laila” or “Taura” in the Rif dialect), a rocky outcrop about 200 metres off the north Moroccan coast. The Moroccans were backed up by a small company of the Royal Armed Forces, which was stationed in an abandoned artillery battery at Punta Leona on the mainland. Later that day an announcement was issued from Rabat claiming that the island was Moroccan and that they had no intention of leaving. The Spanish Foreign Minister, Ana Palacio, who had only been appointed two days earlier, made immediate contact with her Moroccan counterpart, Mohamed Benaissa. A verbal note was sent via the Spanish Embassy in Rabat to point out that such an action on Morocco’s part was incompatible with the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation that the two Governments had signed in 1991 and to call on the Moroccan Government to withdraw. The observation by Spanish forces on the following day (12 July) of further Moroccan naval movements around the Isla del Rey, one of the Chafarinas islands situated 27 kilometres off the coast of Melilla (another Spanish enclave further to the
east), led to a build up of Spanish troops in the area. Five days later Spanish armed forces intervened to ‘liberate’ the island.

This article tries to establish what exactly took place in this bizarre episode, why Morocco suddenly decided to occupy the island, why Spain opted to use force to remove the Moroccans, and in particular why the United States became involved in the dispute over such a tiny territory. It becomes clear that, as with many territorial disputes, the occupation and the responses to it were symptomatic of other, more deep-seated and far-reaching grievances between the disputants, while the involvement of the world’s super-power was as much to do with its own self-interest as it was to act as a broker for peace.

Spain, Morocco and the US

Before embarking on an examination of the details of the dispute over the island, it is important to consider the place of Spain and Morocco in United States foreign policy and the overall strategic interests of the US in the geopolitically sensitive region of North Africa.

In the immediate aftermath of World War Two Washington’s relations with Madrid were problematic. During the War itself General Franco, who had come to power in 1939 after a three-year bloody civil war between Nationalists and Republicans, had been technically neutral but plainly supportive of the Axis powers and after 1945 he continued to head a fascist regime of the kind that the Allies had spent six years struggling to defeat. There was no question of Spain being included in the Marshall Aid plan, but with the descent of the Iron Curtain over Eastern Europe and the start of the Cold War, it became clear that it was in the best interests of the US to find a way of bringing Spain back within the Western European fold on account of its geostrategically significant location at the western end of the Mediterranean. Given Spain’s economic isolation in post-war Europe Franco was quite ready to offer the US the opportunity to use Spanish air bases from 1953 in exchange for substantial economic aid. During the 1950s Spain rejoined the wider international community, becoming a member of the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF, but it was not until after the death of Franco in 1975 and the subsequent establishment of Spain as a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament that membership of other
international groupings, in particular the European Community and NATO, became options that were taken up in the 1980s.

US-Spanish relations remained on an even keel until the bombing of Libya in 1986, when the centre-left government of Felipe González refused to allow American aircraft to enter Spanish airspace. As a consequence there remained a residue of concern about whether Spain could be seen as a reliable ally whenever the US might need its support. As an American international lawyer expressed it, writing in the Policy Review in 2002 when Britain was considering sharing the sovereignty of Gibraltar with Spain: ‘Spain, though in broad outline a friend, contains sufficient political complexities to raise questions about the wisdom of letting indispensable air and sea-lanes and the rock astride them go to Spanish jurisdiction. Spain did not lend a helping hand at an important juncture before, and the prevailing political culture there would counsel prudence about its future conduct’.4

If this view was shared in Washington at the time, it was later assuaged by the significantly more pro-US views of the centre-right Partido Popular Prime Minister, José María Aznar, who had come to power in 1996 and later readily (and very publicly at a meeting in the Azores in May 2003) joined George W. Bush’s ‘alliance of the willing’ over Iraq.5 At the time of the Parsley Island crisis Spain was still very much seen as a close and important ally of the US in the ‘war on terror’, not only because Al-Qaeda was reported to have had strong networks in Spain and because Spain had been used as a base for planning the 9/11 attacks,6 but also because Aznar had shown himself to be a hard-liner against Spain’s domestic terrorists from the Basque separatist movement ETA, and therefore someone who was held in regard by the US President.

If Aznar’s Spain was deemed worthy of American support, so too was the regime of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, the other party in the dispute over Parsley Island. Relations with Morocco were the oldest in America’s history, with Morocco the first to recognise the United States of America in 1777 and holding the longest standing treaty with the US – the Treaty of Friendship dating from 1786. As the US Administration began its early forays into its new role as a world power at the beginning of the twentieth century, Morocco was one of the first to secure the direct
involvement of the President. Theodore Roosevelt insisted on participating at the 1906 Algeciras Conference which decided the fate of Morocco, on the grounds that ‘if the United States truly was a world power with interests everywhere around the globe, then America should be included in the conferences which drew up the boundaries,’ even though it could scarcely be said that at that juncture the United States had a direct interest in what happened in Morocco in particular and North Africa in general. Indeed during the rest of the century the State Department appeared uncertain as to how to focus and organise its relations with the countries of North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa - perhaps a reflection of the fact that until the 1980s Africa was seen as ‘an area of peripheral concern for the American people and for most decision-makers concerned with the overall shape of American foreign policy.’ However, as the US increasingly found itself in the role of a regional power broker in the Middle East in the second half of the twentieth century, so it has taken a growing interest in the Mediterranean region in general and the countries of North Africa in particular.

Morocco itself was one of those African countries that throughout the twentieth century received active support and preferential aid agreements in exchange for the offer of valued services relating to America’s broader global concerns. Indeed Morocco has been America’s most favoured of the Maghreb countries of North Africa, encouraged in recent times by the fact that ‘only in Morocco has the popular spread of Islamism been contained by the strength of King Hassan’s Islamic authority,’ but also by ‘the government’s ability to open political space for the Islamic parties [which] has had a positive effect on curbing the rise of radical Islam.’ King Hassan II, the present King Mohammed’s father who ruled Morocco for 38 years from 1961, listed himself as an ‘advisor of American presidents’ and his country ‘has maintained a close relationship with Washington as a partner with integrity in Middle East matters and also south of the Sahara.’ Having been one of the first Arab and Islamic nations to denounce the 9/11 attacks in the US, Morocco was considered by the US at the time of the Parsley Island crisis to be an important ally – perhaps even more important that Spain – and a valued combatant in the ‘war on terror’.

It is clear from this brief summary of US relations with each of the disputants over Parsley Island that relationships were long-standing and in general positive. On the one hand the good relations suited US strategic interests in a critically sensitive
geopolitical location, while on the other hand both Spain and Morocco saw political as well as economic advantages in being on good terms with Washington. The United States therefore had a strong interest in ensuring that the confrontation over Parsley Island was resolved as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

The island

Parsley Island lies at 35º N and 5º W, about 200 metres off the Moroccan coast between Punta Leona and Punta Almansa, three kilometres west of Benzú in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta and 40 kilometres east of Tangier. It is a barren outcrop, triangular in shape and about 500m long, 300m wide and rising some 70m above the sea (‘about the size of a football pitch’, according to a Moroccan Foreign Affairs spokesman, covering an area of about 33 acres [13.5 hectares]). It is uninhabited and used only for the grazing of goats by Moroccan goatherds. It is popular with underwater divers and its coast is used by fishing boats seeking shelter in bad weather, as well as by smugglers.

Ownership

It is unclear who Parsley Island belongs to. In the early 19th century both Britain and the United States expressed an interest in the island, given its strategic position, but both countries acknowledged Spain’s rights over it. The peace treaty signed in Tetuán between Spain and Morocco in 1860 over Ceuta made no mention of the island. A Moroccan historian, Mohamed Ibn Azzuz, claimed that when Spain sent some soldiers to occupy the island in 1887 in order to build a lighthouse on it, they raised the Spanish flag and placed a sign which said: ‘This territory has belonged to Spain for two years.’ The Sultan Mulay Hassan I sent in some Moroccan soldiers who destroyed the sign and the Minister for Public Works of the day, Segismundo Moret, told Parliament that it had all been a mistake and that the island belonged to Morocco – although later Moret appears to have changed his mind.

The Spanish historian María Rosa Madariaga was unable to find any mention of the island in any relevant treaties signed between 1799 and 1916, including those that established the French and Spanish protectorates in Morocco in 1912. Quoting García Figueras, she concluded that unlike the enclaves and other off-shore islands
(the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, the Peñón de Alhucemas and the Islas Chafarinas, which were referred to as ‘sovereign territories’) Perejil was part of the protectorate and therefore became part of Morocco with its independence in 1956, although Parsley Island was not explicitly referred to in the transfer agreements. The last Spanish occupants were a detachment of five soldiers from the Compañía del Mar (attached to the North African Military Command) which was withdrawn in 1960. Moroccan forces maintained a presence on it until 1970, whereafter both countries informally agreed that neither side would dispute ownership of the island, nor occupy it, nor renounce claim to it.

According to the decree 275-311 of 21 July 1975 the island is included in Moroccan territorial waters. In a Spanish decree 267/1976 of 5 March 1976 referring to the Spanish maritime area in the Mediterranean, no reference is made to the island being Spanish territory. In 1986 when the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla were designated as Spanish autonomous towns, Morocco objected to the inclusion of the island as part of the municipal territory of Ceuta, and the proposal to include it was dropped. A subsequent investigation ordered by the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and undertaken by the Commander of the Ceuta Garrison resulted in an unpublished report that concluded, somewhat surprisingly, that Parsley Island was not Spanish. In the light of that, the Ministry decided to bury the issue.

In an interview for the BBC on 16 July 2002 the Moroccan Foreign Minister claimed that the island ‘did not appear on any map, either in Spain or Morocco or anywhere else.’ However, a map published in 1988 (republished 1994) by the geographic service of the Spanish army (a body that would hardly be suspected of pro-Moroccan bias) does not show the island of Marsa Toura (the Rif dialect word for ‘parsley’), also known as Yezina Mâadnus in Arabic, as falling under Spanish sovereignty.

The official map published by the Ministry of Public Administration in 1995 clearly shows the island as belonging to Spain. However, the first volume of an official National Atlas of Spain, published in the same year under the auspices of the National Geographical Institute, has Ceuta in an inset on page 3a dedicated to Western Andalucía. Parsley Island is shown, but with no border lines around it and no
attribution as Spanish territory.\(^34\) The second edition of this volume of the atlas, published in 1998, rectifies this and shows a border marked in the channel between the island and the mainland, and an attribution to Spain (‘Esp.’). The omission in 1995 was put down to ‘an oversight’.\(^35\)

At the time of the occupation a spokesman for the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reported to have said that ‘it is unlikely that the island is ours although the original title of ownership that dates from the sixteenth century is definitely Spanish’.\(^36\) García Flórez argues that when Ceuta became Spanish in the seventeenth century Portugal’s recognition of Spanish sovereignty referred to ‘Ceuta and its dependencies’, a phrase that could include Parsley Island.\(^37\) The historian Juan Vilar\(^38\) makes a similar point, and refers to several eighteenth century maps that make specific reference to Perejil as belonging to Spain, although he concedes that the omission of any reference to Spain in more recent cartographic publications has been taken to imply that the island belongs to Morocco.\(^39\)

In short, both sides from time to time have not been explicit about their ownership of the island, either because they consider it to belong to them anyway and so it does not need to be stated (in which case it is not clear why at other times they have indicated their ownership), or because they are not certain that it belongs to them and therefore they have not stated that it does. The situation is sufficiently confused that any attempt to prove in court the ownership and sovereignty of Parsley Island would be likely to end in stalemate.

The dossier of issues between Rabat and Madrid

If the ownership of the island is so unclear, it is difficult to talk of a Moroccan ‘invasion’ on 11 July, although since both sides appear to have agreed to leave it unoccupied from 1970 onwards, it seems at least justified to refer to the presence of Moroccans there as an ‘occupation’. It was clearly not an end in itself - Morocco could hardly have nursed a desire to establish possession of the island for strategic reasons at the beginning of the 21st century - but rather a means of highlighting a series of disputes between itself and Spain (what Foreign Minister Benaissa called ‘the dossier of outstanding issues between the two countries.’\(^40\) These included the following, with particular reference to their situation in mid-2002:
(1) A solution to the problem of Western Sahara: formerly part of Spanish Sahara, Morocco took over the territory from Spain in 1975 following the so-called ‘Green March’. A nationalist organisation, the Polisario Front, which emerged towards the end of Spanish rule, sought the implementation of a referendum offered by Spain on independence, but this was rejected by Morocco. There followed a long period of guerrilla warfare activity, backed by Algeria, until a cease-fire was brokered by the United Nations in 1991. A referendum has been on the table since 1992, but the two sides cannot agree on who should be entitled to vote. More significantly from the perspective of Spanish-Moroccan relations, since 2000 Morocco has rejected the option of independence, favouring autonomous region status, but Spain has not supported Morocco’s position. Hence sixteen years after the agreement to hold a referendum it has still not taken place. A meeting of the UN Security Council was scheduled to consider the Western Sahara issue on 30 July 2002, since the UN mandate for the area (MINURSO) was due to expire, and this might have been a factor in the timing of the occupation of Parsley Island. The Council decided to extend the mandate until the end of January 2003 and it has been extended several times since.

(2) Ceuta and Melilla: Morocco nursed a long-standing claim to the Spanish ‘enclaves’ (the former ceded to Spain by Portugal in 1668, the latter conquered in 1497) and associated islands off the north Moroccan coast. This claim was stimulated – not for the first time - by apparent progress in negotiations between Britain and Spain over Gibraltar, specifically the British proposal in 2001 to share the sovereignty of Gibraltar with Spain. The Spanish Foreign Minister made clear that there was no question of opening discussions on the future of the enclaves as a result of the occupation of the island; such issues were ‘not matters for discussion.’ For his part, Morocco’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Fassi Fihri, indicated that the occupation of the island had nothing to do with the claim over the enclaves.

(3) Illegal immigration: Having grown rapidly in the 1990s, Spain constantly argued that Morocco had not taken strong enough measures to prevent it, and on 7 September 2001 the then Spanish Foreign Minister even accused Morocco of police complicity in people-trafficking. As a consequence that same day the Moroccan
Foreign Affairs Minister, Fassi Fihri, cancelled his visit to Madrid (health reasons were given), the purpose of which had been to arrange a meeting between the Moroccan and Spanish Prime Ministers Yousoufi and Aznar. The meeting was rearranged for December 2001 but never took place. Benaissa complained of the ‘conditions of slavery’ in which many Moroccan immigrants live in Spain.\footnote{47}

(4) \textit{Drug-trafficking}: the Rif region of Morocco is estimated to be the source for over 40\% of world cannabis production and in 2003 a UN survey calculated that 134,000 hectares were used for growing cannabis (up from 75,000 hectares in 1995). Much of this production finds its way into world markets via Spain, and in 2001 Spain made 57\% of all cannabis seizures worldwide.\footnote{48}

(5) \textit{Smuggling}: Benaissa claimed that ‘Spain profits to the tune of $4,000m - $5,000m per year from products that are smuggled into Morocco.’\footnote{49}

(6) \textit{Fishing}: the crisis between Spain and Morocco started in April 2001 when Prime Minister Aznar warned of ‘consequences’ following the breakdown of negotiations over a fishing agreement between Morocco and the EU, from which some 420 Spanish fishing boats would have benefitted. As a result part of the Spanish fishing fleet had to move to other waters or was scrapped.\footnote{50} The failure to negotiate a new fishing agreement (Morocco sought double the amount of assistance from the EU and wanted to reduce the Spanish fleet to a third of its size)\footnote{51} and the hostility towards Morocco that this caused in Brussels and Madrid led to the withdrawal of Morocco’s Ambassador, Abdesalaam Baraka, from Madrid on 29 October 2001. No official explanation was given immediately, but Benaissa later told the Moroccan parliament (among a list of criticisms of Madrid) that they objected both to the EU call for sanctions against Morocco because of the crisis over the fishing agreement and what he called the ‘aggressive’ attitude of Spain regarding illegal immigration.\footnote{52} In a press conference during the Parsley Island crisis Benaissa indicated his suspicion that fishing lay behind Spain’s intentions even though Spain had led Rabat to believe that fishing was no longer an issue.\footnote{53}

(7) \textit{Oil}: on 21 December 2001 the Spanish government granted two licences to the Spanish petroleum company Repsol to prospect outside Spanish territorial waters
and in waters claimed by Morocco. The government in Rabat called upon Spain to respect territorial waters, although Morocco had granted prospecting licences off the African coast and not far from the Canary Islands to an American and a French company.\(^\text{54}\)

\(\text{(8) Media attacks by Spain on Morocco: the Moroccan authorities accused the Spanish government of failing to put a stop to attacks by the Spanish press on what they described as ‘sacred people and institutions,’}\(^\text{55}\) \text{from the King downwards. The Moroccan Foreign Minister expressed his surprise towards the end of 2001 at ‘the silence of the Spanish authorities in the face of these excesses that take no account of international custom.’}\(^\text{56}\) \text{The Spanish government pointed out that they enjoyed a free press.}\(^\text{57}\)

\textbf{The immediate causes of the crisis}

These were the underlying issues relating to the Parsley crisis. But they were all on-going bones of contention, some of them going back decades or even centuries, and do not explain why the crisis occurred precisely when it did. So what were the immediate catalysts? It would be hard to point to a single incident that led directly to the action taken by Morocco, but there were two that could have contributed to it by making relations worse between Madrid and Rabat:

(1) A Spanish naval exercise involving five vessels and a helicopter off the Peñón de Alhucemas (one of three Spanish possessions of the Moroccan coast) at the beginning of July 2002, about which the Moroccan Government claimed not to have been informed and which resulted in the Spanish ambassador in Rabat, Fernando Arias-Salgado, being summoned to the Moroccan Foreign Ministry for an explanation.\(^\text{58}\)

(2) The clear indication by the Spanish Government that King Juan Carlos and Queen Isabel would not attend the wedding ceremony of the Moroccan King Mohammed VI (a three-day event which began on 12 July 2002) unless diplomatic relations – broken off by Morocco the previous October (see above) - had been restored beforehand.\(^\text{59}\) In fact there was no official representation from Spain at the ceremony at all, not even by Spain’s ambassador, who was still in Rabat.\(^\text{60}\) Other suggestions linking the occupation of the island to the marriage were that it was a wedding present from the military to the king;\(^\text{61}\) that it was a populist gesture designed
to boost the standing of the royal family; 62 or that it was for security reasons due to the increased activity across the Mediterranean to which the wedding celebrations had given rise. 63

Whether it was the naval exercise, the royal wedding or some other reason – such as an attempt by the military to destabilize the Moroccan regime 64 - that was the immediate cause of the occupation will probably never be clear. The fact remains that the Moroccan Government thought it was worth taking the risk, largely because it thought it could do so with virtual impunity. Unlike any attempt to occupy any of the other, larger Spanish possessions which lay off the Moroccan coast (Vélez de la Gomera, Alhucemas and the Chafarinas) - not to mention the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla themselves - where the presence of Spanish forces would be encountered, Morocco could establish a presence on Parsley without the use of force or armed conflict and thereby draw world attention to its many grievances with Spain. It did so in the knowledge that Spain would find it difficult to demonstrate that it unquestionably held sovereignty over the island, whereas Morocco would claim that from its own standpoint sovereignty had never been in dispute.

The occupation

It is interesting to note that at no time in the immediate aftermath to the occupation did Spain announce that it intended to re-establish Spanish sovereignty over the island, since (as the Deputy Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, recognized) ‘each party had its own legal arguments and claims.’ 65 When he called for a return to the status quo, therefore, Rajoy meant simply the agreement dating back to the late 1960s that neither side should have military personnel permanently stationed on the island. 66

However, given the nature of Hispano-Moroccan relations at the time, coupled with Moroccan naval activity in the area, the Spanish Government did not want to risk the possibility that the occupation of the island would turn out to be a mere prelude to further pressure from Morocco over its claim to the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Consequently, following meetings of the chiefs of the Spanish armed forces with the Defence Minister, Federico Trillo, on 12 July, a fleet of Spanish naval vessels 67 set sail from their bases at Rota and Cartagena en route to the enclaves, while several
patrol boats kept watch on the island. Attack and transport helicopters moved to bases in southern Spain in case they were required to fly across the Strait, and troop reinforcements were sent to Vélez de la Gomera, Alhucemas and the Chafarinas to supplement their normal complement of between 30 and 50 troops each. There were criticisms of the fact that military intelligence, which had recently been focused on Morocco via the National Intelligence Centre (CNI), had not picked up what was being planned by the Moroccans and as a consequence appropriate reinforcements that would have prevented the occupation of Parsley Island had not been deployed.

The initial position of the Spanish Ministry of Defence was that no military action would be taken to reclaim the island. The thinking was that any action requiring the use of force on Spain’s part (which would be inevitable if an attempt were made to retake the island) could be seen to be disproportionate, given that the Moroccans who occupied the island did not themselves have to use force.

The Spanish Government took the view that it would be sensible to involve the European Union, given that the dispute concerned one of its member states with a nation that enjoyed a privileged commercial relationship with the EU, especially through successive cooperation agreements. The Moroccan action was censured by the EU for what it initially described as invading ‘EU territory’ and for ‘violating Spanish territory’, although the description of the island as Spanish was undoubtedly more of an expression of solidarity than a reference to its legal status. The Moroccan ambassador to the EU was warned that ‘if the problem is not resolved quickly, it could have harmful consequences for EU-Moroccan relations.’ At Spain’s request the President of the EU Commission, Romani Prodi, made direct contact with the Moroccan Prime Minister, Abderrahmane Yussoufi, who was reported to have given a commitment ‘not to escalate the situation and to work towards a rapid solution.’ However, the EU formally saw the conflict as a bilateral matter to be resolved between Rabat and Madrid and Spain’s involvement of Prodi (as well as of the then President of the European Council, the Danish Prime Minister, who also sent a communiqué to Rabat) was designed to put pressure on Morocco rather than use the EU as a mediator. In the early stages of the dispute the logical assumption was that the threat of economic sanctions from Europe was likely to cause Morocco to acknowledge the need to bring it to a swift end.
NATO also initially expressed the view that the dispute was a strictly bilateral matter, although later a spokesman made it clear that the Alliance saw the occupation of the island as ‘an unfriendly act’ and called upon Morocco to ‘restore the status quo immediately in the interest of all parties concerned.’

Morocco’s response to the Spanish Government’s verbal note of 11 July came from Foreign Minister Benaissa on 15 July, when he indicated that the deployment of the men on the island was part of the fight against illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other illegal activities (a reference to terrorism). It should be seen, he said, as ‘a simple surveillance operation in a sensitive region, in which the common interest requires extra vigilance, especially under present circumstances’. The arrests in May 2002 of several Islamic fundamentalist terrorist suspects in Morocco and the fact that the island lent itself to clandestine activities very close to the North African mainland gave some credence to this justification, but on behalf of the Spanish Government Mariano Rajoy nevertheless dismissed it.

More ominously from Spain’s perspective, Benaissa described the deployment as falling within ‘the exercise of the sovereignty of the state of Morocco over its national territory,’ a claim that he supported with historical and legal arguments. The Moroccan Foreign Minister argued that this was nothing new and that ‘forces had been deployed on the island since 1970 whenever it had been deemed necessary for the security of the region.’ Rajoy counterclaimed that ‘since 1960 Spain has regularly carried out inspection visits in order to control smuggling and illegal immigration’, and during that time ‘Spanish presence on the island has never been the subject of official protests by Morocco.’ If both such claims were accurate, forces from both sides can only have avoided finding themselves on the island simultaneously over a thirty-year period if there was a deliberate attempt to avoid it via some exchange of information on their respective operations.

As late as the morning of 16 July Benaissa indicated that he was intending to talk to his Spanish counterpart about the dispute that very day (and the talks did indeed take place), although he also said that the Moroccans would remain on the island. By the afternoon of that day the Moroccan presence had been modified, with
six marines replacing the armed police, the erection of a large, solid tent on the island and the presence of about a hundred troops in support on the mainland.86

**Spain’s counter-occupation**

Despite calling for talks from the moment the occupation began, Spain had at the same time been planning an active response and regular briefings were held from 11 July onwards between the Spanish Defence Minister, Federico Trillo, Joint Chiefs of Staff and other appropriate officials. The decision to initiate military action was taken following a meeting of the Cabinet crisis committee on 16 July.87

There are, however, conflicting reports on exactly what happened during the night of the 16/17 July. According to Trillo, Prime Minister Aznar gave the go-ahead for Spain’s counter-occupation at 23.43 on 16 July, although the Foreign Minister Ana Palacio was given until 04.30 the next morning to continue negotiating.88 Meanwhile Spain’s Ambassador in Rabat, Fernando Arias Salgado, was withdrawn and in fact he arrived in Ceuta at 04.30 hours on 17 July en route to Madrid.89

However, Morocco’s Foreign Minister Benaissa gave a different version of events and one that was denied by Palacio.90 He claimed that he had in fact reached a compromise agreement with his Spanish counterpart in the early hours of the morning of 17 July, with the US Ambassador in Rabat, Margaret Tutweiler, acting as intermediary. Benaissa claims that he confirmed directly to Palacio, at her request, that Moroccan forces would be withdrawn from Parsley provided that Spain guaranteed not to occupy it, with the United States acting as guarantor. Benaissa was also asked to confirm that the Parsley situation had nothing to do with Morocco’s claim to Ceuta and Melilla, and he argued that he did so.91 However, according to Benaissa, Palacio insisted that the agreement must have the endorsement of King Mohammed, and that since it was felt that the King could not be woken at four o’clock in the morning, Palacio issued an ultimatum that his backing had to be given later that day. Without waiting for this to happen, Benaissa argued, Spain’s counter-invasion took place.92

It is impossible to confirm whether the Moroccan version of these events is accurate or not. What is certain is that shortly after 06.00 hours on 17 July a group of
28 Special Operations Command marines from Rabassa near Alicante were set down on the island from three Cougar helicopters, captured the Moroccan troops with no casualties and raised the Spanish flag. Although the exercise was carried out by a small number of Spanish troops together with air and naval support, Spain had taken no chances regarding Morocco’s possible reaction and two days earlier had sent 400 ground troops and 14 helicopter units to the air base at Morón on the Spanish mainland.\(^93\) The exercise was also backed by F-1 fighter aircraft and transport planes. There was no resistance from the Moroccans, and the six men were captured, taken to Ceuta and handed back to the Moroccan authorities across the frontier.

The Spanish Government’s official communiqué claimed that Spain had ‘found itself obliged to order the removal of the Moroccan detachment’, but that it was ready to start talks in order to improve relations with Morocco.\(^94\) Spain’s ambassador to the Council of Europe defended the action, which had permitted ‘the re-establishment of international legality without violence’, as ‘totally legitimate and valid.’\(^95\) When the Defence Minister went to the Spanish Congress to make a statement, he hinted that the signs that the Moroccans were settling in with more substantial living quarters, together with Rabat’s plan to take a group of international journalists to the island, were factors that influenced Spain’s decision to move in.\(^96\) There was general support for the Government’s action, although there were several dissenting opinions from some of the opposition parties.\(^97\) Trillo confirmed that the Spanish troops would remain on the island until Morocco guaranteed a return to the status quo.\(^98\) Later he announced that 75 legionnaires would be stationed there, with other units on stand-by and navel vessels positioned in the area ‘for as long as necessary.’\(^99\) It is noteworthy that there was no explicit reference to the question of Spain’s sovereignty over the island. The Spanish Government seemed more concerned to re-establish the neutral character of the island in terms of its physical occupation, although the planting of the Spanish flag by the marines did suggest that the armed forces, at least, saw the issue as one of territorial ownership.\(^100\)

Morocco’s first reaction was to prevent Moroccan goods carriers from entering Ceuta with the aim of hurting the economy of the enclave,\(^101\) although in fact these restrictions only lasted one day.\(^102\) One Moroccan politician, Mahjoubi Aherdane, former Defence Minister and the leader of the Popular National Movement which was
a partner in the Government coalition, described Spain’s action as ‘an act of war’ and called for diplomatic relations to be severed, while another, Abdelkrim Khatib, leader of a moderate Islamic party, described it as ‘an attack on Morocco and its territorial integrity.’

The official Moroccan Government reaction was to call, through the Foreign Affairs Minister, Mohamed Benaissa, on 17 July for ‘the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the forces of occupation from the Moroccan island.’ He described Spain’s action as ‘a flagrant violation of the spirit and the letter of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation’ (a counter-accusation to that of Ana Palacio six days earlier) and ‘contrary to the rules of international law.’

Assuming that it would have international support Morocco chose to internationalize the crisis by appealing to the UN Security Council, the Arab League and the Islamic Conference Organisation, as well as several other friendly countries. Support from these organisations, as well as from the Arab-Maghreb Union, was generally forthcoming, although it was more lukewarm than Rabat would no doubt have wished.

In contrast NATO fully supported Spain’s action, even to the extent of misrepresenting what had been achieved. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that a spokesman for the organisation concerned with regional security should state that with the occupation of the island by troops from a NATO-member country ‘the status quo has been re-established,’ but that had evidently not been the status quo prior to 11 July. However the EU, although supportive of Spain, called for the restoration of the status quo ante and the renewal of dialogue. France – of all the EU nations the one with the most to lose diplomatically and financially from any dispute with Morocco - insisted that the EU should refrain from issuing a statement of solidarity with Spain, on the grounds that ‘there was a crisis between Spain and Morocco, and we should not be adding one crisis to another.’ The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, expressed concern about the escalating dispute and offered to mediate, as did the EU via the Commission representative in Rabat.

Morocco’s ambassador to the UN, Mohammed Bennouna, described the Spanish action as an ‘armed attack’ and a ‘violation of the UN Charter, to be
condemned not only because it contravenes international law but also goes against established practice between civilized nations, whereby the priority is the use of diplomatic means to resolve differences in a peaceful manner.\textsuperscript{114} Although some might accuse Morocco of creating the tension in the first place, by making representation in these terms it was clearly confident of its position because in order to accuse Morocco of ‘invasion’ with any justification Spain would have to be able to prove ownership of the island. Bennouna argued that ‘the island has never been part of the territorial dispute between the two nations’ and that Spain was obviously aware of the weakness of its legal position ‘since it has never laid a territorial claim to the island.’\textsuperscript{115}

By undertaking such a swift counter-invasion, Spain had given itself the advantage of taking everyone by surprise, which undoubtedly contributed to the fact that no blood was shed. There were, however, consequences that did not reflect well on the Spanish Government’s strategy. First, Spain had originally made clear that it intended to resolve the dispute diplomatically and yet within six days it had abandoned the diplomatic route. Second, Spain could not argue that Morocco had broken the agreement that neither side would station troops permanently on the island, since the six days of ‘occupation’ could hardly be described as permanent. By intervening so rapidly, Spain could not disprove Bennouna’s reiteration of Morocco’s position that this was just an example of its practice of ‘deploying small security units on the island whenever it seemed to be necessary.’\textsuperscript{116} Furthermore, in order to carry out the operation, there was also the question as to whether Spain had had to invade Moroccan air-space and territorial waters.\textsuperscript{117}

Despite the fact that Morocco based its case on what it claimed as territorial ownership, Spain did not respond in kind. The Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Ana Palacio, made it clear that Spain would seek nothing more nor less than an official statement from either the Moroccan Government or King Mohammed giving ‘an unequivocal, watertight indication’ that there would be a return to the status quo.\textsuperscript{118} Spain had no desire to enter into a public dispute over the ownership of the island, because there was a strong chance that it would not win, and Palacio stressed in a radio interview that she had never used the term ‘sovereignty’.\textsuperscript{119} Spain’s intention was rather to re-establish the situation in which neither side could demonstrate its
ownership through occupation, but which would allow once again for the possibility (as had clearly happened from time to time) of Spanish troops landing on the island for counter-terrorist or anti-smuggling purposes (although clearly this would be more problematic in future).

Initially Benaissa gave the commitment that Spain sought – that Morocco would not ‘invade’ the island again - but he did so via a press interview. He rejected the idea that he should give a formal commitment at this juncture, arguing that the Spanish troops (not only those on Parsley Island but also all the reinforcements sent to the enclaves and the other islands) would first have to be withdrawn.¹²⁰

**US involvement in finding a solution**

Spain clearly did not want to stay on the island any longer than necessary, and having made its point was anxious to find a solution that would allow it to withdraw provided that necessary guarantees on non-belligerence were given.

One specific pressure was that a meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers was scheduled in Brussels on 22 July, when coincidentally the Moroccan Minister Benaissa was due to be in the Belgian capital for EU talks. There had already been growing criticism within Europe about the appropriateness of Spain’s vigorous response regarding the island, and Palacio was keen to avoid further criticism from her EU counterparts (whom she would be meeting for the first time since her appointment) over any delay in Spain’s withdrawal. At the same time Spain was keen that Morocco should not detect in a withdrawal from Parsley Island any sign of weakness on Spain’s part, in order not to give any encouragement to Morocco in connection with any of the other bilateral issues.¹²¹ In the event, neither minister went to Brussels that day, thanks to the telephonic intervention of the US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The first indication that the United States was involved in the dispute came from the Moroccan claim that the US Ambassador in Rabat had been involved in the discussions between Foreign Affairs Ministers that concluded in the small hours of 17 July (see above).¹²² It is not clear whether Spain or Morocco contacted the United States to seek a mediator, or whether Washington contacted Madrid to offer its good
offices, but either way US sources confirmed that Ana Palacio had spoken to Powell before the counter-invasion took place. Following the counter-invasion it was reported that Powell spoke on several occasions with Palacio and with King Mohammed VI on 19 July in order to secure guarantees from Morocco that if Spain withdrew from the island Moroccan forces would not return.

A statement was drawn up by the State Department to which both sides subscribed and was sent by Powell in an identical letter to each side dated 20 July. This involved the withdrawal and absence of all personnel and symbols of sovereignty, a return to the status quo ante and plans to discuss improvements to bilateral relations. According to the letters the two Governments had agreed that their actions would be without prejudice to their positions regarding the status of the island; that any differences would be resolved solely through peaceful means; that they would publicly take the position that this resolution of their dispute was in their mutual interests, without winners or losers; and that both sides would implement this understanding in good faith. With this agreement accepted in Madrid and Rabat, Spain withdrew its forces after less than four days on the island, landing them by helicopter in Ceuta at 22.00 hours on 20 July. Significantly the announcement that the dispute had been resolved was made from the Department of State in Washington. Shortly afterwards Palacio announced that she would go to Rabat for talks with Benaissa the following day, but it must have been on the understanding that these talks would exclude any discussion of the future of the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and would be limited to implementing the agreement outlined in the Powell letter.

**Why did the United States become involved?**

It came as no surprise that the opposition parties in Spain were critical of the Government at the intervention of the United States in the dispute. While Rodríguez Zapatero for the PSOE called for an explanation from the Government, Gaspar Llamazares for the Izquierda Unida argued that Washington’s involvement represented ‘a resounding failure’ of Spanish diplomacy. For its part, Morocco was keen to highlight the role of the United States and the ‘commendable good offices’ of the Secretary of State. According to the Moroccan version of events, King
Mohammed’s intervention and his discussions with Powell were the real reason behind Spain’s decision to withdraw from ‘the Moroccan island’. 130

The rationale for the US involvement was not hard to see. Some form of mediation was clearly required in order to enable Morocco and Spain to extricate themselves from their confrontation without losing face. Morocco had no confidence in the intervention of the EU in that role, given Spain’s membership of it and the Commission’s initial description of the island as ‘EU territory’ (see above), but France’s stance had also convinced Spain that the EU would not be able to act in a unified way in its favour. 131 So both disputants were content to involve the United States, which proved to be a willing participant. 132 After all, the last thing that Washington wanted, barely ten months after the events of 9/11, was a dispute between two of its allies that happened to bridge the cultural and religious divide between Christianity and Islam and also happened to be located in a strategically sensitive position on either side of the Western Mediterranean coastlines. The United States had no reason to wish to side with one disputant rather than the other. After all, agreements with both countries regarding military cooperation and air bases had been in place for decades, while Spain and Morocco had both supported the United States in the Gulf War in 1991. Both countries were supportive of US efforts in the Middle East peace process and made their own contributions in that direction. Madrid was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, but following the death of Franco Spain collaborated with Israel on anti-terrorism measures and meanwhile persisted in its endeavour to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel (which it achieved in 1986), despite opposition from some Arab states. As for Morocco, in 1986 King Hassan took the bold step for an Islamic leader of inviting the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres for talks and later increased links with Israel following the Oslo Accords of 1993. Parsley Island itself may have been of no strategic significance, but that had clearly not prevented Morocco and Spain from fighting over it, and there were good reasons why the United States would want to keep the peace between them.

The restoration of the status quo ante

The meeting to restore the status quo ante between Benaissa and Palacio duly took place in Rabat on 22 July, causing the Spanish Minister to miss her first reunion
with her EU counterparts in Brussels, in particular her first opportunity to discuss Gibraltar with Jack Straw. A joint communiqué issued after the Rabat meeting stated that the agreement negotiated by Colin Powell had been confirmed by both sides ‘without prejudice to their respective positions with regard to the status of the island.’\textsuperscript{133} The statement also indicated that they would meet in Madrid in September (it was later agreed that the meeting would take place on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of the month) in order to ‘strengthen bilateral relations,’\textsuperscript{134} but there was no indication that other contentious issues had been discussed, despite the fact that the meeting lasted for four hours.

If on the Moroccan side there had been hopes that the Parsley issue would lead to the start of a dialogue about a range of grievances against Spain, this simply did not happen. In his traditional Speech from the Throne delivered in Tangier on 30 July King Mohammed spent some time dealing with the contentious issues between Morocco and Spain, especially the claim to Ceuta and Melilla, but his address was dismissed by the Spanish Foreign Ministry as ‘nothing new’.\textsuperscript{135} The Moroccan authorities tried a different tack a few days later and closed one of the two border entry points in Ceuta, thereby creating a negative impact on trade in the enclave. This coincided with a statement in parliament by the Moroccan Prime Minister Yusufi that his government would continue to try and put an end to the ‘occupation’ of the ‘usurped’ Spanish enclaves and neighbouring islands.\textsuperscript{136} It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that a few months later the Spanish Government announced a package of investment in Ceuta to the tune of 71 million euros (£50 million) in order to ‘reduce Ceuta’s current economic dependency on Morocco.’\textsuperscript{137}

It emerged some time after the July meeting that it had been agreed that full diplomatic representation in Rabat and Madrid would be restored following the proposed meeting on 23 September. However, that meeting (and therefore the exchange of ambassadors) was postponed owing to a further incident over Parsley, in which a Spanish helicopter was alleged to have landed on the island on 22\textsuperscript{nd} (Madrid admitted that it had flown over the island – but not landed on it - in order to establish the intentions of a Moroccan launch). This, said Foreign Minister Benaissa, was ‘in violation of the spirit and the letter of the July agreement.’\textsuperscript{138} Two days later, Benaissa claimed that Spain had violated Moroccan airspace and territorial waters a total of 87
times since the crisis in July,\textsuperscript{139} although Palacio told Parliament that no complaints on such violations, either formal or informal, had been received from Rabat.\textsuperscript{140} Clearly, in spite of the apparent resolution of the dispute over the island, Moroccan vigilance remained acute and the tension remained high.

**Why did Spain take the military option?**

Predictably, following Spain’s military intervention, the Moroccan press accused Aznar of being ‘power-hungry’ and ‘a little caudillo’\textsuperscript{141} – a suggestion that the Spanish Prime Minister was behaving like Spain’s dictator, General Franco. But there were also criticisms of Spain’s action from within Spain and from elsewhere in Europe that Spain had opted so rapidly for a military response.

The justification was that military intervention was seen as necessary both to re-establish the status quo ante and to show Morocco that Spain would not give in to a show of force. This was seen as important in Madrid not simply in relation to Parsley Island but to other areas of dispute between the two countries, in particular the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The events of 1975 and the consequences of the so-called ‘Green March’, when Spain had to concede the loss of Western Sahara, were a reminder of the humiliation that Morocco was capable of inflicting. But there can be no doubt that negotiations would have resulted in a withdrawal by Morocco from the island sooner or later, and that a show of force, considered by most commentators to be ‘excessive’, was unnecessary in order to achieve Spain’s objective of a return to the situation of non-occupation that had prevailed since the 1970s. On balance the reconquest of Parsley was not one of post-Franco Spain’s finest hours, and in the context of Spanish-Moroccan relations probably did more short-term harm than good.\textsuperscript{142}

**Conclusion**

The conflict over Parsley Island was the first international conflict since 9/11. Significantly it was a North-South clash, a Christian-Muslim dispute and partly for that reason attracted considerable media attention. But it was also of interest to the media because the object of the dispute was apparently so trivial and insignificant that the whole episode was seen as comical, like something out of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera.
As one commentator put it, ‘to argue with frigates and soldiers over a small uninhabited island is a colonial leftover of the most anachronistic kind.’

A more graphic description of the dispute (originally used by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges about the dispute over the Falkland Islands twenty years earlier) was that it amounted to ‘two bald men fighting over a comb.’

Some two years after the conflict, when all the major participants were able to consider the issue somewhat more dispassionately, Colin Powell revealed his true feelings about it when he described Parsley as ‘that stupid little island’, adding that ‘it’s not even an island, it’s just a small droplet of an island.’

That said, Powell (possibly with tongue in cheek) still thought it worth referring to in an interview in October 2004 as an example of the challenges that the Administration had met during the first term of President George W. Bush.

This was not the first occasion in recent times that the United States had mediated between two of its allies in the Mediterranean over a disputed island: in January 1996 Greece and Turkey almost went to war over the Imia/Kardak islet in the Aegean Sea. Although there were some similarities between the nature of the two disputes (a small uninhabited but contested islet) and the manner of the US intervention (the telephonic mediator on that occasion was Richard Holbrook, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe), the geographical location and the historical context of the dispute between Spain and Morocco made it potentially more dangerous. There was no doubt, therefore, that Powell’s intervention was both timely and essential, both for the parties concerned and for the Bush Administration.

The return to the status quo ante that Powell had brokered was the most sensible solution, even if it is not a definitive one, because there was no winner and no loser. The only problem with solutions that are not definitive, however, is that they run the risk of allowing the conflict to recur. There are several possible long-term solutions: the parties agree to put the dispute to the International Court in The Hague – which, it has been argued, Morocco would probably lose because ‘borders are determined by history, not geography’; an agreement that would produce a formula for neutrality; the designation of the island as a no-man’s-land; the sharing of sovereignty. There has been no sign of interest by either side in any of these options.
But as this study makes evident, Parsley Island is not really the problem. It served as a convenient, low-risk opportunity for Morocco to air its grievances and for Spain to flex its military muscles in reply. It had the potential to get out of hand, but in the end sanity prevailed, thanks in no small measure to the intervention of the US Secretary of State, who, in the context of the aftermath of 9/11 and the location of the dispute, could not afford to take any chances of a serious armed conflict between two strategically placed allies. Despite the establishment in December 2002 of working groups to try to resolve some of the differences between the two countries, and the eventual restoration on 3 February 2003 of full diplomatic relations, there remain fundamental issues of conflict that could from time to time lead to a frustrated response by one side or the other. No doubt both Spain and Morocco are much more vigilant about the comings and goings in the vicinity of Parsley Island as a consequence of the events of July 2002 and military intelligence capabilities on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar will certainly have been improved. But despite all that, this ‘small droplet of an island’ retains the potential to turn into a dangerous tinder-box in future, should either side again decide to make an issue of its ownership, and for that reason it is highly likely that the United States would again intervene in such circumstances.

Notes

1. El Mundo, 14 July 2002 (http://www.elmundo.es). All press references have been accessed either electronically via the appropriate website at the time of publication or via the electronic resource Nexis.

2. Idem.


5. Spain’s ‘unreliability’, as Grant would have it, was once again exposed in March 2004 when the new centre-left Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (who unexpectedly won the election that immediately followed a series of train bombings in Madrid – ironically involving Moroccan terrorists), promptly brought home all 1,300 of the Spanish troops in Iraq, having announced that he would not continue with his predecessor’s policy of contributing to the war.


8. A Division of Near Eastern Affairs was established within the State Department in 1909, but this dealt with Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe, the Middle East (including Egypt) and Abyssinia. Responsibility for the rest of Africa was added in 1937 (except for Algeria and South Africa) and this was transformed into a Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs in 1949. Relations with African nations became the responsibility of a new Bureau of African Affairs in 1958, but relations with North African nations reverted to the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in 1974. These two areas were only split into two separate Bureaux in 1991.


14. Morocco itself became a major victim of terrorist attacks in May 2003 in Casablanca. Rewards have come to Morocco from the US for its support in the ‘war on terror’ in the form of the status of Major Non-Nato Ally (MNNA) with the US (2004) and eligibility for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) funding in the same year. A bilateral free trade agreement between the US and Morocco came into effect in 2006.


21. Author of España y el Rif, crónica de una historia casi olvidada (Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla: UNED-Centro Asociado de Melilla, 2000).


24. *El País*, 17 July 2002. The Moroccan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Firi Fassi, argued that when Morocco put its case to the United Nations Decolonization Committee in 1975 regarding Ceuta and Melilla, the official claim did not include Parsley Island because Morocco considered it to be ‘an integral part of its territory’, and the title to it had been recovered at the same time as the rest of the protectorate in 1956 (*El País*, 16 July 2002).

25. The Spanish Deputy Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, tried to make something of the fact that Spain had continued to occupy the island for four years after Moroccan independence, implying that it had not been part of the handover to Morocco in 1956 because it was not seen by Spain as Moroccan territory (*El Mundo*, 16 July 2002).


28. *Idem*.


30. *Idem*.


32. The map, which covers the Algeciras-Ceuta region, clearly delineates a border around Ceuta, whereas there are no markings around Perejil (*El País*, 20 July 2002).

33. Dionisio García Florez, ‘Aspectos históricos’.

35. *Idem*.

36. *El Mundo*, 14 July 2002. The Map Archive of the Army Geographical Centre revealed that it owned a map of Parsley Island dating from 1746 that included a note to the effect that ‘it has belonged to Spain from time immemorial on account of the conquest of the Portuguese and of Cardinal Giménez, who was suffragan bishop from Ceuta to Tangier when such territory was held by Christians’ (*El Mundo*, 17 July 2002).


38. Author of *El Sahara español: Historia de una aventura colonial* (Sedmay Ediciones, 1977) and *Relaciones entre España y el Magreb: Siglos XVII y XVIII* (MAPFRE, 1994).


41. The name given to the peaceful invasion of Western Sahara by 350,000 Moroccans, which led to Spain’s withdrawal from the territory.

42. According to David Solar, ‘Sahara is the real reason for Morocco’s irritation with Spain and the Parsley conflict was a warning of what a great nuisance Rabat can be if Madrid does not agree to the autonomous region option’ (*El Mundo*, 22 July 2002).


44. For a recent full study of the Western Sahara issue, see E. Jensen, *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).


56. *Idem*.


59. *Idem*.


66. Idem.

67. The frigate *Navarra* was sent to Ceuta while the corvettes *Infanta Elena* and *Cazadora* were despatched to Melilla. The official explanation for their presence given by the captain of the *Navarra* on 13 July was that they were there as ‘a confidence-boosting measure for the people of Ceuta’ (*El Mundo*, 14 July 2002). It was suspected that a Galerna-class submarine was also sent to the area from Cartagena (*El País*, 14 July 2002).

68. An uninhabited island called Lobos (north of Fuerteventura in the Canaries) also received a detachment of men as part of Spain’s defensive measures (*El Mundo*, 19 July 2002).


70. Between 1996 and 1999 Morocco received 630m euros from the EU, while a further 251m euros (plus 323m euros in loans from the European Investment Bank) were committed for the period 2000-06 (*El País*, 14 July 2002). With regard to trade, in 2001 Moroccan exports to the EU (worth 6,202m euros) accounted for almost three-quarters of its total exports, while imports from the EU (valued at 7,419m euros) represented more than half of the total (*El País*, 14 July 2002).

72. In Morocco one writer attributed the reference to ‘Spanish territory’ to the fact that a Spaniard, Javier Solana, was the European Foreign Affairs Commissioner (see *Al Bayane*, 17 July 2002).


74. *Idem*.


77. *El Mundo*, 16 July 2002. It was argued in some quarters that Spain could invoke the NATO Treaty and call for assistance from the Atlantic Alliance, since Article Six refers to protection from armed attack ‘on the territory of or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties’. However, this was designed to cover the Canaries and the Azores, since it refers specifically to islands ‘in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer’ and not the Mediterranean. On the other hand, it was also argued that Article Six envisages the possibility of calling on NATO partners if there is an armed attack on ‘the territory of any of the Parties in Europe’ (*The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C. 4 April 1949* (http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/treaty.htm#FN2, accessed 31 October 2008). In 1999 Lieutenant–General Juan Narro, then Chief of Joint Command South-West, indicated that he believed that the NATO umbrella would cover the Spanish enclaves in a crisis (and, by implication, Parsley Island) (*El País*, 30 September 1999).


81. *El Mundo*, 16 July 2002. Morocco claimed at the time of the arrests of the terrorist suspects that they were planning to attack US and British naval vessels by ramming.
them with boats from Ceuta and Melilla loaded with explosives. Spain gave no credence to this link with the enclaves, and treated it as a part of Morocco’s plan to use any opportunity to raise their claim to them (El País, 22 July 2002).

82. Libération, 16 July 2002 (http://www.liberation.press.ma)

83. Idem.


85. Idem.


91. Idem.


94. Idem.

95. Idem.


The recovery operation was code-named ‘Operation Romeo Sierra’. The choice of name, using the call-sign initials ‘R’ and ‘S’, referred to the ‘Restoration of the Status quo’, according to the Defence Minister (El País, 19 July 2002), although it was suggested that it was interpreted by the military as ‘Recovery of Sovereignty’ (a designation that could explain the planting of the flag) (El País, 18 July 2002).


106. Idem.


115. *Idem*.

116. *Idem*.


118. *Idem*.


120. *Idem*.

121. *Idem*.

122. *Idem*.

123. *Idem*.


129. *Idem*.


131. After the meeting with Benaissa in Rabat, Ana Palacio did, however, go out of her way to thank the President of the EU Commission, Romano Prodi, for the support he had given during the crisis (*El País*, 24 July 2002).

132. In addition to the United States history of support for both disputants in the crisis, as outlined earlier in the article, there were some coincidences involving the US at the time of the Parsley crisis: a visit to Madrid by a CIA delegation concerning the detention of four Al Qaeda suspects, and the sudden ratification by the Spanish Congress on 19 July of the defence agreement with the United States, which had been signed (by Collin Powell himself) on 10 April, over three months earlier (*El País*, 22 July 2002).


134. *Idem*.


140. *Idem*.


142. Six months after the conflict the Spanish Ministry of Defence published details of the cost of the operation to ‘recover’ the island at almost €1 million ($1.5 million) (*Ultimas noticias*, 23 January 2003, [http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve](http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve)).


144. *Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 2002 ([http://www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)).


146. Collin Powell, Interview with the USA *Today* Editorial Board, 18 October 2004 ([http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/37184.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/37184.htm), accessed 31 October 2008). The other minor issues Powell referred to were Haiti, Greenland and F-15s in Iceland.


149. *Idem*. 