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Research Article

## The Inevitable Legitimacy Of The Moroccan Sovereignty Over The Western (Moroccan) Sahara

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### Abstract

This article sheds light on the Moroccan-Algerian conflict over Western Sahara that has been a perplexed conflict for decades. This issue has caused a big concern in security matters not only in the Maghreb region but also worldwide. Many attempts were initiated to solve this problem by the UN and some European states, yet, in vain. The issue's complexity derives from the long-lasting clash of positions between Morocco and Algeria that concerns the legitimate sovereignty since the decolonization of Western Sahara from Spain in 1975. Consequently, this has made the conflict frozen. The recent consistent and continuous admissions of many European and Arab states have been and still make an immense frustration and disappointment to the neighboring country, Algeria, the biggest supporter of the self-determination plan for the Sahrawi people, and the independence of the Polisario front. Accordingly, this article will be an evaluation of the motivations behind the support Morocco has been receiving from other states and the various positions surrounding the conflict and provides a discussion on the parties involved in this conflict. The significance of this research lies in its ambitious attempt to prove the inevitable Moroccaness of the Western Sahara based on the latest updates on the case. It also proves that the international recognition is just a matter of time which automatically signifies the probability of eternal enmity between Morocco and Algeria.

**Keywords:** Moroccan sovereignty, autonomy plan, legitimacy, Western Sahara

## INTRODUCTION

The question of Western Sahara has long been a sensitive subject for Moroccans, for they consider the former Spanish colony as part of their country, i.e., ‘southern provinces.’ The increasing tensions between Morocco and Algeria stem from their opposing internal and external (foreign) policies and their relations with great world powers. However, regarding the Western Sahara issue, Europe, and the UN particularly, have been following up with changes and trying to find a middle ground to resolve the tensions. The decent quality of relations Morocco maintains with world powers concerns Algeria as that extended to them explicitly declaring their support to the autonomy plan Morocco suggested in 2007 for a peaceful resolution to this four-decade dispute. Indeed, the year 2017 marked the Moroccan rejoin to the African Union after a 33-year gap, leaving the Organisation of African Unity in 1984 to express its objection to the SADR’s admission as a member. Morocco’s decision to rejoin was an indication of “a new diplomatic energy and confidence” in its regional policy, while Algeria’s foreign policy seemed static due to the impotence of its president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Thus, Morocco managed to convince more than 20 Arab and African countries to open consulates in the region to indicate their support for the Moroccan claim of sovereignty. (Dworkin, 2022). The Moroccan Autonomy Plan is the latest initiative Morocco proposed in April 2007. Kofi Annan, the seventeenth Secretary-General of the United Nations, received a letter from the Moroccan King Mohammed VI in which he affirmed Morocco’s commitment to a compromise solution to end the conflict over the Sahara. Following James Baker, after the failure of the UN’s Personal

Envoy to Western Sahara between 1997 and 2004 to reconcile Morocco’s positions with the separatist Polisario Front. Eventually, Baker’s first and second plans escalated the dispute between Morocco and Polisario. (Writer, 2018). Thus, European countries throughout the years have been hesitant about the Moroccan proposal for its lack of external support. Yet, with time, Morocco has been strengthening its ties internationally making more allies that were welcoming to support its proposal and even decided to open consulates representing their countries in the southern territories. Moreover, the Moroccan assertiveness and strict position of its legitimate potential to govern Western Sahara attracted more attention. Particularly, after the Trump declared the American recognition to the Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in December 2020; followed by Spain, whose shift in position surprised Algeria, yet encouraged more states to join the list of countries supporting the 2007 proposal.

### **Morocco vs Algeria post-independence relations**

Since their independence in the 1960s, Morocco and Algeria have long been in unstable relations due to the clash of positions and opinions of their leaders. Each side victimizes itself over the overrated ambitions of the other. This resulted in the trust gradually vanishing between them, and as the conflict has domestic, regional, and international implications, it has made it and seemingly will continue doing so to reach a close resolution. Though their rivalry goes back for decades, last year witnessed one of the most dramatic turns that made it worse. In August 2021, Algeria decided to cut diplomatic relations with Morocco, together with gas shipments that used to pass through Morocco to Spain, all as three Algerian

citizens were killed in the disputed territory of Western Sahara, which they blamed the Moroccan forces for. Morocco and Algeria are two North African countries that make up the central and most politically active states of Maghreb, sharing linguistic (the Arabic language), ethnic (a numerous "berberophone" minority), religious (Islam), and historical (a heritage of harsh struggle for independence from the same colonial power) aspects. In expressions of Algero-Moroccan relations, "the complex relationship of each with the former colonial power is often invoked to emphasise moments of common history, powerful images which constitute epic, mythologised narratives of a fraternal nationalist Maghrib. The anticolonial discourse is federative. This obvious, almost self-evident, point - the obsessive reference to a common history of anticolonialism". (Stora, 2003). The 1930s until the 1960s marked a period of tense political, religious, and cultural anticolonial experiences that both Morocco and Algeria's elites commonly had. In the phase following the independence of both countries, their relationships, together with that of France, were based on the experience gathered from their interactions with one another. The Moroccan daily newspaper 'Le Matin du Sahara et di Maghreb,' in an editorial that was published in May 1999, emphasized the possibility of rapprochement and partnership between Morocco and Algeria, consequently: "Our two countries have sometimes been joined in a typical relationship. They faced the same colonizer and fought the same battle for independence in the name of the same ideals. They set up solidarity, understanding, and brotherhood-in-arms as a common symbol. [...] When French colonization began with the landing at Sidi Fredj in 1830," Morocco at once aligned itself alongside its brother

country and gave evidence of active solidarity which never ceased until liberation in 1962. One can never adequately emphasize the fact that Morocco and Algeria have faced common distress and that in the darkest hours, Morocco, mobilized entirely behind her King, stood at the side of valorous Algeria." (Stora, 2003). As Stora stated (2003), King Hassan II, in April 1999, congratulated Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the new president of Algeria, with a long letter in which he expressed that 'the Moroccan-Algerian relations extend far back in history, which were strongly strengthened in times of national liberation.' From his side, the Algerian president responded concerning the joint struggle against France as the basis for a potential union between the two countries: "It is hardly fortuitous that Algeria and Morocco celebrate together the anniversary of 20 August 1953,6 the day which marks the battles and epic struggles undertaken by Algerian mujahidin in solidarity with their brothers, the Moroccan people, who on that day lived through the exile of its symbol, your late father His Majesty King Muhammed V, and of yourself, an exile which led you far from your fatherland, but which affirmed your patriotism and your spirit of sacrifice for the independence of Morocco and for the dignity of its great people, thereby contributing to the complete liberation of our great Arab Maghrib." (Quoted in the Moroccan newspaper Al-Maghrib 17 May 1999). Both nations share a long history and culture in common, yet such sharply opposing political and social principles were an anticipation of an endless open conflict. To some extent, the Sahara issue was an excuse –and a field far enough from the main population of both sides– for fraternal enemies to allow themselves to launch a state of war. As Morocco got its

independence in 1956, the country claimed the Saharan lands that remain to belong to French Algeria, particularly the cities of Be'char and Tindouf, together with part of the Algerian Sahara. In 1959, some initiatives were made by the French to negotiate these lands -with their clear yet invisible motive represented in stopping Moroccan assistance to the Algerian revolution- yet, king Mohammad V refused the proposal, considering that 'any negotiations entered into with the French government at this time concerning Moroccan claims and rights would be considered a stab in the back of our combatant Algerian friends'; instead, the king prefers 'to wait until the independence of Algeria might give us an opportunity to lay the question of borders before our Algerian brothers.' In fact, Morocco was hoping that the Saharan frontier that the French drew in the early years of the twentieth century would be modified in its favor as Algeria seizes its independence. The expectancy was high since the Algerian Provisional Government (GPRA), on July 6th, 1961, signed a secret agreement with Mohammad V that predicted the formation of a 'Moroccan-Algerian Commission' aimed at resolving the conflict: the 'territorial problem, created by the arbitrary imposition of a delimitation between the two countries by France, will find its solution through negotiation between the government of the Kingdom of Morocco and that of independent Algeria.' (Stora, 2003). Most importantly, these attributes make a key element of the identity and consciousness of the Maghrebians, even if the masses and elites of the territory equally share this sense of belonging and awareness. Yet, despite the strong similarities that characterise the Maghreb states and the deep-seated aspirations toward regional unity, the

Maghrib has suffered the same intra-systemic conflicts that have plagued other regions of Africa.

### **Legitimacy and sovereignty- Morocco and the use of the term Sovereignty**

The theme of sovereignty has made it to reach and position itself at the core of contemporary anthropological and political thought, particularly the various forms in which power is exercised as well as that in which legitimacy is interpreted. 53 In its connection to international relations, the latter was emphasized by Immanuel Wallerstein; he stated: "Sovereignty is more than anything else a matter of legitimacy [that] requires reciprocal recognition. Sovereignty is a hypothetical trade, in which two potentially conflicting sides, respecting de facto realities of power, exchange such recognitions as their least costly strategy." (Wallerstein, 2004). International law has codified this recognition under self-determination and territorial integrity principles. Yet, the way in which sovereignty is defined, exercised, and legitimized is still in dispute. In the same context, Abdeslam Maghraoui states, 'sovereignty often means different things to different nations at different times and has less to do with power per se than with the ambiguities that inevitably surround any evolving international principle'. (White, 2015). Under international law, 'external' and 'internal' sovereignty are understood according to what is relevant and applies to its elements. The first is related to the state being the territorial expression of sovereign power, i.e., the control of an enclosed territory, along with its 'position' in the international community in relation to other players or 'states.' 56 The expression of external sovereignty is done with regards to other states, derived largely not from an internal source but an external one.

However, internal sovereignty is central to the Self-Determination Principle—which entails “the relationship between the sovereign power, the people and their freedom to determine who governs them.” (White, 2015). Thus, the internal sovereignty’s legitimacy is obtained from the nation and the people—seen as a unity sharing a common culture, language, and religion—which clearly proves an efficient and agreeable presentation of state power. Yet, under the use of contemporary international law, these distinctive features of sovereignty are prone to be confused, misinterpreted, and expressed regionally (White, 2015).

#### **Western Sahara Issue and the Implications of Sovereignty**

The source of the perpetual nature of this conflict is basic, which is simply that both sides claim their right to sovereignty to seize the territory that cannot be ceded naturally. After all, sovereignty is a statement that is used classically to express power that is exclusive, indivisible, and undividable. (Østerud, 1994) Although this definition has gone through some modifications in recent years regarding the nature of the legitimacy of states expressing sovereign power, it remains basically undisputed in international law (Chopra 1994). The dispute of Western Sahara challenges this traditional position, yet, those prospective challenges raise suggestions for an eventual resolution to this conflict. This dispute combined two completely different approaches to sovereignty. The base of the Moroccan position is their classical definition of sovereignty as the inherent right of a state to apply its sovereign power over its territory. The Polisario Front, on the other hand, emphasizes the legitimacy of sovereignty solely by reflecting a nation’s rights that inhabit that territory to state its sovereign claims over it,

which reflects the core of self-determination briefly (Chopra 1994). The challenge the United Nations is facing, along with the African Union, is that none of the two parties has distinguished between nation and state, as they both simply claimed that the two go hand in hand. Therefore, international law prefers the first definition even if the pressure was increasing to rather adopt the last one right after the end of the Cold War. In fact, as King Hassan said once, “all Morocco wants is ‘the stamp and the flag’, the classic symbols of sovereignty. Yet that, in essence, is all the Polisario Front wants too. All else is negotiable.” Consequently, the frequent Moroccan proposals for internal autonomy and the United Nations’ failure— “sponsored initiatives,” like the suggested plans by James Baker back when the special envoy of the United Nations between 1997 and 2004 to the region. Not only that, but also the unsuccessful four face-to-face rounds that the United Nations sponsored as talks between January 2007 and March 2008 at Manhasset, and later comes Peter Van Walsum’s desperate comments, the special envoy, stating that the United Nations would have to give up its support for self-determination, costing him his position later on. (Joffé, 2010). Polisario Front, being backed by Algeria, managed to result in critical problems for Moroccan forces in Western Sahara. However, the conflict settled down in the mid-1980s after Morocco built a massive berm of sand throughout the border of the area it managed to control. By the end of the same decade, there was some ease in the tensions between the two countries. As Morocco had severed its diplomatic relations with Algeria in 1976 yet, in 1988, they were resumed. This limited settlement facilitated the approval of a new regional organization comprising the five Maghreb countries, namely:

Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Algeria; additionally, in 1989, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). Nevertheless, in 1991, Morocco and the Polisario agreed on an UN-sponsored settlement plan for Western Sahara, which involved an UN-supervised ceasefire and a promise to guarantee the making of a referendum on the territory's status within two years. (Dworkin, 2022).

### **Autonomy plan and self determination**

According to several scholars, the notion of self-determination goes back to the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. Years later, it grew even more during the French Revolution in the Preamble to the 1791 Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which emphasized that political association aims to preserve the natural rights of liberty, security, property, and resistance to oppression. Additionally, it stressed that sovereignty belongs to the nation, from which every power exercised must emanate; that freedom can only be restricted by law; which expresses the general will of the citizen, either directly or through representatives. (Hayward 1991) Therefore, The American Declaration of Independence clarified that self-determination includes both an external (legitimacy in the society of sovereign states) and an internal element (in the form of legitimate government) (Daadaoui, 2008). Whelan points out that there are three historical roots for self-determination. The first one is analyzing the concept of the legitimacy of government, the second is state sovereignty in international politics, and the third is ethnic nationalism (Whelan 1994). The association between self-determination, legitimacy, sovereignty, and nationalism was the core of literature during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Historically, self-determination holds the right of people to organize in a defined territory and decide their collective political destiny under a democratic entitlement. As defined in UN documents, the discourse of self-determination is very paradoxical and perplexing. While it supports the right of people to define their political future, it points out that national borders must be respected and that any collapse of the state is inadmissible. Thus, even if UN resolution 1541 provided for the three options for self-determination, only the first option of secession is inclined to be excluded in favor of the international system. Given that a group of people is controlled by a foreign regime and is granted the right to govern themselves, it may sometimes be necessary to separate from the government in power. (UN Security Council Resolution 1514 (XV) 1960). Regarding the Western Sahara dispute, the Moroccan stand is characterized by the classic model of self-determination, and Morocco is of the view that any claims for self-determination, as well as the ensuing solution to the Western Sahara dispute, must be made within the state and its official organized institutions and procedures. Subsequently, it is no wonder that Morocco approved a United Nations framework agreement, according to which the Sahrawis would earn internal autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. The claim the Polisario Front adopts is, in nature, undoubtedly separatist or particularly secessionist. Stemming from the principle that state as a nation, it proclaims for the sake of a complete division of the territory, creating a new sovereign state in Western Sahara in which all Sahrawis would be based on solid identity determinants. (Daadaoui, 2008). The right to self-determination is considered the core, if controversial, principle of

international law. Its execution has always been more controversial than its content. Self-determination has earned much more attention and consent, as evidenced by its incorporation into the Charter of the UN. Notably, Article 1 of the Charter states that one of the aims of the United Nations is developing friendly relations between nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people. Nevertheless, no specification has been made concerning the principle, for instance, regarding how decisions ought to be made or even the nature of the result, whether federation, independence, protection, one of the autonomy forms, or complete assimilation (Writer, 2018). These has long been inconsistent definitions and legal standards for defining the legitimate groups that can claim their self-determination rights. Subsequently, the notion self-determination entails the rights of people to decide their own destiny. More specifically, people are granted the freedom to choose their political status and define the form of their cultural, economic, and social development. Exercising this right may lead to various consequences that ranges from political self-role to full integration within the state. The former Moroccan Interior Minister and current ambassador in France, Chakib Benmoussa, explicitly explained that: "self-determination has never been synonymous with independent statehood." As reported in an interview with El Pais published on February 22, 2007. He stressed: "Autonomy is a form of self-determination in the event of political agreement between the parties, with the endorsement of the UN Security Council, and prior consultation of the concerned population, as has been in this case." The consequence is the use of self-determination by the Polisario and some

foreign powers, which abridge the concept of independence (Writer, 2018)

### **The international recognitions of the Moroccan sovereignty over the W.S (Motives and Future Implications)**

As a matter of fact, 2022 has been a very dynamic year for Morocco with the constant diplomatic advancements and changes concerning the Western Sahara issue. Recently, many foreign ministers have affirmed their countries' support for the Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara, stressing that its credibility and significance with the potential it carries to resolve this perplexed regional conflict in regards to the solutions the United Nations suggests in this case. Historically speaking, the Moroccan and the American relationships have long been positive and special. The two countries signed a treaty of friendship since 1787, which is the longest unceasing peace agreement that the United States ever preserved with any country in the world. By 1950, the United States aid was granted to Morocco more than any other Arab country but Egypt; and to Ethiopia more than any other African country under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie. Thus, the American support to Morocco reached one-fifth of that of the whole continent. Therefore, The US recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara came in December 2020, reiterating the viability of the Moroccan autonomy initiative as a credible and serious solution to end the dispute (Zunes, 1987). France and Spain have been dynamic seeking to convince other countries to support Morocco's claim regarding the autonomy of Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty. For France, Morocco can count on it, given that it had continuously showed its support for the issue of Western Sahara. Regardless of the significant Franco-Algerian relations, France holds tight in

its pro-Moroccan. In fact, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, French Prime Minister, during his visit to Morocco days prior to the vote in the United Nations Security Council, reconfirmed the similarity of positions between his country and Morocco regarding the Western Sahara issue. President Jacques Chirac reassured the French position in favor of the integration of Western Sahara into Morocco. He advocated a policy that takes complete account of Morocco's interests and the region's stability. Most importantly, France has clarified that it would have no doubts or hesitation in using its veto right in the United Nations Security Council to restrain any 'imposed' solution on Morocco. In March 2022, The French government also renewed its support for Morocco's autonomy plan, France on Monday reiterated its support for Morocco's Autonomy Plan, describing it as a "serious and credible basis" to help resolve this issue. In order to acknowledge the significance of dialogue, the French government pointed out its readiness to carry on backing the UN-led political process until reaching a mutual solution to the dispute in the territory (Zoubir, 2004). Right after Trump recognized the sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara, the latter's actions have been increasingly firm towards not only Algeria but also the EU. In March 2021, Morocco cut diplomatic relations with Germany due to what Morocco considered a "destructive attitude" concerning Western Sahara issue; it recalled for its ambassador and asked for a closed hearing at the United Nations Security Council (Dorwin, 2022). Thus, in March 2022, the Spanish Prime Minister addressed King Mohammed VI with a letter stating that the autonomy plan Morocco suggested was "the most serious, realistic and credible basis" to

resolve this dispute. This constituted a significant shift in the Spanish stand, as it remained neutral towards the Moroccan and Polisario proposals and sufficed only by calling for negotiation of a possible solution under the auspices of the United Nations. Spain's move came within the framework of reconciliation with Morocco and initiated what the Spanish authorities considered a "new stage" in relations between the two countries. Furthermore, Germany had previously resolved its tensions with Morocco on more neutral manners, describing the autonomy plan of Morocco as "an important contribution". Therefore, Joe Bide, the current president of the US also authorized Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty (Dorwin, 2022). Lately, Nasser Bourita, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, held several bilateral meetings with his counterparts including Serbia, Romania, Nigeria, and Cyprus, which were held on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition against ISIS. Serbia joined the countries that showed their support for the Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara, as Nikola Selakovic, the Serbian Foreign Minister, described it as the "serious and credible" solution that best advocates the sovereignty of the kingdom over the disputed region. Therefore, Selakovic commended the high commitment of Morocco to sustainable socio-economic advancement in addition to stability and growth in Africa (Anouar, 2022). Additionally, the foreign minister of Romania, Bogdan Aurescu, praised the earnest efforts that Morocco dedicated to finding "a just, lasting and mutually acceptable" solution to the Western Sahara conflict, noting the North African kingdom's acknowledgment of the Autonomy Plan proposal to the UN Security Council in 2007. Both ministers



highlighted their countries' role in maintaining and promoting stability and peace in Africa, the Mediterranean, Central Europe, and the Balkans (Anouar, 2022). In addition, the bilateral meeting that Bourita had with his Cypriot counterpart, Ioannis Kasoulides, was centered on territorial integrity; the latter reconfirmed the continuity of his country to support the Moroccan proposal of autonomy. "We will work together today to establish a roadmap for bilateral cooperation in all areas," he stated. According to him, this roadmap is an opportunity to deepen economic, cultural, and, most importantly, political relations between Rabat and Nicosia at all levels, namely, bilateral, regional, and international (Anouar, 2022). Nigeria, for its part, acceded to the list of countries taking the Moroccan side; the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Hassoumi Massaoudou, stated that "Niger supports the position of the African Union, which consecrates the exclusivity of the United Nations as a framework for the search for a solution to the regional conflict created around the question of the Sahara." Furthermore, Massaoudou approved the efforts Morocco invested in finding a fair resolution to the long-lasting conflict over the status of Western Sahara (Anouar, 2022). Moreover, the positions Serbia, Romania, and Niger, adopt on the Western Sahara issue show an international propensity to applaud the Moroccan "credible and serious" autonomy proposal, especially following the United States and Spain's official endorsements. King Carl XVI Gustav, the Swedish Monarch emphasized the "depth of historical ties binding his country and Morocco." Concerning the Western Sahara issue, in 2015, a bill was issued by members of Sweden's Social Democratic Party recognizing the Polisario Front, which resulted in an escalation of tensions between the two

countries. However, Ann Linde, the Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister, held talks with Nasser Bourita, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, shedding light on the necessity of an UN-facilitate process for the case of Western Sahara. Abdelilah Benkirane, the Chief of the Moroccan government, expressed his frustration with the move Sweden made by "recognizing the so-called ghostly republic." Anouar (2022). Gambia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Lang Yabo said that "Gambia supports Morocco's Autonomy Plan and urges that it be considered a consensual and viable solution." He claimed: "This initiative -Morocco's Autonomy Plan- reflects a strong will to resolve this regional conflict and is in line with international law." The Gambian ambassador added: "The Gambian government acknowledges the notion of sovereignty as a core international law that cannot be overlooked in dealing with this dispute." Additionally, he pointed out that "in recognition of this fact, the Gambia opened a consulate general in Dakhla in January 2020 and continues to reaffirm its full support for Morocco's territorial integrity and sovereignty over all of its territories, including the Moroccan Sahara." Benazizi (2022). Following Gambia, Saint Lucia also renewed its support for the autonomy plan in the Sahara issue, praising Morocco's efforts as "serious and credible" to enhance progress in the United Nations process to fix this regional conflict. Therefore, Saint Lucia glorified all the parties' efforts to come up with a practical, long-term, reasonable, and mutually acceptable political solution to the question of Western Sahara Benazizi (2022). Recently, The Democratic Republic of the Congo decided to reiterate its support for Morocco's proposal for autonomy within the scope of the country's

territorial integrity, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic, Christophe Lutundula Apala. He expressed the supportive stand for his country for seeking a permanent solution to the conflict over Western Sahara by preserving the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of the Moroccan kingdom (Benazizi, 2022). In May 2022, the Netherlands joined the increasing number of states that consider Morocco's autonomy plan the most viable way to reach a long-lasting solution to the Sahara conflict. The Netherlands explained that Morocco's Autonomy Plan is a "serious and credible contribution" that contributes to the political process led by the United Nations (Kasraoui, 2022). Not too far in Brussels, the Belgian Committee for the Support of Autonomy in the Sahara Region (COBESA) was introduced to members of Belgium's Moroccan community dedicated to promoting a peaceful solution to the conflict of Western Sahara in line with the political process of the UN. Additionally, the Belgian MP and head of the committee, Hugues Bayet added: "This is fundamental if we want to move on within a peaceful solution that enables the people of the Sahara to live in peace and guarantee them a level of autonomy as proposed by Morocco." (Aamari, 2022). At the 4th committee of the UN General Assembly, Gulf states offered their relentless and brotherly support to the Moroccan plan during the Western Sahara discussion. The Gulf states and the Arab League have expressed their support for Morocco's sovereignty over the region. Representatives from the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia all admitted that the 2007 autonomy plan of Morocco is "serious, legal, and realistic." They also highlighted Morocco's reputation due to

the development projects it initiated in the southern territories, making it a regional example of political stability, which says that a settlement under Moroccan sovereignty is the most enduring and viable alternative. In the same context, Khaled Mohamed Hussein Al Yamani, the Yemeni Foreign Minister "praised King Mohammed VI's efforts in promoting peace and stability" in Yemen. Accordingly, he pledged that his country would return the favour with regard to the Moroccan sovereignty and territorial integrity (Koundouno, 2018). The former Gabonese Minister of Forest Economy, Fisheries, and Environment and current Member of Parliament, Estelle Ondo, claimed that Spain's new position is "political and diplomatic" recognition which provides the Moroccan proposal with more support and credibility; which would automatically destabilize enemies of the country's territorial integrity. According to Ondo, "The new Spanish position clearly states that Morocco is winning and progressing by garnering strong international support." She also added, "Morocco is about to make the world aware of the reality of this conflict and the geostrategic and security repercussions of this file, which some parties (the Polisario and Algeria) on the other side are trying to hide." (Benazizi, 2022). Turkey has always enjoyed strong bilateral relations with Morocco not for years, but for decades. Recently, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, in his last visit to Morocco, reiterated his country's support for Morocco's Autonomy Plan and Ankara's firm position on its sovereignty over its southern territories as well as territorial integrity. Furthermore, Turkey acknowledges the crucial role Morocco plays in the maintenance of safety and security in the region. "I would like to reiterate Turkey's principled position in

favor of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries, and reaffirm Turkey's support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of brotherly Morocco,” stated, Cavusoglu. “Peace, stability, and prosperity of the Sahel Region and North Africa are indispensable for the stability of the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East, and even Europe,” he stressed (Latrech 2022). Withstanding that, April and May of 2022 marked a series of greatly important announcements by many states other than those mentioned above including: Mexico, Philippines, Bahrain, Egypt, Guinea, and Central Africa, declaring their pro-Moroccan positions on the conflict, and more is yet to come.

## CONCLUSION

Following the US recognition of the credibility and the seriousness of the peace plan Morocco suggested in 2007, and with the strict stand Morocco adopts regarding its sovereignty, as stated by King Mohammed VI in several speeches, shows how severe and persistent the claim is. This goes back to Hassan II, the previous king of Morocco; after Spain left the colonized area of 'Western Sahara,' he seized the chance with Mauritania that gave it all away to Morocco due to its venerability towards the pressure from the UN as well as the Polisario Front. Since then, Morocco has undergone a series of treaties and negotiations under the UN invigilation; yet, Algeria kept claiming that Morocco is taking away people's land and playing the 'next colonizer'. Also, it helped in the creation of the Polisario Front and providing them with military supplies and goods. Despite the fact that Algeria has been the first and foremost supporter of the self-determination, both Moroccan and Saharan people claim the territory to belong to them historically. Meanwhile, Moroccans express their historical and

cultural ties between the Sahrawis and the Sultans. On the one hand, Sahrawis see it as an opportunity to apply their self-determination, earning their natural rights under a ruling figure of their choice; thus, decolonizing from the Moroccan sovereignty. On the other hand, Morocco considers self-determination; but only, if it is applied within the state, i.e., the kingdom's sovereignty. On this ground, Morocco suggests that Sahrawi people can have their own identity but only under its rule. The territory to its south- the former Spanish colony of Spanish Sahara- has long been claimed by the Kingdom of Morocco in its entirety. Whereas several countries declared their support for Moroccan rule over Western Sahara within the framework of the autonomy plan of that territory, the United States became the first significant country to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. Followed by Spain, France and Germany. Later on, the Spanish shift in position influenced other states from African and Arab states to join the approval. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic declared that the Polisario Front (SADR) controls only around 20 percent of Western Sahara's territory, and even if it is a member of the African Union, it did not manage to become a member of the Arab League. (Pillalamarri, 2021) Given that Morocco has the rest 80 percent of the land, where people enjoy their rights as normal Moroccan citizens, and with the huge support and declarations of the credibility and the seriousness of the autonomy plan, Algeria keeps its claims sabotaging and backing up the Polisario seeking their independence. The reason behind the UN failing to resolve the dispute over Western Sahara stems from the geographical considerations of external parties, such as France, the United States, and Spain. During the

Cold War, the United States and France were concerned about the fall of the Western Sahara under Soviet influence. Although not directly aligned, Algeria preserved close relations with the former Soviet Union. France and the United States provided Morocco with all the support it needed to maintain its presence in the former colony. Indeed, Algerian relations with Europe are considered weaker than those of Morocco. Algeria is a country involved in much more tensions and problems from various aspects. It is regarded as an "awkward partner, given that its government lacks popular support, its business climate discourages European investment, and it has failed to follow through on commitments made in its 2002 association agreement with the EU." However, the EU continues to be a significant partner for Algeria and may provide it with more influence in case the country develops the energy and economic transformation that will secure its prosperity in the future. Meanwhile, the increasing number of declarations Morocco has been granted made a big disappointment for Algeria, which has been closely following up on the developments and updates of its neighboring country. After the recent claim of Spain, Algeria was very uncomfortable as Amar Belani, the Algerian "special envoy in charge of Western Sahara," stated the frustration of his country as he threatened the Spanish government, expressing that Albares has to "bear the consequences." Tebboune himself described the Spanish decision supporting Morocco's Autonomy Plan as "morally and historically unacceptable." Not only this, but also after Turkey declared the same; days after the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu declared Morocco's territorial integrity, the Algerian president decided to visit the Turkish president Recep Erdogan for

the sake of getting Turkey to reconsider its support for Morocco's territorial integrity. This reveals the intensive efforts Algeria invests in triggering tension and creating obstacles to Morocco. Dworkin suggested that for a better solution, the EU needs to persuade Algeria to rejoin the four-party format for talks on Western Sahara to support the UN envoy's drive to resume negotiations. European officials therefore, should also try to stop Algeria from providing military support to Polisario and avoid any further inciting speech towards Morocco.

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