

**Diplomatic Mobilisation and the Abraham Accords:
Shifting Balances in the Western Sahara Conflict**

Diplomatik Seferberlik ve Abraham Anlaşmaları:
Batı Sahra Sorununda Değişen Dengeler

Abdüssamet PULAT

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Sakarya Üniversitesi,
Ortadoğu Enstitüsü, Ortadoğu Çalışmaları ABD,
Ast. Prof. Dr., Sakarya University,
Middle East Institute, Department of Middle East Studies
apulat@sakarya.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-0758-5596

ROR ID: <https://ror.org/04ttnw109>

DOI: 10.56720/msbd.2026.s17.453

Makale Bilgisi | Article Information

Makale Türü / Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Geliş Tarihi / Date Received: 28 Temmuz / July 2026

Kabul Tarihi / Date Accepted: 3 Ekim / October 2026

Yayın Tarihi / Date Published: 15 Ekim / October 2026

Yayın Sezonu / Pub Date Season: Ekim / October

Atıf / Citation: Pulat, Abdüssamet. "Diplomatic Mobilisation and the Abraham Accords: Shifting Balances in the Western Sahara Conflict". *Mevzu: Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 17 (Ekim 2026): 347-386. <https://doi.org/10.56720/msbd.2026.s17.453>

İntihal: Bu makale, ithenticate yazılımınca taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

Plagiarism: This article has been scanned by ithenticate. No plagiarism detected.
web: <https://mevzusbd.com> | mailto: mevzusbd@gmail.com

Copyright © CC BY-NC 4.0



Abstract

Although the Western Sahara issue has remained unresolved for nearly half a century, it has undergone a marked diplomatic shift in Morocco's favour since 2020. This study examines why and how the international framework surrounding the issue was reshaped in the absence of either a decisive military development on the ground or a fundamental structural change in the international system. It aims to explain the relationship between the long-term diplomatic mobilisation pursued during the reign of King Mohammed VI, which made Western Sahara a central reference point of Moroccan foreign policy, and the United States' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory in December 2020. Within this framework, the article examines Morocco's African outreach, the 2007 Autonomy Plan, its return to the African Union and its efforts to reduce international support for the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). It also considers the place of the US recognition decision, secured in connection with Morocco's normalisation of relations with Israel, within the subsequent process encompassing policy changes by Spain, France and the United Kingdom, as well as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2797. The study adopts a qualitative research design and employs process tracing. The causal connections between Morocco's long-term diplomatic initiatives, the US decision of 2020 and subsequent international developments are examined chronologically. It finds that Morocco's diplomatic mobilisation eroded international support for the SADR but moved no permanent member of the Security Council. The decisive shift followed the United States' recognition of December 2020, after which Spain, France and the United Kingdom changed position and Resolution 2797 took the autonomy plan as the basis for negotiation, leaving the diplomatic balance altered in Morocco's favour though the dispute unresolved.

Keywords: Western Sahara, Morocco, the Polisario Front, the Abraham Accords, Diplomatic Mobilisation

Öz

Batı Sahra sorunu, yaklaşık yarım yüzyıldır çözüme kavuşturulmamasına rağmen 2020 sonrasında Fas lehine belirgin bir diplomatik dönüşüm geçirmiştir. Bu çalışma, sahada sonucu belirleyen bir askerî gelişme veya

uluslararası sistemde köklü bir yapısal değişim yaşanmadan sorunun uluslararası çerçevesinin neden ve nasıl yeniden şekillendiğini incelemektedir. Araştırmanın amacı, Kral VI. Muhammed döneminde Batı Sahra meselesini Fas dış politikasının temel referans noktalarından biri hâline getiren uzun soluklu diplomatik seferberlik ile ABD'nin Aralık 2020'de Batı Sahra üzerindeki Fas egemenliğini tanıması arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamaktır. Bu kapsamda Fas'ın Afrika açılımı, 2007 Özerklik Planı, Afrika Birliği'ne dönüş süreci ve SADR'a yönelik uluslararası desteği azaltma girişimleri ele alınmaktadır. Ayrıca Fas'ın İsrail ile ilişkilerini normalleştirilmesi karşılığında alınan ABD tanıma kararının, İspanya, Fransa ve Birleşik Krallık'ın sonraki politika değişiklikleri ile 2797 sayılı Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi kararına uzanan süreçteki yeri değerlendirilmektedir. Çalışma, nitel bir araştırma tasarımına dayanmakta ve süreç izleme yöntemini kullanmaktadır. Fas'ın uzun vadeli diplomatik girişimleri, 2020'deki ABD kararı ve sonrasında uluslararası düzeyde yaşanan gelişmeler arasındaki nedensel bağlantılar kronolojik bir çerçevede incelenmektedir. Çalışmanın bulgusu, Fas'ın diplomatik seferberliğinin SADR'a yönelik uluslararası desteği aşındırdığı, ancak Güvenlik Konseyi'nin daimi üyelerinden hiçbirinin tutumunu değiştirmedeği yönündedir. Belirleyici dönüşüm ABD'nin Aralık 2020'deki tanıma kararının ardından gerçekleşmiş, bunu İspanya, Fransa ve Birleşik Krallık'ın pozisyon değişiklikleri ile özerklik planını müzakerenin esası haline getiren 2797 sayılı karar izlemiş ve diplomatik denge Fas lehine değişirken uyuşmazlık çözümsüz kalmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Batı Sahra, Fas, Polisario Cephesi, Abraham Anlaşmaları, Diplomatik Seferberlik

1. Introduction

In his first speech following his accession to the throne in July 1999, King Mohammed VI of Morocco stated that the Western Sahara issue, which had remained unresolved for years, was a fundamental national cause for Morocco and affirmed the country's determination to ensure territorial integrity.¹ Nearly a quarter of a century later, in a speech delivered on the occasion of the Day of the Revolution of the King and the People, after referring to the diplomatic

¹ Mohammed VI, "Discours du Trône de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI" (Rabat, 30 July 1999).

gains made in recent years regarding the Western Sahara issue, he expressed the existential importance of the matter for Morocco in the following words: “I wish to send a clear message to everyone: the Sahara issue is the prism through which Morocco views the international community”.²

At the time of this second address it was evident that the Western Sahara issue was shifting from deadlock towards a diplomatic balance increasingly favourable to Morocco. In 1999, whilst the Rabat administration claimed that Western Sahara had historically been part of the Kingdom of Morocco, no country recognised the Kingdom’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. Moreover, historically, around 80 countries had established relations with the Polisario Front, which was fighting for Western Sahara’s independence, and recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)³. By the time of the 2022 speech, however, the United States – a major power – had recognised Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. Furthermore, key European nations such as Spain and Germany, along with some Middle Eastern countries, had begun to take a stance in favour of Morocco’s autonomy plan. Many countries, such as Mali, Peru, Colombia and Bolivia, which had previously maintained relations with the Polisario Front, have severed those ties, and the number of countries recognising the SADR has dropped to approximately 40.⁴ In addition, as of the end of 2025, 29 countries had opened consulates in Western Sahara or announced their intention to do so in the near future.⁵ The resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in October 2025 was one of the most significant developments regarding the international standing of Morocco’s claims over Western Sahara. This shift concerns the distribution of international positions rather than the legal status of the territory, which remains contested.

² Mohammed VI, “Discours de SM le Roi Mohammed VI à l’occasion de l’anniversaire de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple” (Rabat, 20 August 2022).

³ The Polisario Front declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976, while it was operating in Algeria.

⁴ Stephen Allen - Jamie Trinidad, *The Western Sahara Question and International Law: Recognition Doctrine and Self-Determination* (London: Routledge, 2024), 22-27, 28-33; Ouardani Issa - Latifa Babas, “Sahara: Which Countries Still Recognize ‘SADR’?,” Yabiladi (29 November 2024).

⁵ “Paraguay to Open Consulate in Morocco-Ruled Western Sahara, Joining 29 Other Nations,” *The Arab Weekly* (2025).

Despite the absence of any structural change in the international system or any significant developments in the Western Sahara region (although a conflict broke out between the parties in 2020, no major shift occurred), how did the issue evolve in the direction desired by Morocco? The question is not a rhetorical one, since the dispute has long been shaped by regional and international actors whose calculations lie outside the two parties themselves.⁶ This study examines the reasons why the Western Sahara issue, which has been deadlocked since 1975, has shifted so markedly in Morocco's favour. At this point, the research question of the article is as follows: What factors account for the reordering of the international framework surrounding the Western Sahara issue in Morocco's favour? In answering this question, the study focuses on two factors. The first is the Rabat administration's decision in the 2010s to launch a diplomatic mobilisation, thereby framing all its foreign relations through the prism of the Western Sahara issue. The King's 'prism' characterisation is the most concrete expression demonstrating that, for Morocco, the Western Sahara issue is not merely a territorial dispute, but a fundamental reference point upon which the establishment, maintenance or suspension of bilateral relations is based. Indeed, the tensions and crises Morocco has experienced with other countries during this period, the level of its diplomatic relations and the context in which its foreign policy instruments are employed can all be interpreted through the prism of Western Sahara. For example, when the Swedish government's policy on recognising the SADR emerged in 2015, the Rabat administration threatened to boycott Sweden.⁷ Morocco has, at times, clashed over the Western Sahara issue not only with countries with which it has no close ties, such as Sweden, but also with major powers such as the United States, with one of the continent's key countries, South Africa, and even with allies such as the UAE. Morocco's position on the Western Sahara issue is reflected in the contacts it maintains at the level of the King and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As part of this campaign, the aims have been to reduce the recognition of the SADR,

⁶ Yahia H. Zoubir, "The Western Sahara Conflict: Regional and International Dimensions," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 28/2 (1990), 225-243.

⁷ The New Arab, "Morocco Hails Sweden's U-Turn on Recognising Western Sahara" (16 January 2016).

secure Morocco's return to the African Union, and, in recent years, secure recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

The second factor is US President Donald Trump's efforts in 2020 to normalise relations between Arab countries and Israel as part of his Middle East policy. Trump, who had claimed before taking office that he would end the wars in the Middle East and bring about the 'peace of the century', began to put pressure on Arab countries to normalise relations with Israel after taking office in 2017.⁸ Signed in 2020 following the emergence of a favourable international climate, the Abraham Accords paved the way for the establishment of official relations between Israel and certain Arab countries. Following the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan, Morocco also joined the normalisation process at the end of 2020. However, the Rabat government conducted an intensive round of negotiations with the US before formalising relations with Israel. At the heart of these talks was the question of whether Washington would change its traditional stance on the Western Sahara issue. Indeed, despite the long-standing and close ties between the two countries, the US had not, up to that point, officially recognised Morocco's claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara. The record of the negotiations indicates that recognition was the price Rabat obtained within the normalisation bargain rather than an independent reassessment of American policy on the territory. The demand was tabled at the outset of the talks in 2019 and delayed agreement for more than a year, and the recognition was issued as a presidential proclamation on December 2020, the same day the normalisation was announced, before being embedded in the trilateral Joint Declaration of 22 December 2020.⁹ Although the Kingdom had made sustained efforts since the 2010s to shift the issue in its favour, the Trump administration's foreign policy and the Abraham Accords process marked a decisive turning point. This was because, whilst many countries had withdrawn their recognition of the SADR, no state had recognised Morocco's sovereignty over these

⁸ "Trump Gives Awards to Top Aides for Arab-Israeli Deals," *Reuters* (24 December 2020).

⁹ Barak Ravid, "Fallout between Trump and Top GOP Senator Made Morocco-Israel Deal Possible," *Axios* (11 December 2020); Alexis Arieff et al., "Morocco-Israel Normalization and U.S. Policy Change on Western Sahara" (Congressional Research Service, 15 December 2020); "Joint Declaration between the Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America, and the State of Israel" (22 December 2020).

territories. Following this decision by a major power such as the US, some European countries also began to shift their policies over time. Key EU members such as Spain and, subsequently, Germany issued statements supporting Morocco's autonomy plan, whilst similar support was also forthcoming from the UK and France.¹⁰ Adopted on 31 October 2025, Resolution 2797 renewed MINURSO's mandate for a further year and, for the first time, called upon the parties to negotiate "taking as basis Morocco's Autonomy Proposal", recognising that "genuine autonomy could represent a most feasible outcome".¹¹ The text contains no reference to an independence referendum, while retaining the language of self-determination. When the resolution was adopted, China and Russia, two permanent members with the power of veto, abstained rather than opposing the text, which represented a further diplomatic gain for Rabat.

The study argues that Morocco's decision to place Western Sahara at the centre of its foreign policy in the 2000s and to frame its bilateral relations around this issue created the conditions in which a change of position by a major power could produce wider international effects. The article's argument, however, is that whilst these efforts created a favourable climate for Morocco, the United States' change of policy in exchange for the Abraham Accords was the decisive factor in the reordering of the international framework surrounding the dispute. The contribution of the study lies in treating these two dynamics, which the literature has largely examined separately, as a single causal sequence and in extending that sequence to Resolution 2797. The study will first evaluate the existing literature on the subject, the course and dynamics of the conflict, and the structural causes of the impasse. Section 4 then discusses the stages of the diplomatic mobilisation spearheaded by Mohammed VI, and Section 5 analyses the effects of the Abraham Accords and US recognition, including their reflection at the level of the United Nations in Resolution 2797.

¹⁰ El Houssine Majdoubi Bahida, "Is the West Shifting Towards Supporting 'Autonomy' in Western Sahara?," International Centre for Dialogue Initiatives (20 August 2024); "UK Latest Country to Back Morocco's Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara," *France 24* (1 June 2025).

¹¹ "Resolution 2797 (2025)," S/RES/2797 (31 October 2025), para. 3.

1.1. Conceptual Framework and Method

Three terms used throughout this article require definition. Diplomatic mobilisation refers to the systematic framing of Morocco's bilateral relations through the Western Sahara issue. This framing consists of the concentration of leader-level visits on states whose position on the dispute was considered alterable, the pairing of these visits with investment and cooperation agreements, and the readiness to downgrade relations or apply economic pressure when a partner moved towards the SADR. US recognition refers to the Presidential Proclamation of 10 December 2020 and its subsequent reaffirmation in the Joint Declaration of 22 December 2020.¹² A shift in Morocco's favour refers to a change in the international diplomatic balance surrounding the dispute and not to its legal settlement. Throughout the article, political support for the autonomy plan as a basis for negotiation is distinguished from formal recognition of Moroccan sovereignty, and the two are attributed separately to the states concerned.

The study adopts a qualitative single-case design and uses process tracing to examine whether the sequence running from Morocco's diplomatic mobilisation to the international realignment of the dispute constitutes a causal mechanism rather than a chronological coincidence. The evidence consists of four bodies of material. The first comprises official documents. These include the Moroccan Autonomy Proposal submitted to the Security Council in 2007 (S/2007/206), Resolution 2797 (2025) and the record of its adoption, the Presidential Proclamation of December 2020, the trilateral Joint Declaration of the same month, royal speeches, and the letters sent by Prime Minister Sánchez in 2022 and President Macron in 2024.¹³ The second comprises institutional analyses, including the Congressional Research Service report on the normalisation

¹² "Proclamation on Recognizing the Sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Western Sahara" (The White House, 10 December 2020); "Joint Declaration between the Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America, and the State of Israel" (22 December 2020).

¹³ "Letter dated 11 April 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2007/206; "Resolution 2797 (2025)," S/RES/2797; "With 11 Members Voting in Favour, 3 Abstaining, Security Council Adopts Resolution 2797 (2025)," United Nations Meetings Coverage, SC/16208 (31 October 2025).

agreement and the assessments produced after the adoption of Resolution 2797.¹⁴ The third comprises data on leader-level visits for the period 1991-2023, drawn from an existing quantitative study of Moroccan leader diplomacy.¹⁵ The fourth comprises press reporting, which is used to establish the timing and sequence of events but not as evidence of motive. Where a claim concerns the intentions of decision-makers, it rests on official documents or on reporting that discloses the content of the negotiations.

Three criteria are used to distinguish a causal mechanism from a temporal correlation. The first is documentary evidence of the linkage itself. The negotiation record and the instruments of December 2020 establish that recognition was exchanged for normalisation, so the connection between the two decisions is stated by the parties rather than inferred by the analyst. The second is a counterfactual observation. The instruments of the diplomatic mobilisation were in use throughout the 2013-2019 period and produced measurable results at the level of the African Union and of individual recognitions, yet no permanent member of the Security Council altered its position and the United Nations framework remained referendum-based. This establishes that the mobilisation was not sufficient on its own. The third is the timing and the stated justification of the subsequent shifts. The Spanish, French and British changes of position occurred within five years of the American decision, and each was justified in the language of the autonomy plan rather than in the language of the bilateral disputes that had preceded them. Alternative explanations, in particular the migration and security leverage Morocco exercised over European states and the deterioration of Algeria's relations with Madrid and Paris, are examined in Section 5 and assessed against this evidence.

Two limitations follow from this design. The internal record of the negotiations is not publicly available, so the weight of each factor in the American decision cannot be measured precisely, and the analysis relies on documents and on reporting of their content. In addition, the period after Resolution 2797

¹⁴ Arieff et al., "Morocco-Israel Normalization and U.S. Policy Change on Western Sahara"; "What Next for the Western Sahara? The Repercussions of Security Council Resolution 2797," Unit for Political Studies (13 November 2025).

¹⁵ Abdüssamet Pulat, "Navigating Foreign Policy Priorities: Leader Diplomacy of Morocco in the Period of King Mohammed VI," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 61/4 (2026), 2919-2935.

is too recent to permit an assessment of implementation, and the study therefore confines itself to the reordering of positions rather than to outcomes on the ground.

2. Literature Review

The Western Sahara conflict has attracted scholarly attention since its earliest years, owing to the region's strategic location, its colonial past, its mineral resources and the half-century-long struggle between Morocco and the Polisario Front. The studies most relevant to this article fall into three strands: the first is concerned with the origins of the conflict and the construction of competing claims, the second with its legal and institutional dimensions, and the third with Moroccan policy and the changing international setting.

The first strand traces the conflict to the colonial period and to the formation of competing national claims. Zunes and Mundy treat it as an unresolved case of decolonisation, examining the formation of Sahrawi nationalism and the Polisario Front's quest for political legitimacy¹⁶, while Baers approaches the dispute historically, from the pre-colonial period and the borders drawn by Spanish and French colonialism to the concept of 'Greater Morocco' and the role of regional rivalries.¹⁷ San Martín examines the development and naturalisation of Sahrawi national identity, addressing the conflict through the construction of identity and citizenship rather than through territorial sovereignty or international law.¹⁸ Daadaoui approaches the same problem from a constructivist perspective, arguing that the classical and secessionist categories of self-determination theory cannot account for the dispute because they neglect its colonial legacy and treat identity as a fixed, legally ascertainable attribute. He proposes instead an understanding of Sahrawi identity as socially constructed, with direct implications for the United Nations identification process and its

¹⁶ Stephen Zunes - Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Michael Baers, *A History of the Western Sahara Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022).

¹⁸ Pablo San Martín, "Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship in the Western Sahara," *The Journal of North African Studies* 10/3-4 (2005), 565-592.

reliance on the Spanish census of 1974.¹⁹ This strand explains why the dispute has resisted conventional bargaining, since the parties are divided not merely over an outcome but over the terms in which the dispute may legitimately be described. It is less well equipped to account for change. If the incompatibility of claims is durable, the strand offers few resources for explaining why the international framework has moved as rapidly as it has since 2020.

The second strand addresses the legal and institutional dimensions of the conflict. Jensen examines the United Nations settlement effort, focusing on the identification of the electorate, the intransigence of the parties and the failure of the Baker plans, approaching the issue through the institutional limits of the peace process rather than its social or economic dimensions.²⁰ Joffé examines the relationship between territorial sovereignty and self-determination, arguing that the conflict also reflects the struggle for regional leadership between Morocco and Algeria and that the will of the Sahrawi people has been progressively sidelined.²¹ Noutcheva situates Western Sahara alongside Kosovo and Abkhazia as a case of contested statehood, asking why the European Union commits itself substantially to the management of some such conflicts and not at all to others, and explaining that variation through the interaction between external conditions and the Union's own internal capability.²² This strand explains the institutional persistence of the deadlock and the mechanisms by which recognition is withheld or extended, but it treats the positions of external actors largely as a function of legal constraint, whereas the period examined here is one in which those positions changed without any change in the underlying legal situation.

The third strand asks why the positions of external actors towards the dispute have changed, and it is the strand to which this article most directly contributes. Three kinds of answer can be distinguished. The first locates the

¹⁹ Mohamed Daadaoui, "The Western Sahara Conflict: Towards a Constructivist Approach to Self-Determination," *The Journal of North African Studies* 13/2 (2008), 143-156.

²⁰ Erik Jensen, *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

²¹ George Joffé, "Sovereignty and the Western Sahara," *The Journal of North African Studies* 15/3 (2010), 375-384.

²² Gergana Noutcheva, "Contested Statehood and EU Actorness in Kosovo, Abkhazia and Western Sahara," *Geopolitics* 25/2 (2020), 449-471.

explanation at the systemic level. Soler i Lecha and Arco Escriche argue that the transition to competitive multipolarity has widened the field of actors engaged with the conflict, so that the involvement of China and Russia and of rising regional powers such as Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates has made the dispute an arena in which interests, values and foreign policy strategies are differentiated rather than aligned.²³ This account explains why no actor is now in a position to impose a settlement and why abstention has become an attractive posture, and it is drawn upon in Section 5 in interpreting the Chinese and Russian votes on Resolution 2797. What it does not explain is direction, since a more crowded field does not by itself indicate why the movement of the past five years has been towards Rabat rather than away from it.

The second kind of answer locates the explanation in Moroccan agency. Zhiwen argues that Morocco preserved the sovereignty claim inherited from Hassan II while broadening the instruments used to advance it, through the African outreach, the 2007 Autonomy Plan, regionalisation and new international partnerships.²⁴ This is the closest existing account to the argument advanced here, and its limitation is correspondingly instructive. The instruments are documented, but their effects are not differentiated. It is not established which instrument altered the position of which actor, nor why the same repertoire, applied continuously from 2013, produced results among African and smaller European states while leaving the permanent members of the Security Council unmoved. The account records the American recognition of 2020 and its continuation under the Biden administration, but treats it as an episode within the narrative of Moroccan policy rather than as the beginning of a sequence, and it does not extend to the European realignments after 2022 or to the multilateral outcome of 2025. The present article addresses both points by specifying the mechanism and by continuing the analysis to Resolution 2797.

The third kind of answer locates the explanation in a specific bargain. Maghraoui treats Morocco's normalisation with Israel as a multi-layered process,

²³ Eduard Soler i Lecha - Inés Arco Escriche, "The Western Sahara Conflict in a Post-Hegemonic World: Interests, Values and Foreign Policy Strategies," *The Journal of North African Studies* 30/4 (2025), 579-610.

²⁴ Liang Zhiwen, "Morocco's Western Sahara Policy during the Reign of Mohammed VI," *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2/2 (2024), 419-434.

in which the domestic packaging of the agreement through the instrumentalisation of Moroccan Jewish heritage is intertwined with regional considerations and with the pursuit of military and geostrategic capacity, so that the recognition obtained in December 2020 appears as one element of a wider exchange rather than as a diplomatic windfall.²⁵ The Doha Institute's report on Resolution 2797 extends this reading to the multilateral level, showing that the resolution reflects a shift from self-determination through a referendum to self-determination within the framework of the autonomy plan, and that this transition extends the process begun with the US recognition of 2020.²⁶ Its focus, however, is the event rather than the sequence that produced it, and the relation between the bargain of 2020 and the diplomatic capital accumulated before it is left unexamined. Pulat's quantitative study of Moroccan leader diplomacy supplies part of the missing evidence, in the form of the visit data used in Section 4, without addressing the question of outcomes.²⁷

Taken together, the three strands account for the persistence of the deadlock, for its legal architecture and for the instruments Morocco has employed, but the interaction between the long-term accumulation of Moroccan diplomatic effort and the rupture of 2020 has received relatively limited attention. This study aims to present an analytical perspective that positions the diplomatic mobilisation as an enabling condition and US recognition as the precipitating decision, whilst tracing their consequences in the international arena.

3. The Roots of the Conflict and the Path to an Impasse

The Western Sahara issue is one of the longest-standing unresolved self-determination disputes in Africa, and the only territory on the continent that remains on the UN list of non-self-governing territories. It is not merely a territorial conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front, but a multi-layered international issue shaped by incomplete decolonisation, competing interpretations of self-determination, the limited effect of international legal determinations on the conduct of the parties, regional rivalry and the changing priorities

²⁵ Driss Maghraoui, "The Multiple Layers of Morocco's Normalization with Israel," in *Risks, Resilience and Interdependency* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).

²⁶ "What Next for the Western Sahara?"

²⁷ Pulat, "Navigating Foreign Policy Priorities," 2919-2935.

of major powers.²⁸ Its origins therefore cannot be understood solely through the conflict that began in 1975. The present impasse emerged from the interaction between the colonial legacy, incompatible political claims, the disregard of international law, and subsequent international and regional developments.

Spain established control over Western Sahara in 1884, in the same period as the Berlin Conference, and administered the territory as a colony. After the Second World War, the spread of decolonisation increased international pressure on Madrid, particularly after Western Sahara was placed on the United Nations 'list of non-self-governing territories'.²⁹ At the same time, competing political claims became more pronounced. Morocco argued that the territory had been linked to the Moroccan sultan before colonial rule and was therefore historically part of the kingdom. Among the Sahrawis, however, a distinct political consciousness developed. Established in 1973, the Polisario Front initially fought Spanish colonial rule before becoming the principal political and military movement demanding independence. The dispute thus came to centre on the incompatibility between Morocco's claim to territorial sovereignty and the Sahrawi demand for self-determination.³⁰

The advisory opinion delivered by the International Court of Justice in 1975 became a major reference point in this dispute. The Court acknowledged the existence of certain legal ties of allegiance between some of the territory's tribes and Morocco and the Mauritanian entity, but concluded that these ties did not amount to ties of territorial sovereignty and did not affect the application of the principle of self-determination to the territory.³¹ This finding reinforced the United Nations 'referendum-based approach and limited the legal weight that could be attached to Morocco's historical claims. Morocco and the Polisario Front nevertheless interpreted the opinion differently, with each emphasising

²⁸ Allen - Trinidad, *The Western Sahara Question and International Law*, 2-3.

²⁹ Davut Dursun - Nebi Miş, "Batı Sahra: Sömürge Mirasında Hakimiyet Mücadelesi," in *Dünya Çatışmaları: Çatışma Bölgeleri ve Konuları*, 1 (İstanbul: Nobel, 2010), 200.

³⁰ Anthony G. Pazzanita, "Morocco versus Polisario: A Political Interpretation," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32/2 (1994), 270.

³¹ *Western Sahara*, Advisory Opinion, ICJ Reports 1975, 12, at 68, paras. 162-163.

the elements that appeared to support its own position. The advisory opinion therefore clarified the legal framework without resolving the political dispute.³²

Later in 1975, Spain's decision to withdraw created the conditions for a new phase of conflict. Hassan II organised the Green March, during which hundreds of thousands of Moroccans entered Western Sahara, thereby demonstrating Rabat's determination to consolidate its claim.³³ The subsequent Madrid Agreement transferred the administration of the territory to a temporary tripartite arrangement involving Morocco and Mauritania, but it did not transfer sovereignty. Neither the Polisario Front nor UN accepted the agreement as determining the territory's legal status, which has remained internationally contested ever since.³⁴ After Spain's withdrawal, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1976 and launched an armed struggle against Morocco and Mauritania.³⁵

Mauritania withdrew from the conflict in 1979 after suffering serious military and economic losses. Morocco then took control of the areas previously administered by Mauritania and established de facto control over most of Western Sahara. From that point onwards, the conflict became centred on Morocco and the Polisario Front, while Algeria's political and military support for the Polisario strengthened its regional dimension. During the 1980s, Morocco constructed a series of defensive walls across the territory, enabling it to preserve military superiority and retain control over the most populated and economically important areas.³⁶

After years of warfare, the parties accepted a UN-supervised ceasefire in 1991, which took effect on 6 September of that year, and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara was established by Security

³² Allen - Trinidad, *The Western Sahara Question and International Law*, 12.

³³ Jerome B. Weiner, "The Green March in Historical Perspective," *Middle East Journal* 33/1 (1979), 20.

³⁴ Allen - Trinidad, *The Western Sahara Question and International Law*, 11-13.

³⁵ Dursun - Miş, "Batı Sahra: Sömürge Mirasında Hakimiyet Mücadelesi," 206.

³⁶ "Batı Sahra Sorunu," ORSAM (2021), 8-9.

Council Resolution 690.³⁷ The peace plan aimed to organise a referendum through which the people of Western Sahara would determine the territory's future. Its implementation, however, became deadlocked over the identification of eligible voters. The Polisario Front favoured an electorate based largely on the Spanish census, whereas Morocco argued that populations with links to the territory who had settled there later should also be included. This disagreement was not merely technical, since the composition of the electorate could determine the outcome of the referendum. As a result, MINURSO gradually became primarily a ceasefire-monitoring mission, while the referendum at the centre of its original mandate was never held.³⁸

The failure of the referendum process encouraged the United Nations to pursue more flexible forms of political settlement. Morocco presented its Autonomy Plan in 2007, offering Western Sahara extensive self-government (elected local institutions with competence over administration, taxation, and economic and cultural affairs, while reserving defence, external relations, the currency and the King's religious prerogatives to Rabat) under Moroccan sovereignty. Rabat portrayed the proposal as a realistic compromise capable of safeguarding Morocco's territorial integrity while providing the territory with meaningful autonomy.³⁹ The Polisario Front rejected the plan on the grounds that it excluded independence and therefore restricted the Sahrawi right to self-determination, and it continued to insist on a referendum containing that option.⁴⁰ Despite continued United Nations-led negotiations, their basic positions remained unchanged and no lasting settlement emerged.

A central cause of the impasse is that Morocco and the Polisario Front define the dispute through fundamentally different legal and political frameworks. Morocco regards Western Sahara as a matter of sovereignty, territorial

³⁷ "About MINURSO," MINURSO (2026); United Nations Security Council, Resolution 690 (29 April 1991).

³⁸ "What Next for the Western Sahara?," 1-2.

³⁹ "Letter dated 11 April 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco," S/2007/206, paras. 12-14, 19-21.

⁴⁰ Allen - Trinidad, *The Western Sahara Question and International Law*, 17.

integrity and national unity, and officially refers to the territory as its southern provinces. It therefore rejects any settlement that could lead to separation. The Polisario Front, by contrast, considers the issue an unfinished process of decolonisation and insists that self-determination must include the option of independence.

The rivalry between Morocco and Algeria constitutes a second structural source of deadlock. Although Algeria is not formally one of the two direct parties, its long-standing political and military support for the Polisario Front has made it a decisive regional actor, and Rabat's official discourse increasingly treats Algiers as a party to the dispute in its own right.⁴¹ Morocco views this support as both a challenge to its territorial integrity and a threat to its national security. The conflict has consequently become intertwined with the broader competition between the two states for regional influence. Western Sahara's natural resources add another dimension. The territory contains important phosphate deposits, rich fishing grounds and growing renewable energy potential, and the governance of these resources has itself become a field of legal and political contestation.⁴² These resources increase its strategic value and reinforce competition over the territory, although the policies of regional and international actors cannot be explained by economic interests alone.⁴³

The persistence of the Western Sahara conflict cannot therefore be attributed to any single cause. The colonial legacy, the competing interpretations of sovereignty and self-determination, the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria and the strategic value of the territory have combined to produce a self-reinforcing structure of deadlock. Western Sahara is consequently to be understood both as an unresolved question of decolonisation and as a contemporary contest over sovereignty, legitimacy and regional power. This background is

⁴¹ Nourelhouda Mouhoub, "Western Sahara in Transition: Geopolitics, Diplomacy, and Uncertain Future," *Al Sharq Strategic Research* (1 April 2026).

⁴² Ángela Suárez-Collado - Juan Domingo Torrejón Rodríguez, "Natural Resource Governance in Western Sahara: Contemporary Issues and Emerging Themes and Approaches," *The Journal of North African Studies* 30/4 (2025), 557-578.

⁴³ Soler i Lecha - Arco Escriche, "The Western Sahara Conflict in a Post-Hegemonic World," 598.

essential to explaining why Morocco subsequently adopted a more assertive diplomatic strategy and why the international balance surrounding the dispute began to change.

4. Diplomatic Mobilisation: Mohammed VI's New Approach and Outreach to Africa

During the reign of Hassan II, the Western Sahara issue was defined as a national cause and became one of the key priorities of Moroccan foreign policy. Whilst the structural conditions set out above continued to exist, the policies pursued during the reign of Mohammed VI gradually shifted the balance in Morocco's favour.⁴⁴ The first significant move of the new reign was the Autonomy Plan of 2007, which was not accepted by the Polisario Front but was presented internationally as a realistic proposal made in good faith. Although states such as France and the United States did not endorse the plan, they did not dismiss it either.⁴⁵

The second and more consequential move was a diplomatic mobilisation in the 2010s directed primarily at African countries and at major powers. In contrast to the diplomatic legacy of King Hassan II, which focused predominantly on the Middle East, Mohammed VI placed Africa at the centre of his strategic priorities. From the 2000s onwards, the King undertook official visits to Sub-Saharan African countries several times a year and signed nearly a thousand cooperation agreements between 2000 and 2015.⁴⁶ Following the Arab Spring uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, the King—who had retained his monopoly on foreign policy decision-making through the constitutional referendum in Morocco—began to pursue a more active foreign policy. The primary objective of this policy was to reduce the number of countries supporting the Polisario Front and recognising the SADR.

⁴⁴ Raúl Redondo, "Morocco and the Sahara: 50 Years of the Green March," *Atalayar* (6 November 2025).

⁴⁵ Elliott Abrams, "Morocco's Victory on the Western Sahara," Council on Foreign Relations (2 November 2025).

⁴⁶ Celeste Hicks, "Why Did the African Union Readmit Morocco after Its 33 Years in the Cold?," *African Arguments* (2 February 2017).

In this vein, the Rabat administration's first aim was to rejoin the African Union (AU) – the successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), from which it had withdrawn in 1984 in protest at the SADR's admission as a member. The administration of Hassan II had decided to withdraw from the organisation in response to the admission of the SADR to the OAU, which had been secured through the efforts of Morocco's regional rival, Algeria, in the 1980s.⁴⁷ Although King Mohammed VI had maintained relations with African countries since accession, no decision to rejoin was taken until this situation began to change from 2013 onwards.⁴⁸

The scale of this reorientation is visible in the pattern of high-level visits. Of the 163 visits the King undertook between his accession to the throne and 2024, 69 were to African countries, 38 of them after 2012. After announcing his intention to rejoin the African Union, the King embarked on diplomatic tours targeting the Union's member states, during which he made 38 visits to 14 different countries. When the visits by foreign ministers and prime ministers are also taken into account, it was found that they carried out 146 visits to 27 different countries between 2013 and 2023 (see Table 1). Indeed, a recent study analysing Morocco's foreign policy using quantitative methods examines the visit patterns of the King and foreign ministers and reveals that a country's location on the African continent significantly increases the likelihood of it being visited by Moroccan leaders.⁴⁹ During these visits, hundreds of agreements were signed between Morocco and African countries in the fields of trade, investment, infrastructure, transport and human development. Morocco's financial institutions, telecommunications companies, construction firms and public

⁴⁷ Yasmina Abouzzohour - Beatriz Tomé-Alonso, "Moroccan Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring: A Turn for the Islamists or Persistence of Royal Leadership?," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24/3 (2019), 445.

⁴⁸ "Morocco's Africa Policy," *Strategic Comments* 24/9 (2018), vi-vii.

⁴⁹ Pulat, "Navigating Foreign Policy Priorities," 2928-2931.

bodies have become more active in Africa.⁵⁰ This economic engagement complemented the diplomatic strategy.

Table 1. Distribution of High-Level Foreign Visits by Moroccan Leaders by Period (1991–2023)

Period	Total Visits	Visits to Africa	Share (%)	Royal Visits to Africa
1991–1999	50	12	24.0	3
2000–2012	302	68	22.5	31
2013–2023	584	189	32.4	38
Total	936	269	28.7	72

Note: Visits to Africa include those at the level of the King, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The final column records visits to African countries made by the King alone. The three visits recorded for 1991–1999 belong to the reign of Hassan II, so that the 69 African visits undertaken by Mohammed VI correspond to the sum of the second and third periods. The percentages have been calculated as a proportion of the total number of visits during the relevant period.

⁵⁰ Rim Berahab, “Relations between Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa: What Is the Potential for Trade and Foreign Direct Investment?,” Policy Center for the New South (1 February 2017).

Source: Compiled from data obtained as part of the TÜBİTAK 3005 123K254 project entitled ‘Diplomatic Ties: An Analysis of Inter-State Relations in the Middle East through Leaders ‘Visits’.

As a result of this Africa-focused policy, it was announced in 2016 that Morocco would return to the African Union, and the Kingdom was readmitted unconditionally, without being required to recognise the SADR or to take any prior step towards resolving the Western Sahara dispute. The campaign also produced a collective statement: in July 2016, ahead of readmission, 28 member states signed the Kigali declaration calling for the suspension of the SADR’s membership of the Union.⁵¹ At the 28th African Union Summit held in Addis Ababa in January 2017, the King symbolically described his historic return by saying, “How wonderful it is to come home after being away for so long.”⁵² Remaining outside the continent’s most comprehensive regional organisation had been a long-standing constraint on Moroccan diplomacy, and the readmission removed it without, however, altering the Union’s own recognition of the SADR. Morocco was thereafter in a position to strengthen its relations with a bloc of West African and Francophone African countries.⁵³

Morocco’s diplomatic drive has extended beyond the borders of the African continent. The Rabat administration had long prioritised the support of European countries, the US and the Gulf states in particular regarding the Western Sahara issue. However, during the reign of Mohammed VI, efforts were made to develop relations not only with African nations but also with two key players – China and Russia – both of which are permanent members of the UN Security Council. In 2016, the King undertook an official visit to China and Russia, conveying his request for support on the Western Sahara issue to these two key representatives of the non-Western world.⁵⁴ Russian President Putin signalled his support for Morocco’s stance, but this rapprochement on the President’s

⁵¹ “Morocco in, SADR out,” Good Governance Africa (5 January 2017).

⁵² “Fas Kralı 33 Yıl Sonra Afrika Birliği Zirvesi’nde,” Anadolu Agency (31 January 2017).

⁵³ Sarah Feuer - Reda Ayadi, “Twenty Years Under King Mohammed VI (Part 2): Foreign Policy Developments,” The Washington Institute (29 July 2019).

⁵⁴ Pulat, “Navigating Foreign Policy Priorities,” 2920.

part never translated into an official change of policy.⁵⁵ Beijing likewise declined to endorse Morocco's claim, invoking its general commitment to state sovereignty and territorial integrity, while also refraining from supporting the Polisario Front. The investment relationship gave China an interest in avoiding a confrontation with Rabat, and its effect was therefore to restrain Beijing from taking a position against Morocco rather than to move it towards open support. The contacts that began between Morocco and these two major countries in 2016 continued in subsequent years at the level of foreign ministers.⁵⁶ By 2025, both China and Russia had abstained during the vote on Resolution 2797 rather than opposing it.⁵⁷ Given that both countries have maintained good relations with Algeria since the Cold War era, this was a meaningful return on the 2016 outreach.

Alongside this positive agenda, Morocco used diplomatic and economic pressure to dissuade states from moving towards the Polisario Front, and the pattern of these episodes is consistent enough to be treated as a single instrument rather than as a series of separate crises. The most prominent case was Sweden. Following a parliamentary motion in favour of recognising the SADR and indications in 2015 that the government was reviewing the question, Rabat suspended certain Swedish commercial operations in Morocco and signalled that the country would face an economic boycott. The Swedish government suspended the process and the crisis ended in 2016.⁵⁸ A similar sequence occurred with Germany in 2021. Moroccan authorities reacted after German officials criticised the US for recognising Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara and called for a return to the UN process. The Rabat government recalled its ambassador to Berlin and downgraded diplomatic relations. The crisis between the two countries ended a year later when Germany softened its stance

⁵⁵ Frederic Wehrey, "A Mixed Balance Sheet: Russia's Uneven Influence in the Maghreb," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3 October 2024).

⁵⁶ Yahia H. Zoubir, "Morocco and China: A Pragmatic Relationship," in *Expanding Sino-Maghreb Relations* (London: Chatham House, 2020).

⁵⁷ Steven Höfner, "Resolution 2797," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (4 November 2025).

⁵⁸ The New Arab, "Morocco Hails Sweden's U-Turn on Recognising Western Sahara."

and described the autonomy plan as a positive basis for progress.⁵⁹ Comparable episodes involved France, Spain, the UAE and Tunisia. In each case the instruments were the same: the escalation of tension through the recall of ambassadors and the downgrading of relations, the use of economic leverage, and, in the European cases, the linkage of the dispute to cooperation on migration and counter-terrorism.

The results of the mobilisation, however, were uneven, and the distinction matters for the argument of this article. Around twenty states that had previously recognised the SADR withdrew that recognition, and Morocco regained its seat in the African Union.⁶⁰ At the level of the states whose positions determine the multilateral framework, by contrast, the campaign produced no change. No permanent member of the Security Council recognised Moroccan sovereignty or endorsed the autonomy plan, and the UN continued to frame the dispute in referendum terms.⁶¹ The 2016 crisis provoked by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's use of the term 'occupation' during his visit to Tindouf demonstrated that Morocco did not wield significant influence over United Nations mechanisms.⁶² The mobilisation therefore satisfies the description of an enabling condition rather than a sufficient cause. By 2019 it had reduced the diplomatic cost of aligning with Rabat and had built a constituency of supportive states, but the threshold of great-power recognition had not been crossed. The instruments available to Morocco had been applied to the European states in question for several years without moving them. The development that changed this emerged in 2020 from a decision taken in Washington for reasons that had little to do with Western Sahara itself.

⁵⁹ Graham Keeley, "What's behind the Morocco-Germany Diplomatic Dispute?," *Al Jazeera* (8 March 2021).

⁶⁰ Ahmet Kavas, "Batı Sahra Sorunu ve Afrika'nın Güvenliği," *Anadolu Agency* (16 May 2018).

⁶¹ Peter Fabricius, "Western Sahara's Quest for Independence Seems to Be Flagging," *Institute for Security Studies* (16 August 2024).

⁶² AfricaNews, "Morocco Condemns Ban Ki-Moon's Comments on Western Sahara" (9 March 2016).

5. The Abraham Accords and the 2020 Turning Point

Following Donald Trump's election as president in 2016, one of the key questions was what sort of policy the US would pursue regarding issues in the Middle East. This was because, during his presidential campaign, Trump had occasionally spoken about the Middle East and had signalled significant changes.⁶³ Although the National Security Strategy document published following his election as President contained statements in line with Trump's rhetoric, it did not provide any details.⁶⁴ However, based on both this document and the newly elected president's statements, it was clear that Israel would be at the centre of US policy more than ever before. The National Security Strategy stated that the threats posed by "jihadist terrorist organizations" and by Iran were creating "the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region's problems", and that states in the region had increasingly found common interests with Israel in confronting common threats. In statements made before becoming president, Trump had also emphasised that he would draw up a comprehensive peace plan, which he termed the Deal of the Century, aimed at resolving the Palestinian issue. However, during his presidency, rather than placing the Palestinian issue at the centre of the resolution process, he adopted an approach that encouraged Arab countries to establish official relations with Israel. Whilst this policy aimed to strengthen Israel's regional legitimacy and security, the Palestinian issue was pushed into the background. Working on this issue with a pro-Israel team, led by his son-in-law Jared Kushner and Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt (later Avi Berkowitz), Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) reached during

⁶³ Eric Cortellessa, "Trying to Make Sense of That 'Neutral,' 'Totally Pro-Israel' Donald Trump," *The Times of Israel* (2 March 2016).

⁶⁴ "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (The White House, December 2017), 48.

Barack Obama's term, subsequently imposing tough sanctions on that country.⁶⁵

The Trump administration made intensive diplomatic efforts between 2018 and 2020 to advance the normalisation process later designated the Abraham Accords.⁶⁶ Among the states that joined was Morocco, which, although it had long maintained good relations with Israel, had no formal ties with the country. Kushner and Berkowitz visited Morocco as part of the 'Peace to Prosperity' tour in 2019.⁶⁷ According to information leaked from the talks, the Rabat administration's demand from its counterparts, in return for the normalisation of relations with Israel, was the recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.⁶⁸ The negotiations, which began in early 2019, were prolonged by this demand. Although Trump had rapidly taken decisions his predecessors had avoided, he hesitated on this one, and figures such as the then National Security Adviser John Bolton opposed it.⁶⁹ While the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan concluded their agreements, Morocco, the fourth state to join, continued to press its claim, and the pandemic and the presidential election kept the issue off the White House agenda for several months.⁷⁰

Following Trump's defeat in the November 2020 election, the process accelerated and the negotiations were concluded. Under the agreement, announced by Trump himself on 10 December 2020, the US recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco establishing official relations with Israel. In addition, it was announced that the US would commit to providing Morocco with \$3 billion in investment and financing, whilst

⁶⁵ Mehmet Öztürk, "Trump'ın Kudüs Kararının Bir Analizi," *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8/4 (2019), 2894.

⁶⁶ Joel Singer, "The Abraham Accords: Normalization Agreements Signed by Israel with the U.A.E., Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco," *International Legal Materials* 60/3 (2021), 448-463.

⁶⁷ Sophie Pons, "Kushner Meets Morocco King on Trip to Push Peace Plan," *The Times of Israel* (2019).

⁶⁸ Ravid, "Fallout between Trump and Top GOP Senator Made Morocco-Israel Deal Possible."

⁶⁹ Abdüssamet Pulat, "Fas 2019," in *Ortadoğu Yılı 2019* (İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2020), 306.

⁷⁰ Pulat, "Fas 2019," 306-307.

Morocco would purchase \$1 billion worth of arms and ammunition from the US.⁷¹ The agreement was officially signed on 22 December 2020 in Rabat by Jared Kushner, representing the US; Meir Ben-Shabbat, Chairman of the National Security Council, representing Israel; and Saad Eddine El Othmani, Prime Minister of Morocco.⁷² The sequencing of these instruments is the clearest available evidence of the linkage. The recognition was not announced as a reassessment of American policy on the territory but as one side of a bilateral exchange, and it was subsequently embedded in a trilateral text alongside the normalisation commitments themselves.⁷³ Although the US and Morocco have enjoyed good relations for decades, no administration in the White House had ever referred to Moroccan sovereignty, not even in rhetoric. This decision, taken under the influence of pro-Israel figures within Trump's administration, marked a turning point in the dispute that had been ongoing since 1975. Many countries in the Arab and Islamic world, particularly the Gulf states, had supported Morocco's claims regarding Western Sahara. However, until 2020, no country had recognised Morocco's sovereignty over this region.

Whether the Biden administration would reverse the decision remained uncertain for some time. It did not do so, although it refrained from restating it and did not proceed with the consulate in Dakhla that had been promised. What mattered for Rabat was the continuity of the decision, since recognition by the state with the greatest capacity to shape the multilateral agenda on this issue thereby became a settled feature of the diplomatic landscape rather than a one-term initiative. It was on that basis that other states began to adjust their own positions.

Spain, which adopted a policy described as 'active neutrality' following its withdrawal from Western Sahara in 1975, became one of the countries supporting Morocco's autonomy plan. In 2021, a crisis arose between the two countries

⁷¹ Arieff et al., "Morocco-Israel Normalization and U.S. Policy Change on Western Sahara."

⁷² "Joint Declaration between the Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America, and the State of Israel."

⁷³ Singer, "The Abraham Accords," 450-451.

following the treatment of the Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali in Spain, and this crisis persisted for some time. In March 2022, however, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez formally changed Spain's stance in a letter sent to King Mohammed VI. According to the text of a written question in the European Parliament, the letter stated: "Spain regards Morocco's autonomy initiative as the most serious, realistic and reliable basis for resolving the dispute."⁷⁴ Spain's shift was support for the autonomy plan as a negotiating framework, not recognition of Moroccan sovereignty. Nevertheless, it led Algeria to recall its ambassador from Madrid and ended Spain's policy of neutrality in Morocco's favour.

After 2020, France became another country to support Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara. For decades Paris had provided tacit support to Morocco while avoiding legal recognition, describing the 2007 plan as a serious and credible basis for negotiation without recognising sovereignty, a position that reflected its concern to maintain a balance between Rabat and Algiers.⁷⁵ After 2020 Rabat pressed Paris to abandon the status quo, and relations passed through a period of tension extending from postponed visits to allegations of espionage.⁷⁶ In a letter sent to Mohammed VI in July 2024, President Macron stated that the present and future of Western Sahara lay within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty and described the autonomy plan as the sole basis for a solution, making France the first permanent member of the Security Council to use the language of sovereignty rather than that of support for a negotiating framework. During his official visit in October 2024, Macron reiterated this stance in the Moroccan Parliament, pledged that French companies would contribute to the region's development through investment, and agreements worth up to 10 billion euros were signed as part of the visit. Thus, recognition was

⁷⁴ Ignacio Molina - Pablo del Amo, "Between Principles and National Interest: 50 Years since the Spanish Withdrawal from the Western Sahara," Elcano Royal Institute (7 January 2026).

⁷⁵ "Press Review CW 31/2024: Change of Course," Deutsche Afrika Stiftung (1 August 2024).

⁷⁶ Sarah Zaaimi, "France Has Sided with Morocco on the Western Sahara. How Might Algeria Respond?," Atlantic Council (1 August 2024).

translated from the rhetorical level into economic and institutional practice.⁷⁷ Empirical work on bilateral investment flows indicates that recognition has had measurable economic consequences of this kind.⁷⁸

The United Kingdom followed in 2025. London had maintained a strict neutrality, treating the territory's status as undetermined and supporting the United Nations process based on self-determination.⁷⁹ During his visit to Rabat, Foreign Secretary David Lammy described the 2007 proposal as the most credible, viable and pragmatic basis for resolving the dispute, making the United Kingdom the third permanent member to support the plan. The announcement was accompanied by bilateral agreements covering access to public procurement and infrastructure financing of up to £5 billion.⁸⁰ As in the Spanish case, the British position is one of support for the plan and not of recognition of sovereignty, and the distinction is maintained here because it determines what the shift does and does not establish in legal terms.

These three shifts invite an obvious alternative explanation, which must be addressed before the American decision can be treated as decisive. Each of the states concerned had substantial bilateral reasons to accommodate Rabat: Morocco's role in controlling irregular migration towards Europe, cooperation against terrorism, and extensive trade relations, to which may be added the deterioration of Algeria's relations with Madrid after 2021 and with Paris thereafter. Two observations tell against treating these factors as sufficient. First, they were not new. The same instruments were available to Morocco throughout the

⁷⁷ "France Reverses Course to Back Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Disputed Western Sahara," *France 24* (30 July 2024); "Macron Pledges French Investment in Disputed Western Sahara in Speech to Morocco's Parliament," *France 24* (29 October 2024).

⁷⁸ J. Ait Soussane - A. Ibourek, "The Impact of Recognizing Morocco's Sovereignty over Western Sahara on Bilateral Foreign Direct Investment: An Empirical Analysis Using Panel Data from 2007 to 2022," *Thunderbird International Business Review* 68/3 (2026), 333-355.

⁷⁹ Louisa Brooke-Holland, "Western Sahara," House of Commons Library Research Briefing CBP-9906 (8 July 2026).

⁸⁰ "UK Latest Country to Back Morocco's Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara"; Manara Magazine, "UK's Endorsement of Morocco's Autonomy Plan Signals Turning Point in Foreign Policy" (5 June 2025); Brooke-Holland, "Western Sahara."

2010s, were used in the crises described in Section 4, and did not produce a change of position. What changed after 2020 was not Morocco's leverage but the international cost of exercising it. Second, the content and the language of the shifts point elsewhere. Had the changes been driven by bilateral bargaining over migration or energy, one would expect settlements addressed to those issues. Instead, each government chose to express its accommodation in the specific vocabulary of the autonomy plan, which is the vocabulary Washington had adopted in December 2020. The American decision broadened the basis of international legitimacy available to Morocco's position and reduced the diplomatic cost of a policy shift for other states, and it is in this sense, rather than in the sense of direct pressure on European capitals, that it operated as the precipitating decision.

Beyond the states discussed above, more than ten countries declared their support for the 2007 plan after 2020, among them Hungary, Slovenia, Greece and Panama, while others withdrew their recognition of the SADR. Twenty-nine states have opened consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla or announced their intention to do so, giving practical expression to their alignment with Rabat's position.⁸¹

The multilateral consequences became visible in 2025. Following Trump's return to office, the United States again supported Rabat within the Security Council, and at the October session concerning the extension of MINURSO's mandate it circulated, as penholder, a draft resolution describing the autonomy plan as the "most serious, credible and realistic" option and providing for an extension of only three months. Algeria, together with Russia, China and Pakistan, argued that the draft undermined the principle of impartiality, privileged Morocco's proposal over other options and gave insufficient weight to the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. The text was revised

⁸¹ Issa - Babas, "Sahara: Which Countries Still Recognize 'SADR'?" ; "Paraguay to Open Consulate in Morocco-Ruled Western Sahara."

twice: the language on the autonomy plan was softened, the emphasis on self-determination was strengthened, and the mandate was extended by one year.⁸²

Resolution 2797 was adopted on 31 October 2025 by eleven votes in favour and none against, with China, Pakistan and Russia abstaining and Algeria, then a non-permanent member, not participating in the vote.⁸³ Its operative paragraph 3 calls upon the parties “to engage in these discussions without preconditions, taking as basis Morocco’s Autonomy Proposal, with a view to achieving a final and mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”, and recognises that “genuine autonomy could represent a most feasible outcome”.⁸⁴ Three features of this text should be distinguished. First, the Autonomy Proposal is named, for the first time, as the basis of the negotiations, which represents a change in the framework rather than in the legal status of the territory. Second, the formulation is qualified: the resolution refers to “a most feasible outcome” rather than the most feasible one, the phrase “under Moroccan sovereignty” appears in the preamble and not in the operative paragraph, and the reference to self-determination is retained. An earlier revision had stated that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty was the most feasible solution, and that formulation did not survive the negotiations. Third, the resolution makes no reference to a referendum, which had been the organising premise of the settlement plan since 1991.

The resolution therefore consolidated a shift in the negotiating framework without conferring recognition of sovereignty, and it should be read as the multilateral registration of a change that had already occurred bilaterally rather than as an independent turning point. Following its adoption, Mohammed VI described 31 October 2025 as a historic threshold, stating that there would

⁸² “What Next for the Western Sahara?”

⁸³ “With 11 Members Voting in Favour, 3 Abstaining, Security Council Adopts Resolution 2797 (2025),” United Nations Meetings Coverage, SC/16208 (31 October 2025).

⁸⁴ “Resolution 2797 (2025),” S/RES/2797, para. 3. For an assessment of the shift, see İhsan Faruk Kılavuz, “UNSC Resolution 2797 on Western Sahara: From a Status Quo to a Pragmatic Approach,” TRT World Research Centre (1 December 2025).

henceforth be a 'before' and an 'after'.⁸⁵ The reception was not uniform. The Polisario Front rejected the framework, Algeria declined to participate in the vote, and human rights organisations argued that endorsing a proposal that does not include independence among the available outcomes is difficult to reconcile with the right to self-determination as the United Nations has previously articulated it.⁸⁶ These objections do not diminish the diplomatic significance of the resolution for Rabat, but they indicate why the adoption of a negotiating framework is not equivalent to the settlement of the dispute.

6. Conclusion

After decades of stalemate, the Western Sahara issue has undergone a marked diplomatic shift in Morocco's favour. This study argues that this transformation cannot be attributed to a single event. Rather, it resulted from the interaction between Morocco's long-term diplomatic mobilisation and the US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in 2020. During the reign of Mohammed VI, Morocco increasingly placed Western Sahara at the centre of its foreign policy. Rabat deepened its political and economic relations with African states, intensified high-level visits, expanded investments and sought to reduce recognition of the SADR. Morocco's return to the African Union in 2017 was one of the most significant outcomes of this strategy. These efforts weakened the Polisario Front's international support and increased acceptance of Morocco's autonomy plan as a possible basis for negotiations.

Nevertheless, Morocco's diplomatic gains before 2020 were insufficient to change the positions of major powers regarding the territory's status. The same instruments that proved effective against smaller states and within the African Union produced no movement among the permanent members of the Security Council, and this asymmetry is the central finding of the study. The US recognition decision therefore represented a critical turning point. It also

⁸⁵ "UN Security Council Supports Morocco's Plan for Western Sahara," *Al Jazeera* (31 October 2025).

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch, "UN: Western Sahara Peoples' Self-Determination at Risk" (25 March 2026).

strengthened the international legitimacy of Morocco's position and reduced the political cost for other states of supporting the autonomy plan. The subsequent policy changes of Spain, France and the United Kingdom demonstrated the wider impact of this shift, and Resolution 2797 further increased the weight of Morocco's proposal within the negotiation framework, naming it as the basis of the discussions while stopping short of any endorsement of sovereignty.

The contribution of the study lies in treating two dynamics that the literature has largely examined separately, the long-term Moroccan mobilisation and the rupture of 2020, as a single causal sequence, and in extending that sequence to the multilateral level reached in 2025. Read in this way, the mobilisation appears as an enabling condition that made a great-power decision consequential, while the decision of December 2020 appears as the precipitating factor that converted accumulated diplomatic capital into a change of framework. The principal limitation of the analysis follows from its evidentiary base. The internal record of the American decision is not publicly available, so the relative weight of the Moroccan demand, of the administration's regional priorities and of domestic political considerations within that decision cannot be established with precision. Nor is the period following Resolution 2797 long enough to permit an assessment of implementation.

Finally, the limits of what has changed should be stated plainly. Morocco's sovereignty over the territory has been recognised by a small number of states and remains without foundation in a general legal determination. The autonomy proposal has become the basis of negotiation without having been accepted by the other party. The Polisario Front and Algeria reject the emerging framework, and MINURSO continues to operate under a mandate whose original purpose was never fulfilled. What has changed is the distribution of international positions surrounding the dispute, and its effects already reach beyond diplomacy into investment and institutional cooperation. The current situation should therefore be understood as a realignment of the diplomatic balance in Morocco's favour rather than as the resolution of the conflict.

Bibliography

- Abouzzohour, Yasmina - Tomé-Alonso, Beatriz. "Moroccan Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring: A Turn for the Islamists or Persistence of Royal Leadership?" *The Journal of North African Studies* 24/3 (2019), 444-467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2018.1454652>
- Abrams, Elliott. "Morocco's Victory on the Western Sahara." Council on Foreign Relations, 2 November 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/morocco-victory-western-sahara-1>
- AfricaNews. "Morocco Condemns Ban Ki-Moon's Comments on Western Sahara." 9 March 2016. <https://www.africanews.com/2016/03/09/morocco-condemns-ban-ki-moon-s-comments-on-western-sahara/>
- Ait Soussane, J. - Ibourk, A. "The Impact of Recognizing Morocco's Sovereignty over Western Sahara on Bilateral Foreign Direct Investment: An Empirical Analysis Using Panel Data from 2007 to 2022." *Thunderbird International Business Review* 68/3 (2026), 333-355.
- Al Jazeera. "UN Security Council Supports Morocco's Plan for Western Sahara." 31 October 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/31/un-security-council-supports-morocco-plan-for-western-sahara>
- Allen, Stephen - Trinidad, Jamie. *The Western Sahara Question and International Law: Recognition Doctrine and Self-Determination*. London: Routledge, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032658827>
- Anadolu Agency. "Fas Kralı 33 Yıl Sonra Afrika Birliği Zirvesi'nde." 31 January 2017. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/fas-krali-33-yil-sonra-afrika-birligi-zirvesinde/738592>
- Arieff, Alexis et al. "Morocco-Israel Normalization and U.S. Policy Change on Western Sahara." Congressional Research Service, 15 December 2020.
- Baers, Michael. *A History of the Western Sahara Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022.

- Berahab, Rim. "Relations between Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa: What Is the Potential for Trade and Foreign Direct Investment?" Policy Center for the New South, 1 February 2017. <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/relations-between-morocco-and-sub-saharan-africa-what-potential-trade-and-foreign>
- Brooke-Holland, Louisa. "Western Sahara." House of Commons Library Research Briefing CBP-9906, 8 July 2026. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9906/>
- Cortellessa, Eric. "Trying to Make Sense of That 'Neutral,' 'Totally Pro-Israel' Donald Trump." *The Times of Israel*, 2 March 2016. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trying-to-make-sense-of-that-neutral-totally-pro-israel-donald-trump/>
- Daadaoui, Mohamed. "The Western Sahara Conflict: Towards a Constructivist Approach to Self-Determination." *The Journal of North African Studies* 13/2 (2008), 143-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380801996471>
- Deutsche Afrika Stiftung. "Press Review CW 31/2024: Change of Course." 1 August 2024. <https://www.deutsche-afrika-stiftung.de/en/press/press-review-cw-31-2024-change-of-course/>
- Dursun, Davut - Miş, Nebi. "Batı Sahra: Sömürge Mirasında Hakimiyet Mücadelesi." *Dünya Çatışmaları: Çatışma Bölgeleri ve Konuları*. 1/199-223. İstanbul: Nobel, 2010.
- Fabricius, Peter. "Western Sahara's Quest for Independence Seems to Be Flagging." Institute for Security Studies, 16 August 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/western-sahara-s-quest-for-independence-seems-to-be-flagging>
- Feuer, Sarah - Ayadi, Reda. "Twenty Years Under King Mohammed VI (Part 2): Foreign Policy Developments." The Washington Institute, 29 July 2019. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twenty-years-under-king-mohammed-vi-part-2-foreign-policy-developments>
- France 24. "France Reverses Course to Back Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Disputed Western Sahara." 30 July 2024.

<https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240730-france-backs-morocco-s-autonomy-plan-for-disputed-western-sahara>

France 24. "Macron Pledges French Investment in Disputed Western Sahara in Speech to Morocco's Parliament." 29 October 2024.

France 24. "UK Latest Country to Back Morocco's Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara." 1 June 2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250601-uk-morocco-western-sahara>

Good Governance Africa. "Morocco in, SADR Out." 5 January 2017. <https://gga.org/morocco-in-sadr-out/>

Hicks, Celeste. "Why Did the African Union Readmit Morocco after Its 33 Years in the Cold?" *African Arguments*, 2 February 2017. <https://africanarguments.org/2017/02/how-did-morocco-manage-to-rejoin-the-african-union-after-33-years-in-the-cold/>

Höfner, Steven. "Resolution 2797." Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 4 November 2025. <https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/resolution-2797>

Human Rights Watch. "UN: Western Sahara Peoples' Self-Determination at Risk." 25 March 2026. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/25/un-western-sahara-peoples-self-determination-at-risk>

International Court of Justice. *Western Sahara*, Advisory Opinion. ICJ Reports 1975, 12.

Issa, Ouardani - Babas, Latifa. "Sahara: Which Countries Still Recognize 'SADR'?" Yabiladi, 29 November 2024. <https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/156883/sahara-which-countries-still-recognize.html>

Jensen, Erik. *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005.

Joffé, George. "Sovereignty and the Western Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 15/3 (2010), 375-384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2010.520237>

- Kavas, Ahmet. "Batı Sahra Sorunu ve Afrika'nın Güvenliği." Anadolu Agency, 16 May 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/bati-sahra-sorunu-ve-afrikanin-guvenligi/1147826>
- Keeley, Graham. "What's behind the Morocco-Germany Diplomatic Dispute?" *Al Jazeera*, 8 March 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/8/whats-behind-the-morocco-germany-diplomatic-row>
- Kılavuz, İhsan Faruk. "UNSC Resolution 2797 on Western Sahara: From a Status Quo to a Pragmatic Approach." TRT World Research Centre, 1 December 2025. <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/publications/analysis/unsc-resolution-2797-on-western-sahara-from-a-status-quo-to-a-pragmatic-approach/>
- Maghraoui, Driss. "The Multiple Layers of Morocco's Normalization with Israel." *Risks, Resilience and Interdependency*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-7167-0_10
- Majdoubi Bahida, El Houssine. "Is the West Shifting Towards Supporting 'Autonomy' in Western Sahara?" International Centre for Dialogue Initiatives, 20 August 2024. <https://dialogueinitiatives.org/is-the-west-shifting-towards-supporting-autonomy-in-western-sahara/>
- Manara Magazine. "UK's Endorsement of Morocco's Autonomy Plan Signals Turning Point in Foreign Policy." 5 June 2025. <https://manaramagazine.org/2025/06/uks-endorsement-of-moroccos-autonomy-plan-signals-turning-point-in-foreign-policy/>
- MINURSO. "About MINURSO." United Nations Peace Operations, 17 April 2026. <https://minurso.unmissions.org/en/about-minurso>
- Mohammed VI. "Discours de SM le Roi Mohammed VI à l'occasion de l'anniversaire de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple." Rabat, 20 August 2022. <https://maroc.ma/fr/discours-messages-royaux/discours-royaux/discours-de-sm-le-roi-mohammed-vi-loccasion-de-lanniversaire-de-la-revolution-du-roi-et-du-peuple>

- Mohammed VI. "Discours du Trône de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI." Rabat, 30 July 1999. <https://maroc.ma/fr/discours-messages-royaux/discours-royaux/discours-du-trone-de-sa-majeste-le-roi-mohammed-vi>
- Molina, Ignacio - del Amo, Pablo. "Between Principles and National Interest: 50 Years since the Spanish Withdrawal from the Western Sahara." Elcano Royal Institute, 7 January 2026. <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/between-principles-and-national-interest-50-years-since-the-spanish-withdrawal-from-the-western-sahara/>
- Mouhoub, Nourelhouda. "Western Sahara in Transition: Geopolitics, Diplomacy, and Uncertain Future." *Al Sharq Strategic Research*, 1 April 2026. <https://research.sharqforum.org/2026/04/01/western-sahara-in-transition-geopolitics-diplomacy-and-uncertain-future/>
- Noutcheva, Gergana. "Contested Statehood and EU Actorness in Kosovo, Abkhazia and Western Sahara." *Geopolitics* 25/2 (2020), 449-471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1556641>
- ORSAM. "Batı Sahra Sorunu." 2021. <https://orsam.org.tr/yayinlar/bati-sahra-sorunu/>
- Öztürk, Mehmet. "Trump'ın Kudüs Kararının Bir Analizi." *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8/4 (2019), 2876-2905. <https://doi.org/10.15869/itobiad.597096>
- Pazzanita, Anthony G. "Morocco versus Polisario: A Political Interpretation." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32/2 (1994), 265-278.
- Pons, Sophie. "Kushner Meets Morocco King on Trip to Push Peace Plan." *The Times of Israel*, 2019. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/kushner-meets-moroccan-king-on-trip-to-push-us-peace-plan/>
- Pulat, Abdüssamet. "Fas 2019." *Ortadoğu Yıllığı 2019*. 302-308. İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2020.
- Pulat, Abdüssamet. "Navigating Foreign Policy Priorities: Leader Diplomacy of Morocco in the Period of King Mohammed VI." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 61/4 (2026), 2919-2935. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096251359238>

- Ravid, Barak. "Fallout between Trump and Top GOP Senator Made Morocco-Israel Deal Possible." *Axios*, 11 December 2020. <https://www.axios.com/2020/12/11/trump-morocco-israel-inhofe>
- Redondo, Raúl. "Morocco and the Sahara: 50 Years of the Green March." *Atalayar*, 6 November 2025. <https://www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/politics/morocco-and-the-sahara-50-years-of-the-green-march/20251106120550220177.html>
- Reuters. "Trump Gives Awards to Top Aides for Arab-Israeli Deals." 24 December 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-gives-awards-top-aides-arab-israeli-deals-2020-12-24/>
- San Martín, Pablo. "Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship in the Western Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 10/3-4 (2005), 565-592. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380500336870>
- Singer, Joel. "The Abraham Accords: Normalization Agreements Signed by Israel with the U.A.E., Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco." *International Legal Materials* 60/3 (2021), 448-463. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ilm.2021.18>
- Soler i Lecha, Eduard - Arco Escriche, Inés. "The Western Sahara Conflict in a Post-Hegemonic World: Interests, Values and Foreign Policy Strategies." *The Journal of North African Studies* 30/4 (2025), 579-610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2500472>
- Strategic Comments. "Morocco's Africa Policy." 24/9 (2018), vi-vii. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2018.1557844>
- Suárez-Collado, Ángela - Torrejón Rodríguez, Juan Domingo. "Natural Resource Governance in Western Sahara: Contemporary Issues and Emerging Themes and Approaches." *The Journal of North African Studies* 30/4 (2025), 557-578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2492863>
- The Arab Weekly. "Paraguay to Open Consulate in Morocco-Ruled Western Sahara, Joining 29 Other Nations." 2025. <http://the arabweekly.com/paraguay-open-consulate-morocco-ruled-western-sahara-joining-29-other-nations>

- The New Arab. "Morocco Hails Sweden's U-Turn on Recognising Western Sahara." 16 January 2016. <https://www.newarab.com/news/morocco-hails-swedens-u-turn-recognising-western-sahara>
- The White House. "National Security Strategy of the United States of America." December 2017.
- The White House. "Proclamation on Recognizing the Sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Western Sahara." 10 December 2020.
- Unit for Political Studies. "What Next for the Western Sahara? The Repercussions of Security Council Resolution 2797." Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 13 November 2025. <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/security-council-resolution-2797-background-and-implications-for-western-sahara.aspx>
- United Nations. "Joint Declaration between the Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America, and the State of Israel." 22 December 2020.
- United Nations Meetings Coverage. "With 11 Members Voting in Favour, 3 Abstaining, Security Council Adopts Resolution 2797 (2025), Renewing Mandate of UN Mission in Western Sahara for One Year." SC/16208, 31 October 2025. <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16208.doc.htm>
- United Nations Security Council. "Letter Dated 11 April 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council." S/2007/206.
- United Nations Security Council. Resolution 690 (1991). S/RES/690, 29 April 1991.
- United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2797 (2025). S/RES/2797, 31 October 2025.
- Wehrey, Frederic. "A Mixed Balance Sheet: Russia's Uneven Influence in the Maghreb." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 October 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/russias-uneven-influence-maghreb>

- Weiner, Jerome B. "The Green March in Historical Perspective." *Middle East Journal* 33/1 (1979), 20-33.
- Zaaimi, Sarah. "France Has Sided with Morocco on the Western Sahara. How Might Algeria Respond?" Atlantic Council, 1 August 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/france-has-sided-with-morocco-on-the-western-sahara-how-might-algeria-respond/>
- Liang, Zhiwen. "Morocco's Western Sahara Policy during the Reign of Mohammed VI." *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2/2 (2024), 419-434.
- Zoubir, Yahia H. "Morocco and China: A Pragmatic Relationship." *Expanding Sino-Maghreb Relations*. London: Chatham House, 2020. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/02/expanding-sino-maghreb-relations/3-morocco-and-china-pragmatic-relationship>
- Zoubir, Yahia H. "The Western Sahara Conflict: Regional and International Dimensions." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 28/2 (1990), 225-243. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00054434>
- Zunes, Stephen - Mundy, Jacob. *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1j2n9vz>