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The Sahara Question and Foreign Policy Realism: An Analysis of Paradigmatic and Conceptual Evolution

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Abstract – The Moroccan Sahara question, central to the paradigm of territorial integrity, is a longstanding and influential factor in the evolution of modern Morocco's foreign policy. As a foundational pillar of the nation-state's completion, the Sahara issue has played a decisive role in shaping the Kingdom's diplomatic direction. This issue holds a dual significance: domestically, it reinforces political legitimacy and national identity, while internationally, it serves as a core aspect of Morocco's foreign policy framework. This duality has been a defining characteristic of Morocco's approach to the Sahara. Morocco's foreign policy realism is anchored in several parameters, primarily the prioritisation of territorial integrity as essential to state survival, aligning with core realist tenets such as national interest, security, and sovereignty. In this context, the Sahara question acts as a vital expression of national interest, thus underpinning the predominance of realism in Morocco's diplomatic conduct. However, this realist focus on the Sahara also raises potential tensions with other policy vectors, such as economic and social development or the Kingdom's strategic influence. Recognising these potential conflicts, the Moroccan state has sought a balanced approach, maintaining the Sahara as a foreign policy priority while abandoning isolationist stances. This paper hypothesises an evolution towards a functionalist realism in Moroccan diplomacy. By integrating elements of neorealism, Morocco's foreign policy seeks to balance various objectives, positioning the diplomatic pursuit of territorial integrity alongside broader development and strategic aspirations.

Keywords: Moroccan Sahara; Moroccan foreign policy; territorial sovereignty; political realism; Moroccan diplomacy; nationalism; neorealism

Introduction

The Moroccan Sahara question—and more broadly, the paradigm of territorial integrity—constitutes a persistent leitmotif in the historical development of modern Morocco. As such, this issue, a fundamental pillar in the struggle for the completion of the modern Moroccan nation-state, has played a decisive role in shaping the foreign policy of contemporary Morocco. Its trajectory is intimately tied to the broader evolution of the modern nation-state apparatus.

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The Sahara question carries a dual dimension: on the one hand, it serves as an instrument of domestic politics, particularly in relation to the mechanisms of political legitimisation and the assertion of national sentiment; on the other, it functions as a metronome of Morocco's foreign policy (Hannoun, 2006). This "ambivalence" is one of the defining features of the way this dossier has been managed over time.

The realist orientation of Morocco's foreign policy is a structuring element shaped by a variety of parameters and factors. However, this realist tendency—as described by the general theory of international relations—encounters certain tensions, particularly in relation to the prioritisation of the objective of completing national territorial integrity.

Realist doctrine is grounded in the concepts of national interest, state security, and sovereignty. In the Moroccan context, the completion of territorial integrity is perceived as a condition for the very survival of the state. Consequently, the Sahara issue, as a central component of the national interest, helps explain the predominance of realism in the conduct of Moroccan foreign policy.

It may be hypothesised that the centrality of the Sahara question within the foreign policy framework potentially comes at the expense of other strategic dimensions, such as economic and social development or the broader international influence of the Kingdom. The Moroccan state has recognised the risk of such a contradiction. In response, it has sought to establish a balanced foreign policy that maintains the Sahara issue as a strategic prism, while simultaneously abandoning the policy of the "empty chair."

In this regard, one may identify an evolution—indeed, a functional recalibration—of Moroccan realism. Realism has positioned Moroccan diplomacy in the near-exclusive service of territorial integrity. However, the emergence of a form of neorealism within Moroccan foreign policy reveals an attempt to strike a balance between multiple priorities. This raises the following question: How has Morocco managed to rationalise its policy priorities in a way that transforms decision-making optimisation into a lever for both conceptualisation and action?

The Sahara question as a vector of realism

The classical definition of foreign policy highlights the following elements:

- It is defined as the instrument by which a state attempts to act upon its international political environment (Institut Royal des Etudes stratégiques, 2019).
- The policy followed by a state in matters of international relations stems from the sovereign power of its highest authority (Eid, 2019).
- Foreign policy, as an object of study, is never monolithic. It consists of a set of attitudes, decisions, orientations, and actions. The multiplicity of direct and underlying forces acting upon foreign policy makes it a complex scientific object (Duroselle, 1992).

Realism, as the dominant theory in the study of international relations, posits that states are the main actors on the international stage, primarily guided by the pursuit of power and the preservation of their security. This approach highlights the way foreign policy decisions are shaped by considerations of power and strategic concerns, rather than by moral ideals or international norms. From this perspective, foreign policy becomes a scientific object that can be analysed through the prism of national interests and power relations.

Realism entails prioritising the primary needs of states—namely, survival and security. It is for this reason that realism has established itself as the dominant framework in the study of foreign policies. Realism is not an immoral orientation; it is simply a redeployment of moral priorities from a particular perspective in which otherness holds less weight. The priority does not have a collective scope such as building a peaceful world, but rather an egoistic scope—namely, the preservation of the state's interests (Kouadio & Moumine, 2011). Those who adopt and practise the principle of realism are convinced that the nature of the world is inherently conflictual. The principle of sovereignty, a pillar of the international state system, ensures that the world will always exhibit certain characteristics of

disorder. Since states are potentially powerful actors, they are compelled to display a certain form of self-interest in order to preserve themselves.

In fact, it is the prevalence of the principle of state sovereignty that structures the international community and international law. Sovereignty implies the absence of a superior authority; it naturally leads to another fundamental principle, that of the equality of states. This absence of a superior authority has always placed the concept of domination and power at the centre of international relations.

In Morocco, the question of the Sahara today constitutes the primary focus of the struggle for territorial integrity, which itself has been a constant priority of the Moroccan state since independence. Moroccan nationalism was built upon the struggle for territorial unity. One of the Kingdom's historical specificities lies in the fact that its millennia-old independence spared it from civilisational erosion. It was thus able to develop a singular identity bloc. This asset was directly and dangerously threatened; Morocco was divided into three zones. Thanks to its historical capital, the colonial episode remained relatively brief and did not manage to break the momentum of civilisational uniqueness.

All these elements have resulted in the following facts:

- The precolonial political power was able to maintain itself while strengthening its social and economic foundations.
- The country's full independence was not achieved in a single historical moment. Morocco experienced staggered moments of independence (1956, 1958, 1969, 1975, 1979...).
- This specificity had the effect of making territorial integrity the main political issue of independent Morocco. The political forces in place thus invested in this survival field of the nation to strengthen their positions.

From the earliest years of independence, the issue of the "Spanish Sahara" became a major concern both internally and diplomatically and geopolitically.

Internally, the question of Saguia El Hamra and Rio de Oro became an opportunity for the political power to reinforce its legitimacy and draw on historical capital in the construction of modern Morocco. This includes the invocation of restoring Morocco within its authentic historical borders. It also includes the emphasis on the allegiance bond between the Sultan and the Umma, known as *Beia* (البيعة) in Muslim public law. In the Moroccan conception, more emphasis is placed on the Rousseauian (Jean-Jacques Rousseau) character of this bond, referencing the concept of the social contract. In Morocco, *Beia* is a social and political contract through which each party (Sultan, Umma) commits to fulfilling its obligations: the Umma must obey the Sultan and contribute to his efforts to defend the territory and religion, while the Sultan, for his part, commits to doing everything in his power to defend the territory of *Dar al-Islam* (Mouaquit, 2013).

The recovery of the territory, inscribed on the UN decolonisation agenda, became one of the means of legitimation that lay exclusively in the hands of the Monarchy, beyond any competition. The national movement—particularly the Istiqlal party, a true support force of political power—risked turning into a potential competitor to that power. Thus, Allal El Fassi did not hesitate to brandish this card. Greater Morocco was a tool used to put pressure so that Morocco could put an end to the historical fragmentation from which it had suffered.¹

All these elements generated a contradiction between Moroccan claims based on historical rights and the key principles of international decolonisation law, whose historical construction took place within the Western framework. Classical international law is the result of the evolution of international power relations in the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and America. In fact, international law is the child of precolonial and imperialist gestations.

One of the most significant points of contradiction lay in the notion of historical rights. The history of political power in Morocco is based on personal ties, crystallised by the bond of allegiance. In contrast, the basis of international law is linked to the effectiveness of territorial ties. This contradiction was illustrated in the 1975 Advisory Opinion delivered by the International Court of

Justice in The Hague.² Through the Green March, Morocco sought to assert its own conception of territorial rights based on a selective reading of that advisory opinion.

In his book *The Social and Cultural Origins of Moroccan Nationalism*, historian Abdallah Laroui clearly linked the birth of Moroccan nationalism to the struggles of the Sharifian Empire against European and colonial penetration attempts (Laroui, 1977). The centrality of the Sahara issue in Moroccan foreign policy is an extension of the role that the struggle for territorial integrity has historically played in Morocco's international relations. In a speech on 20 August 2022, on the occasion of the anniversary of the King and the People's Revolution, King Mohammed VI declared:

I would like to send a clear message to everyone: the Sahara issue is the prism through which Morocco considers its international environment. It is also, clearly and simply, the yardstick by which it measures the sincerity of friendships and partnerships it forges.³

This prism did not originate in this 2022 royal speech. It has been consistently expressed and implemented. One of its most significant historical manifestations was Morocco's withdrawal from the Organisation of African Unity, of which it was a founding member.⁴ At times in history, Morocco even distanced itself from its most loyal allies and supporters. This was the case with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which provoked the discontent of the late King Hassan II when the Polisario leader addressed the Palestinian National Council in 1987.⁵ More recently, on 19 December 2007, Morocco recalled its ambassador to Dakar for consultations following remarks deemed unfriendly by the head of the Senegalese Socialist Party in Tifariti. These are strong examples of the Moroccan diplomacy's intransigent stance on this issue. Friendly countries like Spain and the United States have also faced Moroccan displeasure.⁶

National interest is a central concept in foreign policy, referring to the fundamental goals a country seeks to achieve to ensure its security, prosperity, and influence. It may include aspects such as national security, economic performance, political influence, and culture. The formulation of national interest presents itself as a dynamic and complex process, as this category reflects social realities that encompass the totality of the needs and aspirations common to all members of a socio-cultural entity. It is imperative to note that satisfying and supporting these needs and aspirations is a necessary condition for the existence and identity of a society as a historical subject (Juc & Dodu Savca, 2014).

National interest can remain a subjective notion insofar as the definition of priorities depends on subjective analysis and interpretation. Within this framework arises the question of determining the legitimate political authority to set the order of priorities in foreign policy and thereby define national interest.

It is within this framework that the decision-making process constitutes the main dimension of the study of foreign policy (El Houdaigui, 2003). In Morocco, the constitutional system results in a centralisation of decision-making at the level of the Monarchy. Indeed, foreign policy decisions are linked to the strategic and historical foundations of the State. Foreign policy is a function of the deep forces that define its broad orientations (Renouvin & Duroselle, 2007).

Nevertheless, the supreme decision in foreign policy—whose primary dimension consists in defining the national interest—is not a purely arbitrary and absolutist process. The definition of national interest is the result of various historical and political factors that have themselves contributed to the construction of the modern nation-state. In France, for example, maintaining France's civilisational influence remains one of the key elements constituting the French state and a metronome of its foreign policy.

The decision-making process, along with the historical memory and the deep forces that shape a state, defines the hierarchy of foreign policy priorities and determines what constitutes the national interest. In Morocco, the national interest has historically been closely tied to the issue of territorial integrity. This connection has gradually crystallised into a foundational principle of foreign policy, particularly through the primacy of the Sahara question in both diplomatic and strategic considerations.

This national interest, interpreted through the realist lens, highlights the continuity of the Moroccan state's policies despite changes in the international context. The state's strategic posture reflects the permanence of certain fundamentals that derive from Morocco's long-standing historical narrative, and which continue to influence its political behaviour and diplomatic choices.

In essence, Moroccan foreign policy towards the Sahara question exemplifies how realism operates in practice. It is driven not only by the pursuit of power or the maximisation of strategic advantage, but also by the historical construction of identity, sovereignty, and legitimacy. The Sahara issue, far from being a mere geopolitical dispute, embodies a national consensus and a symbolic struggle for survival and recognition in the international system.

The consistency with which Morocco defends its territorial integrity, even at the cost of diplomatic fallout or temporary isolation, is emblematic of the realist logic that places national interests above all else. This unwavering stance stems from a deep conviction that survival, security, and sovereignty are non-negotiable priorities, which must be preserved even in the face of international legal norms or external pressures (Balta, 1990; Stora, 2002).

Ultimately, the case of Morocco's foreign policy regarding the Sahara demonstrates how realism remains a relevant and explanatory framework in understanding the behaviour of states, especially in postcolonial contexts where sovereignty, identity, and historical legitimacy remain vital stakes of international politics.

Neorealism and foreign policy: In search of goal complementarity

We established in the first part that the realism of Moroccan foreign policy is perfectly illustrated by the prioritisation of the cause of the Moroccan Sahara, seen as the principal embodiment of the paradigm of completing territorial integrity. The time-consuming and quasi-permanent nature of this issue makes it vulnerable to the changing dynamics of the international environment. Indeed, although it remains a top priority in foreign policy, the Sahara question is subject to the test of time. Moroccan foreign policy itself is constantly evolving in response to shifts in geostrategic stakes. Adaptation is an act of survival, and this maxim holds true for states within the realm of international relations (Brailard & Jalili, 2025).

Since the late 1990s, Moroccan foreign policy has consistently sought to answer the following question: what place should Morocco occupy in a changing world? Foreign policy lies at the intersection of global imperatives and domestic political demands. Until the 1990s, it was clear that Morocco needed to concentrate on completing its territorial integrity: before reflecting on Morocco's place in the world, one had to first conceive what kind of Morocco should be promoted.

The Morocco that emerged from independence in 1956 did not reflect its authentic and historical borders. Morocco had to be strong in its identity. The Sahara conflict is an anachronistic one for several reasons:

- It continues to be presented at the United Nations within the framework of decolonisation. The territory itself is still classified as a "non-self-governing territory" eligible for the application of the right to self-determination, a pillar of decolonisation law. It remains on the agenda of the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, which deals with decolonisation issues—one of the most glaring examples of the outdated and rigid nature of the current conflict-resolution framework.
- The Sahara conflict was born from and influenced by the Cold War context. It has outlived that era and become a relic of a bygone time. Algeria has made it a leitmotif for projecting its international influence and asserting its role as a regional power that seeks to perpetuate its anti-colonial struggle.

This anachronistic nature of the Sahara conflict clearly demonstrates the Moroccan nation's deep attachment to this sacred cause and the unanimity it generates. Nevertheless, it could become a source of pressure on the state. Indeed, the renewal of international challenges is an inevitability tied

to global transformations. Morocco's international ambitions require the pursuit of parallel geo-economic objectives. The challenge of development is becoming increasingly urgent; Morocco possesses geographical, historical, and political potential that constitutes a decisive asset. The Moroccan state should not remain confined by the ossification of its foreign policy. While the territorial issue remains constant, the means to address it must be continually renewed.

From the early 2000s to the early 2020s, major events disrupted the international order established after the Cold War. Morocco, due to the specificities of its political system—centred around the strategic role of the Monarchy—initiated a redeployment of its diplomacy in line with the transformation of the “strategic intent of the state” (El Houdaigui, 2022). The completion of the modern Moroccan state-building project had to take multiple yet complementary forms. The completion of territorial integrity needed to go hand in hand with development and economic outreach in service of the Nation.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Morocco faced major deficiencies, particularly on economic and social fronts. In the late 1990s, Hassan II warned in a speech that Morocco risked a heart attack. This alarm bell reflected a real awareness of the challenges at hand and signalled the beginning of a shift in the state's strategic intent.

This shift coincided with the royal succession. King Mohammed VI was confronted with the following strategic dilemma: How to uphold the dogma of completing territorial integrity as the leitmotif of foreign policy while adapting that policy to the evolving international landscape? Improving the living conditions of Moroccans could only happen through a significant improvement in the national economy's performance, which in turn required effective exploitation of Morocco's potential and full integration into the dynamics of globalisation.

The response to this dilemma could not simply lie in seeking a balance. Balance, by definition, implies a break from wholeness; it is based on a process of relativisation. By pursuing balance in this context, the cause of the Moroccan Sahara would inevitably lose its status as the absolute priority of foreign policy. Instead, the goal was to create a kind of synergy, whereby the two major dimensions of foreign policy could become complementary. Morocco has retained the main realist features of its foreign policy, namely adaptation to the constraints of the international context. However, this realism has taken on new characteristics and expressions.

During the phase that followed the 11 September 2001 attacks, a period marked by the hardening of American foreign policy and its effort to keep the world within its sphere of influence, Moroccan diplomacy found itself with limited room for manoeuvre (Saddiki, 2024). The consolidation of a unipolar international order pushed Moroccan diplomacy to develop a strategy that would harness the economy to strengthen Morocco's position on the Sahara issue. Thus, Morocco had to navigate international pressures resulting from the United States' direct involvement in the UN peace process. James Baker, a prominent figure in American diplomacy and the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General, exerted pressure—backed by the American state—to impose a final solution, though without success.

The Moroccan State has undertaken actions aimed at capitalising on its existing potential by leveraging the country's geopolitical status. The conclusion of free trade agreements with the United States and the European Union, as well as the construction of the Tanger Med port, were among the key means deployed to achieve this goal. Strengthening Morocco's status as a geoeconomic partner of the West was intended to prevent any international attempt to impose a solution to the Sahara issue that Morocco would reject. The Kingdom utilised its diplomatic assets to reinforce its integration into global value chains. Major national corporations, referred to as “national champions,” were directed to make substantial investments in strategic sectors, particularly in Africa.

The gradual decline of American supremacy, especially during President Barack Obama's tenure, provided Morocco with additional room for manoeuvre, enabling it to undertake a more dynamic redeployment of its foreign policy.

This redeployment was reflected in the expansion of Moroccan diplomacy, which appeared, at first glance, to become more pragmatic. The new orientations and instruments were thus designed to simultaneously pursue two main objectives: (i) To reinforce the geopolitical status of the Kingdom in order to provide it with the necessary leverage to strengthen its position on the Sahara issue. Since the matter is addressed at the UN level, Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara territory needed as much international support as possible. By creating economic interdependencies, Morocco sought to shield itself from external pressure and to transition from a defensive to a more offensive posture. (ii) To equip itself with the tools for economic take-off through greater integration into the global economy. We can therefore draw a connection between each of the instruments and orientations of this new phase and the parallel objectives mentioned above:

- The diversification of Morocco's international partners. In response to shifts in the international system, Morocco opted to strengthen economic partnerships with emerging powers such as China,⁷ Turkey,⁸ India,⁹ Russia,¹⁰ and Brazil. The economic aim of this reorientation is clear: opening to new markets and opportunities for investment and trade. At the same time, it sought to establish channels of interdependence with these emerging powers, which are expected to play a decisive role in the near future. The rapprochement with Russia and China—both permanent members of the UN Security Council—was intended to prevent the Sahara issue from becoming a point of fracture between the West and its geopolitical rivals. Western support for Morocco should not provoke hardened positions among powers whose foreign policies are increasingly shaped by opposition to the Western-led world order.
- The strengthening of Morocco's presence in Africa is one of the most prominent features of the new foreign policy. Morocco has become one of the leading African investors on the continent. Moroccan companies have penetrated various markets thanks to a well-crafted state-led strategy. In addition to integrating the national economy more deeply into global value chains, this redeployment allows for the multiplication of stakes and communication channels with African countries. Several African states have opened consular representations in cities within the Southern Provinces, the most recent being Chad. Moreover, enhancing Morocco's economic presence in Africa will, in due course, facilitate more effective management of Morocco's membership in the African Union alongside the entity created by the separatist Polisario movement.
- Transforming Morocco into an economic and financial hub has the direct objective of helping the Kingdom secure decisive advantages in the race for economic and strategic emergence. Morocco's economic and financial centrality will translate into geopolitical centrality. Strengthening its geopolitical status both globally and regionally hinges on this transformation, which is meant to attract various interests to Moroccan territory. The hosting of the 2030 World Cup also fits within this strategic framework.
- The redefinition of Morocco's geo-economic environment. Indeed, the state of lethargy of the regional space to which it belongs, namely the Arab Maghreb Union, pushes Morocco to try to redefine its geopolitical environment.

Several initiatives fall within this framework:

- The Atlantic Initiative launched by King Mohammed VI. This initiative is the culmination of a process that began more than ten years ago; the "strategic intent of the State"¹¹ has thus been oriented towards defining a geopolitical and geostrategic meaning of the Atlantic Africa. This initiative, which has matured to arrive in 2024 at the Royal Initiative aiming to enable Sahel countries to gain access to the ocean, also seeks to create strategic convergences with Sahel states. These states have thus begun to adopt more favourable attitudes towards Morocco: in August, the Republic of Chad decided to open a consulate in the Southern Provinces.

- Morocco had submitted a request to become a member of ECOWAS. Regardless of the fate of this request and the reservations it raised, it constitutes another illustration of Morocco's desire to redefine its geopolitical environment.

Related to the previous point, Morocco's reintegration into the pan-African community framework, namely the African Union, is a symbolic initiative of the new orientation of Moroccan diplomacy. This action represents a clear break with the policy of the empty chair, which made the issue of the Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara an almost exclusive objective of foreign policy. The reintegration into the African Union carries several meanings:

- Strengthening Morocco's diplomatic position requires an offensive approach aimed at opening previously closed doors. The goal was not only to neutralise the impact of this issue on Morocco's influence but to make it the main leverage.
- A pragmatic and realistic attitude aimed at confronting various constraints by giving oneself the means to change certain negative trends.
- It also involves a desacralisation of the cause through a de-dogmatisation of foreign policy. Pragmatism is also expressed through a certain flexibility. Morocco accepts sitting alongside the separatist entity that claims sovereignty over the territory.

The neorealism of the new Moroccan foreign policy is perceptible through a dual observable trend. A new offensive diplomatic dynamic. This dynamic consists in mastering the evolution of the process in order to influence the outcome of the conflict. This dynamic began with the clearing of the Guerguerat zone.¹² This action made it possible to impose a power balance on the ground in favour of Morocco. On the diplomatic level, this dynamic allowed the alignment of a considerable number of states with Morocco's position. Thus, the United States in 2020 recognised Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. This historic decision triggered a wave of similar decisions, notably resulting in the opening of consular representations in the Southern Provinces. These acts express states' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over this territory. Some states have not gone so far as to declare direct recognition, but they have shown clear support for Morocco. This is the case of Spain, which has detached itself from its historically neutral and balancing attitude on this issue.

This neorealism is also expressed through an interpenetration between political-diplomatic objectives and economic and geo-economic objectives. Indeed, in a very pragmatic approach, Morocco has sought to make the Sahara issue a strategic and geo-economic lever. The economic dimension has been highlighted for several years as a gateway to managing this conflict.

In fact, King Mohammed VI previously launched a national reflection dynamic around a development model for the Southern Provinces. The Economic, Social and Environmental Council had prepared a report containing an economic model published in October 2013. A new vision thus emerged, making the Southern Provinces a strategic accelerator of the Kingdom's development and influence. Several major projects and structuring initiatives can be cited in this context, such as the Grand Dakhla Atlantic Port, the Tiznit-Dakhla expressway, the gas pipeline project from Nigeria; the Atlantic Initiative launched by the Sovereign is a typical example of this new proactive approach. The objectives of completing territorial integrity and Morocco's economic influence somewhat merge.

Conclusion

One could conclude that realism is a constant feature of Moroccan foreign policy. It certainly evolves and adapts, taking various forms according to changes in the international context. Through this article, we have attempted to analyse the evolution of Moroccan foreign policy by examining its structuring elements within the major strategic orientations. The specificity of Moroccan foreign policy is linked to the decision-making process, the nature of the politico-constitutional system, and Morocco's vast innate strategic potential. These three elements have enabled the development of a

strategic, depoliticised, and long-term foreign policy. It is true that realism constitutes a dominant trait of the foreign policies of many states today; nevertheless, in Morocco, foreign policy genuinely reflects the country's history and geography.

The following conclusions fall within this framework:

1. Morocco is a monarchy whose protectorate period was but a brief interlude. Historical continuity was able to break the colonial rupture. The completion of territorial integrity is a means to perpetuate this continuity.
2. Morocco possesses major geostrategic assets that must be leveraged to achieve strategic gains.
3. These two elements give rise to particular constraints, notably related to Morocco's immediate environment. The decision-makers have demonstrated realism, synonymous with skillfulness, aimed at achieving successes despite difficulties.

Notes

1. The 'Greater Morocco' thesis, formulated by El Fassi in 1956, advocated for the integration of territories considered historically Moroccan, notably:
 - Mauritania: El Fassi regarded this territory as a natural extension of Morocco.
 - Former Spanish Sahara: He viewed this region as an integral part of Morocco.
 - Portions of the Sahara that colonial France considered part of Algeria, including the present-day Algerian cities of Tindouf and Béchar.
 - Areas in northern Mali and Senegal, with claims based on historical and cultural ties.
2. As a reminder, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) acknowledged the existence of legal ties.
3. Royal Speech of 20 August 2022.
4. In a message delivered by Royal Advisor Reda Guedira on 12 November 1984 at the Twentieth Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, the late King Hassan II declared: "Here we are, and I regret to say it, at the moment of separation. Until wiser days come, we bid you farewell and wish you good luck with your new partner."
5. *Meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Algiers: Tension between the PLO and Morocco after the intervention of a Polisario delegate*. Le Monde, 23 April 1987.
6. Due to the Obama Administration's stance in favour of extending MINURSO's mandate to include human rights monitoring, Morocco decided to suspend joint military exercises.
7. King Mohammed VI's visit to China in May 2016 led to the establishment of a strategic partnership framework. <https://maroc-diplomatique.net/visite-de-sm-le-roi-en-chine-une-nouvelle-dynamique-aux-relations-de-cooperation-entre/>
8. Following the signing of a free trade agreement between the two countries in 2004, the value of bilateral trade reached over 6 billion USD by 2023.
9. The Royal visit in October 2015 also helped revitalise the strategic partnership between the two countries, particularly in the phosphate sector.
10. The Royal visit to Russia in March 2016 contributed to strengthening economic exchanges. Today, despite various developments, Russia does not adopt a particularly hostile stance towards Morocco on the Sahara issue.
11. According to Rachid El Houdaigui.
12. In a Royal Speech in August 2022, the King stated that around thirty states had opened consular representations in the cities of the Southern Provinces. That number has since been surpassed.

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Notes on contributor

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