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Seattle University

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Seattle University

**Resistance and Complacency:
Cold War Legacies and the Geopolitics of the Western Sahara**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Departmental Honors in International Studies

By
Kasha Bradford-Adams

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The signatures below constitute approval of this departmental honors thesis by Kasha Bradford-Adams.



Dr. Robert Andolina, Thesis Seminar Instructor



on behalf of Victor (see attached)

Dr. Victor Reinking, External Reader

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Abstract

From 1975-1991, the Moroccan government engaged in an armed conflict in the Western Sahara with the indigenous Sahrawi population, led by the Polisario Front (the independence movement in the Western Sahara). The armed conflict began after the Moroccan occupation of the territory was initiated by King Hasan II, immediately following Sahrawi independence from Spain in 1975. Despite the existence of a ceasefire, organized by the United Nations in 1991, there have been no further decisions made by the international community regarding the status of the Western Sahara. In particular, there have been no developments in relation to a self-determination referendum, a decisive factor in whether or not the Sahrawi will be granted sovereignty by the Moroccan government. Using a realist and liberal framework, this paper analyzes the regional and international geopolitical and cultural conflicts preventing the referendum from occurring and sovereignty being granted to the Sahrawi. Furthermore, this research aims to develop a realist and liberalist analysis of indigenous autonomy underneath a post-colonial critique and against a critical historical background.

Keywords: Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Sahrawi, Polisario

Introduction

The Western Sahara is located just south of Morocco, as shown in Figure 1, on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, in a territory deemed the Maghreb. The Maghreb encompasses the countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and the Western Sahara territory. The Western Sahara spans 266,000 square kilometers of land, making it about the size of the state of Colorado (World Factbook). The other neighboring countries are comprised of Mauritania and Algeria. Although the territory is often blocked out in maps—without color, labeled as either the “Spanish Sahara,” “Western Sahara,” or “Moroccan Sahara” and with no indication that people live there—it is home to the Sahrawi people who are caught up in a political, economic, and social conflict against Morocco. The indigenous Sahrawi population to the Western Sahara lived under Spanish colonial rule until 1975 (Mundy, 2006). Following decolonization, Morocco claimed the Western Sahara due to historical ethnic and cultural ties, citing the Alouaite dynasty. Such claims contributed to the eventual occupation and led to an armed conflict between the Moroccan government and the native Sahrawi.



Figure 1: (Map of Western Sahara, 2012, retrieved from the United Nations)

European scientific research in the Western Sahara revealed the territory as a major producer of phosphates, a necessary natural resource for the production of fertilizers. These phosphate reserves are now responsible for over half of Morocco’s income, and are exported to European countries and the United States (Morocco.com). In 1990, the United Nations (UN)

intervened in the conflict between the Moroccan government and the Sahrawi, leading to a ceasefire. The UN worked on a referendum agreement to give Western Sahara their independence, which nearly passed, before it was dropped by the UN Security Council due to French and American economic relationships with Morocco (Mundy, 2006). Since then, the Sahrawi and Moroccan conflict has remained a ceasefire periodically discussed by the UN Security Council. The lack of a referendum has been attributed to international trade agreements, while Morocco presides over much of the territory.

The continuing stalemate at the UN is due in part to influence of Russia and the United States. The history of competing ideologies (i.e. the Cold War) between these states, and the region's significant reliance on Russian and American trade partnerships with Algeria and Morocco, directly impacts the fate of the Western Sahara and the Sahrawi population. The distinct cultural identities, as well as political and economic tensions between Moroccans and the people of the Western Sahara, perpetuates the marginalization of the Sahrawi people. The interests of and tensions between the two superpowers, combined with regional tensions between Morocco and Algeria, make it unlikely that the Sahrawi will obtain independence through diplomatic means, which may lead to renewed armed conflict in the Maghreb.

This paper will employ a two-step research process. First, it will begin by introducing a theoretical framework and historical information in order to answer the question, *What is stopping the United Nations from passing a referendum for independence in this disputed territory?* Second, it will undertake to estimate the implications of a possible referendum by way of the additional research question, *Do current deliberations signify a referendum passing, and if so, to what extent will cultural tensions in the Maghreb impact the outcome of the referendum?* This research intends to elucidate the continuity of the conflict occurring in the Maghreb around

Sahrawi independence, and the international implications further conflict may have. As this topic is not well-known, this thesis attempts to illuminate the current and historical geopolitical situation so that more readers may be informed on how the Sahrawi have been forgotten by the international community.

Methodology

The application of a western gaze or epistemic framework often leads to methods that reaffirm colonial interests (Brown, 2015, 59). For the purposes of this research, the thesis will use the discourse of “self-determination” and “sovereignty” as they are used by the United Nations, however, these terms are problematic because they provoke an array of feelings that, “draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses,” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, 21). It is necessary to recognize the limitations of these terms because of the exclusionary practices against those most affected by coloniality, and how this also contributes to the othering of certain populations.

This thesis employs a case study approach in which Western Sahara geopolitics demonstrates how independence movement can be stymied by a lack of international recognition, therefore it is important to look at two prominent political theories of realism, or power politics, and liberalism, or the foundation of democratic institutions. In order to apply realism and liberalism, the research will use secondary sources to collect data, focusing largely on qualitative data, and include aspects of both explanatory and exploratory research. The explanatory aspect will focus and expand on the study of colonial legacy in regards to the realist

and liberal theories that will be used to analyze the prevention of an independence referendum in Western Sahara.

As the discipline, international studies, is continuously reconceptualizing its approach towards global issues, this project will also incorporate aspects of exploratory research (Darian-Smith, 2017). Exploratory research envelops the development of “a set of working theories and accounts of what may be going on,” (Darian-Smith, 2017, 96). This research approach is necessary as the topic under discussion is currently unfolding, with particular regards towards future outcomes. The complexities of these historical roots are being further uncovered as reports on the topic are published, for example the United Nations Referendum between Morocco and Polisario to resolve the conflict, that has been in discussion since 1991, was re-opened in November 2018 and is currently still being deliberated as of May 2019.

Further, the secondary sources will originate from academic journals and books. These journals and books will be in both English and French, to create a holistic approach to the topic. Most of the journal articles and book chapters have been sourced from online databases (such as JSTOR, ProQuest, EbscoHost, etc.). This article will also incorporate primary sources, such as news articles from *Le Monde*, which will be used to expand on the current deliberations and updates in the international community in regards to Sahrawi independence.

Theoretical Framework

While realism focuses on understanding power politics, or the balance of power, liberalism focuses on the development of political institutions and processes (Morgenthau, 1958). When applied to the Western Saharan conflict, realism exhibits the historical and contemporary tension between Algeria and Morocco, and the influence from Russia and the

United States. In the same context, liberalism applies to the United Nations' involvement in the territory, despite the lack of a referendum for almost three decades. As a result, these two theories need to be applied when discussing the topic of the Western Sahara, a territory that has been characterized as the last existing colony in Africa under a non-European colonizer.

Political realism is useful when understanding the balance of power amongst countries on the regional and international levels. There are three major sections of political realism: 1) offensive realism, 2) defensive realism, and 3) structural realism (neorealism). Offensive realism originates from the political scientist, John Mearsheimer, and focuses on the idea that states want security and act aggressively as a result. This aggression may be a result of survival, but causes a strife for power and the outbreak of conflict. Defensive realism indicates a "status quo bias" that illustrates a state's action out of regulation of the status quo (Wagner, 2010, 15). This category of realism also disagrees with the assumption that states would act aggressively, indicating a respect for the existing structure. Additionally, defensive realism asserts that, due to the nature of the international structure, states are forced to expand in order to preserve their own independence. Structural realism, or neorealism, claims that the international structure is anarchic, as there is no world government, and describes the difference organization structures of global power. Kenneth Waltz discusses that the United States and the Soviet Union gaining nuclear weapons during the Cold War reduced the number of great world powers to two. (Wagner, 2010).

As briefly mentioned, liberalism encompasses different liberties, or freedoms, and was developed as a way of combatting arbitrary forms of governance. Liberalism addresses freedoms by means of developing a foundation for democratic systems. Liberal theory revolves around government institutions and the arrangement of people in society. The theory describes a

government as an organ of a free and functioning society, and the institution as a representative body of the greater population. (Hobhouse, 1911).

Liberal theory also addresses free will, and freedom of mobility, emphasizing the importance of individual choice (this is also seen through group selection). This liberal freedom of mobility and choice has come to influence the creation of *laissez-faire* economic structure, or the liberalization of trade. The liberal influence on trade is based on the affirmation of national liberty, or freedom, and has a utilitarian effect, with the intent of creating the largest positive impact on the greatest population. The creation of Free Trade was an attempt at creating peaceful relationships between nations, establishing supply and demand flows between majority colonial powers. In this way, colonial freedom, international freedom, and personal freedom, were interconnected and dependent on one another, balancing governmental control and impact on national freedom. (Hobhouse, 1911, 35). As a result, trade liberalization influenced the rapid globalization of the international economic structure of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To further develop this research, post-colonial theory will aid in the explanation of the topic at hand. Jean-Marc Moura describes a distinction between “post-colonial” and “postcolonial”. Post-colonial is the period of time after colonization, whereas postcolonial is refers to the speeches, writings, and ways of analyzing the binary function of imperialists (Moura, 2013). Specifically, Moura discusses postcolonialism in the context of globalization, specifically stating that they are two different things. Postcolonial perspectives focus on the representation of those previously excluded from the popular narrative, and then re-imagine literary expression by shaping a new vision of the world (Moura, 2013).

Futhermore, Moura emphasizes a re-imagined and more complete perspective of the world also has risks: the first being the possibility of allowing a generalized Eurocentric

understanding of the world that could end up regulating or limiting the number of diverse practices and cultures, or the other being the possibility of generating of so many different types of literary approaches that colonialism would end up being the only constant throughout history (Moura, 2013). The most relevant piece of Moura's depiction of postcolonial theory is that there are two different ways of study surrounding the relationship between globalization and postcolonial studies; the first is an understanding that before the conquest, during, and post-colonial history can all be attributed as components of globalization; the second asserts difference, labeling globalization as a threat to postcolonial projects focused on history and politics (Moura, 2013).

The History of Western Sahara: A Literature Review

Colonialism (1884-1975)

The Spanish originally colonized the Western Sahara in 1884, and claimed it as the Spanish Sahara, while the French colonized Morocco and Algeria, amongst other countries in North and West Africa. In 1947, Spain launched the *Empresa Nacional Minera del Sahara* (ENMINSA) research project into natural resource reserves in the territory, specifically oil and phosphates, and later uranium. Initially, the research did not find any phosphates due to an antiquated understanding of how to find and test phosphates, assuming they came from "marine sediments left in land depressions during flood periods" (Camprubi, 2015). Morocco's *Office Chérifien des Phosphates* (OCP) and the French *Comptoir de Phosphates de l'Afrique du Nord* were the two largest producers of phosphates in North Africa but in 1961, the French Comptoir dissolved and the OCP became the main producer. After failing to find phosphates in the

Western Sahara in 1947, ENMINSA focused on looking for uranium in the territory. This new focus brought the Spanish to the Bu-Craa region in 1963. Bu-Craa is an area in the Western Sahara, defined by one tree often used as reference point for indigenous populations. While testing for uranium, Spain identified over 1.6 million tons of phosphates with “68 percent average quality with veins of 80 percent purity,” making it the largest in the world (Camprubi, 2015).

The discovery of phosphates in the Western Sahara occurred during the height of the Cold War, and Khrushchev’s Seven Year Plan, impacting agriculture on an international level. ENMINSA, with their new mine at Bu-Craa, focused on building relationships with the United States, rather than France, and their collaboration with the *Compagnie Financière de l’Outre Mer* (Overseas Finance Company; COFIMER) ended in 1966. The United States focused on the advantages of maintaining a global market and preventing regional monopolies. ENMINSA and the Florida-based manufacturer International Mineral and Chemicals (IMC) negotiated a business deal before Morocco interfered, sabotaging the agreement by influencing the stagnation of phosphate prices in the global market. The World Phosphate Institute was founded in Paris, France, where Morocco was granted power to veto possible members, such as Spain and Israel. (Camprubi, 2015).

In 1973 the Popular Front for the liberation of Saguiaat El-Hamra y Rio de Oro (Polisario Front) was founded as the primary liberation movement against Spanish colonialism in the Western Sahara. In response to the growing Polisario Front, Spain introduced a referendum that allowed for the independence of the territory, which was vetoed by France and the United States, both allies with Morocco. Morocco and Mauritania both indicated their historical claims on the Western Sahara territory. This claim is in reference to the Alouaite dynasty, descendants of the

prophet Muhammed, King Hassan II's ancestors. However, the Sahrawi do not recognize themselves as part of the Alouaite dynasty, citing the Almoravide state, or the unification of the different indigenous tribes of the Maghreb and Northern Africa, including Amazigh and other Berber tribes (Thomas, 2001). This claim resulted in the Moroccan and Mauritanian governments joining forces to resist Spain's attempt at passing a referendum for the Western Sahara's independence, which was rejected by the International Court of Justice in 1974 (Mundy, 2006). The International Court of Justice advised that it did not find any connection of sovereignty over the Western Sahara for either Morocco or Mauritania (International Court of Justice, 1975).

Despite the ruling by the International Court, King Hassan II of Morocco addressed Moroccans on national television and radio in order to organize and launch the Green March on October 16th, 1975, launching the Green March into motion. What was originally considered "the king's call" became "the Green March," (Hafez, 2013). Over half a million Moroccans attempted to register for the march, with only 350,000 chosen to participate (Hafez, 2013). As Spanish forces were still in the North of the Western Sahara territory, supporting the Sahrawi independence movement, King Hassan II organized in two blocs near the southern border. In November, Hassan ordered one of the blocs to march south and over the border (Hafez, 2013). This action constituted a positive response by Morocco, and stimulated its national identity.

As a response to the Green March, Spain chose to negotiate the future of the territory with Morocco and Mauritania, rather than using military force (Dunbar, 2000). On February 26, 1976, the Spanish government declared they were no longer the ruling power over the territory (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). As a way of also avoiding conflict with the Moroccan ally, the United States, Spain gave their territory to Morocco and Mauritania (Mundy, 2006). The next

day, February 27, the Polisario Front declared the creation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)¹ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013).

The Green March has since become a national holiday or *moussem* (“saint’s festival”) celebrated as an act of mysticism, while re-enforcing the political authority of King Hassan II (Hafez, 2013). The understanding of the Green March as a *moussem* indicates religious influence, with the color green alluding to the Islamic faith, which is tied to the region of North Africa through the Alouaite dynasty (Farah, 2010). Descendents of the Alouaite dynasty are who currently rule the Kingdom of Morocco, as the bloodline of King Hassan II and his son Mohammed VI are connected to the founder of the original dynasty (Stora, 1999). The Alouaites are descendants of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammed of Islam (Stora, 1999). Morocco insists that the Western Sahara was historically part of the Alouaite territorial rule.

War, Self-Determination, and Ceasefire (1975-2018)

From 1975-1991, the Polisario Front fought against the Moroccan government until the United Nations negotiated a ceasefire between the two forces (Thomas, 2001). The United Nations adopted three resolutions between 1977 and 1979 that gave the responsibility of determining the status of the Western Sahara to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Zunes, 2008). In 1979, the OAU created an agreement between Morocco and the Western Sahara that would give the indigenous population the right to autonomy. The OAU officially recognized the Polisario-led Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a sovereign state in 1984 (Mundy, 2006). This led to Morocco suspending their membership in 1982 before formally

¹ The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is not the Polisario front, but rather the title of the nation living in exile and being governed by the Polisario (Wilson, 2013).

withdrawing in 1984 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). Since then, over 90 countries in the Global South have recognized the legitimacy of SADR and formed diplomatic ties (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013).

In 1988, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution regarding the situation in the Western Sahara to appoint a representative for the Western Sahara to the Security Council (UNSCR, 1988). The resolution also called for a report “on the holding of a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and on ways and means to ensure the organization and supervision of such a referendum by the United Nations in co-operation with the Organization of African Unity” (UNSCR, 1988, 18). However, the war between Morocco and the SADR continued for another two years before the Security Council re-convened on the topic. In 1990, the Security Council sent peacekeepers to the area, negotiating a ceasefire in the territory (Zunes, 2008).

Throughout the course of the War, Morocco, backed by the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia, was able to push back the Algerian-backed forces of the Polisario Front to occupy half of the Western Sahara territory, which was now divided by a large border wall, while most of the native population fled (Mundy, 2006). In 1991, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) committee was created in order to maintain peace in the area and promote negotiations between the SADR and Morocco. The Security Council began negotiating the requirements for the referendum, passing the Houston Accords in 1997, which standardized the referendum process (Zunes, 2008). However, the United States and France, both allies of Morocco, continued to threaten to veto the Security Council’s enforcement of the accords (Zunes, 2008). The United Nations has passed seventy resolutions since 1975

regarding the future of the Western Sahara, with the latest being passed in October 2018, without passing a resolution to address the referendum (UNSCR, 1975-2018).

Morocco and Algeria

When the French government made Morocco a protectorate, the Varnier line was drawn as a border between Morocco and Algeria (Heggoy, 1970). The border was originally supposed to aid in the governance of trade within the territory, but later became an international border (Heggoy, 1970). After the two Franco-Spanish treaties of 1904 and 1912, the Trinquet line was formed in 1934 as a way of dividing Morocco and Algeria down the Draa Valley, without the consent of the Moroccan government, giving the territory just south of the Draa Valley, the Tindouf, to Morocco (Heggoy, 1970). However, the Franco-German Treaty of 1911 contradicted the border when it stated that the Tindouf belonged to Algeria (Heggoy, 1970). In 1952, the Tindouf region was officially declared part of French Algeria, after reviewing the past administrative decisions (Farsoun, 1976). Later, during the Algerian struggle for independence and after Moroccan independence was granted in 1956, the French attempted to negotiate by giving the territory back to Morocco in exchange for aid in the conflict (Farsoun, 1976). Such negotiations were nullified after protest from Moroccan citizens, prior to Algeria winning their independence in 1962 (Farsoun, 1976).

The conflict between Morocco and Algeria over the territory of the Tindouf became a military conflict in July 1963, when King Hassan II sent troops over the border into the middle of the disputed territory. The epicenter of the conflict was located halfway between the towns of Colomb-Bechar and Tindouf, both controlling the highway from Algeria, through Western Sahara, and towards the coast (Farsoun, 1976). The militarized conflict, however, only lasted

until January 1964, when diplomatic relations were re-instated to develop economic partnerships in the territory (Farsoun, 1976). Despite the brevity of the war between Morocco and Algeria in 1963, the conflict resulted in the consolidation of the right-wing parties in both countries. King Hassan II of Morocco moved to dissolve the left opposition. In turn, Moroccan conservatism contributed to the further conservatizing of the Algerian regime (Farsoun, 1976). The augmented right-wing influence in both countries contributed to tension, as their growing authoritarian regimes sought economic and political power in territories like the Tindouf and the Western Sahara, both rich in natural resources.

Russia, the United States, and the Maghreb

In Mohieddine Hadhri's article, "U.S. Foreign Policy Toward North Africa During the Cold War: From Eisenhower to Kennedy (1953-1963)," he discusses the relationship between the United States and North African states during the height of the Cold War. Hadhri discusses how the Truman Doctrine shaped American foreign policy by establishing basic principles and commitments beginning in the 1940s and 1950s and lasting until the end of the Cold War period (Hadhri, 2014). Hadhri continues, stating that American foreign policy was a key component of the results of the de-colonization process in North Africa (Hadhri, 2014). Hadhri explains the strategies of the North African countries consisted largely of exploiting Western antagonisms, and this was used to manipulate power dynamics between France and the United States (Hadhri, 2014). Hadhri discusses how the United States' National Security Council report on the Maghreb emphasized the importance of preventing communist influence from infiltrating, describing this as the "American objective in the Maghreb" (Hadhri, 2014, 103). Although the United States was supportive of nationalistic movements in North Africa, the Eisenhower administration did

not exclusively support the Algerian nationalist movement, the National Liberation Front (FLN) because of American trade agreements, like the North Atlantic Trade Organization (NATO), with France (Hadhri, 2014).

However, the Kennedy Administration quickly developed a reputation for being self-determination champions as President Kennedy gave a speech condemning the actions taken by France in Algeria, as well as the Eisenhower decision to continue supplying the French with arms through NATO (Hadhri, 2014). Hadhri explains that Kennedy's speech provoked strong reactions, with hope in North Africa and the Middle East and hostility in France. Hadhri also discusses how Kennedy was considered a pragmatic idealist, as he believed the best way to prevent communism from spreading would be for the United States to lead the developing social revolutions (Hadhri, 2014). Hadhri goes on to explain that although the Kennedy administration showed a considerable amount of interest in the Algerian revolution, the relationships that the United States has with Morocco and Tunisia are the most important to U.S. interests (Hadhri, 2014). Similar to the Eisenhower administration, the Kennedy administration did not pursue a closer relationship with Algeria because of NATO. The United States could not support the self-determination of the Algerians while also being allied with France (Hadhri, 2014).

Algerian relations with Russia (previously the Soviet Union) had developed since the country won their independence from France. Algeria has been the third most important consumer of weapons for Russia, after importing almost 80 percent of all their weaponry from Russia between the 1960s and 1980s (Schumacher, 2015). However, in 1985, Algeria began trading with the United States and importing American-made military aircrafts. At this time, trade between Russia and Algeria came to a stand-still until 1999, when President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was inaugurated in Algeria (Mokhefi, 2015). The Russo-Algerian relationship

strengthened, and Russia became the top trade partner for arms and military equipment (Mokhefi, 2015). In 2006, the relationship between Algeria and Russia transitioned to incorporate energy development, specifically oil and natural gas. Russia is the number one producer of natural gas in the world, and Algeria is the second largest producer of oil in Africa (Mokhefi, 2015). Subsequently, both countries significantly influence the global economic market, asserting their regional and international impact.

Sahrawi Resistance

As a result of the 1975 conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front, nearly 200,000 Sahrawi refugees migrated to and now live in refugee camps in the Tindouf region of Algeria. Much of the social and economic support received by these camps relies on humanitarian aid, and the camps themselves were designed to be a temporary solution (Angeloni, 2018). At the same time, conditions in the territory annexed by Morocco are also poor. There have been reports of human rights abuses inflicted upon the Sahrawi by the Moroccan government, such as unfair imprisonment and crowded prison conditions (News, 2014).

Further, since Morocco began occupying the Western Sahara in 1975, and continuing through the stalemate in 1991, there has been an ongoing *intifada*, or uprising, in the Moroccan-occupied territory gaining significant momentum in recent years (Farah, 2010). These uprisings have been a result of a recently developed organization in the Moroccan-occupied territory, the *Intifadah al-Istiqlal*, or struggle of independence; the leaders are indigenous Sahrawi who grew up under Moroccan rule, and classify themselves as first-generation nationalists (Mundy, 2006). The *Intifadah al-Istiqlal* brought their movement to attention during protests in May 2006, and were present for the funeral of a Sahrawi activist.

In October 2010, Gdiem Izik occurred in the Western Sahara, which began as a few tents and later grew to over 25,000 protestors. The Gdiem Izik protests occurred prior to the larger Arab Spring uprisings in North Africa, and were located outside of the capital of the annexed Western Sahara, Laayoune (Wilson, 2013). Gdeim Izik protest focused on economic needs, but with emphasis on the marginalization of the Sahrawi population. Wilson's article also brings up the difficulty of statistics when it comes to the Sahrawi population, because they are so dispersed there are no exact population numbers attributed to either the Sahrawi's who live within the Moroccan-controlled borders or outside of them under the SADR. Wilson also discusses the Sahrawi strategy of protesting the annexation through living as refugees, this is their way of resisting Moroccan occupation (Wilson, 2013). A symbol of the Sahrawi resistance is the flag of the SADR, symbolizing the sovereignty of the state (Farah, 2010).



Figure 2: (SADR Flag, 2016, retrieved from worldatlas.com)

Analysis

In December 2018, the United Nations invited the Polisario Front, Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria, to negotiate and discuss the Western Sahara's fate, opening discussions of independence and self-determination for the area, two very different solutions (Le Monde AFP, 2019b). The last negotiations opened to the Polisario Front and Morocco occurred in 2007, focusing on the specifics of a proposed referendum of self-determination, supported by the United States, that did not end up happening because of Sahrawi insistence on sovereignty (Le Monde AFP, 2018b).

The case for a referendum has been opened and closed at least 70 times since 1990, and there has been no response from the United Nations. As a result of trade agreements, such as free-trade agreements between the United States and Morocco and NATO, permanent members of the Security Council have threatened the use of their veto power, and no referendum has been passed. To understand the complexity of the situation, the analysis of this topic has been divided into two main concepts: regional conflict and the monopolization of phosphates, and Russian and American involvement.

Regional Conflict and the Monopolization of Phosphates

During the Cold War, the seven-year plan introduced by the Soviet Union's Khrushchev contributed to the augmentation of agriculture as a major component to the global economy, which led to the world's production of fertilizer doubling between 1954 and 1964, increasing the demand for phosphates (Camprubi, 2015). The Spanish had discovered the phosphate reserves in the Western Sahara but did not have the resources required to capitalize on their control over these reserves. Instead they reached out to American companies to invest in the development of

infrastructure to mine the reserves, but were subsequently prevented by Morocco, due to competing trade relationships with the United States.

During their nineteen-year war with the Polisario Front, Morocco was able to obtain control of over 80 percent of the Western Sahara territory, including the Bu-Craa region, with the majority of the phosphate reserves. This action can be understood as offensive, given the context of the global demand for phosphates. Particularly, after decades under French rule, the annexation of the Western Sahara would set the Moroccan government up for economic prosperity without the intervention of European powers.

Further, the war between the Moroccan government and the Polisario Front was significant for the territory because Morocco was able to push the Polisario Front further into Algeria as Morocco gained territory. As a result, Morocco was able to assert an increased regional stronghold in North Africa. However, the territory that now houses the Polisario Front is in the Tindouf region, a span of land that Morocco and Algeria have disputed since the end of French colonization in the 1950s. Keeping the Sahrawi refugees housed in the Tindouf creates further tension between Morocco and Algeria—the refugees do not recognize either Morocco or Algeria as their government, but have chosen to continue living as refugees in a form of protest until a decision is made on the referendum (News, 2014). The protests represent the Sahrawi refusal to integrate into Moroccan society.

At the beginning of November 2018, the Moroccan government held a forum on the affairs of Laayoune, the capital of the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, deciding to increase funding towards the development of enterprise in the area (Le Monde AFP, 2018a). The objective is to increase “*l’attractivité*” (the attractiveness) of the Atlantic Ports on the coast of the Western Sahara and “*les opportunités à saisir*” (the opportunities to seize) production in

different economic sectors including agriculture and construction (Le Monde AFP, 2018a).

Philippe-Edern Klein, the president of the *Chambre française du commerce et d'industrie au Maroc* (the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Morocco; CFCIM), specifically said that this forum was strictly for the development of the Western Sahara, and not politically-inclined.

The development of infrastructure in Laayoune, as well as other parts of the Moroccan-occupied territory in the Western Sahara, indicates the intention of the Moroccan government to continue controlling this territory. Moroccan development of infrastructure while maintaining military control over the territory is consistent with liberal theory, indicating the acceleration of democratic processes (e.g. infrastructure) with the presence of the military. The further expansion and investment in development in the Western Sahara influences Moroccans to move to the area, and as there are no exact population numbers attributed to either the Sahrawis who live within the Moroccan-controlled borders, or outside of them under the SADR, the international community can assume that Moroccans are the majority living in this area (Wilson, 2013).

In January 2019, the European Parliament extended Morocco's trade agreement to include the products exported from the Western Sahara territory. The combined trade of imports and exports in the Moroccan economy is about 83.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Morocco, n.d.). Although the Polisario Front urged members of the European Union to vote against such measures, indicating their fear of Morocco using this integration as a reason to prevent the independence referendum in discussion from passing in the United Nations, the extension passed with a large majority (444 votes for and 167 votes against) (Le Monde avec AFP, 2019a). Although the extension passed, there is speculation that it goes against European

and International Law because the European Union does not recognize Morocco’s sovereignty over the territory, or the SADR as sovereign (Le Monde AFP, 2019a).

The expansion of trade with Morocco has significant consequences on the SADR, as the European Union legitimizes Morocco’s claim over the territory. Phosphate contributes to nearly half of the country’s economy while only employing 2 percent of the population (Morocco.com, 2019). However, these numbers illustrate the large dependence the Moroccan government has on phosphate production. As shown in Figure 3, Morocco and the Western Sahara hold over 57 percent of the phosphates in the world.

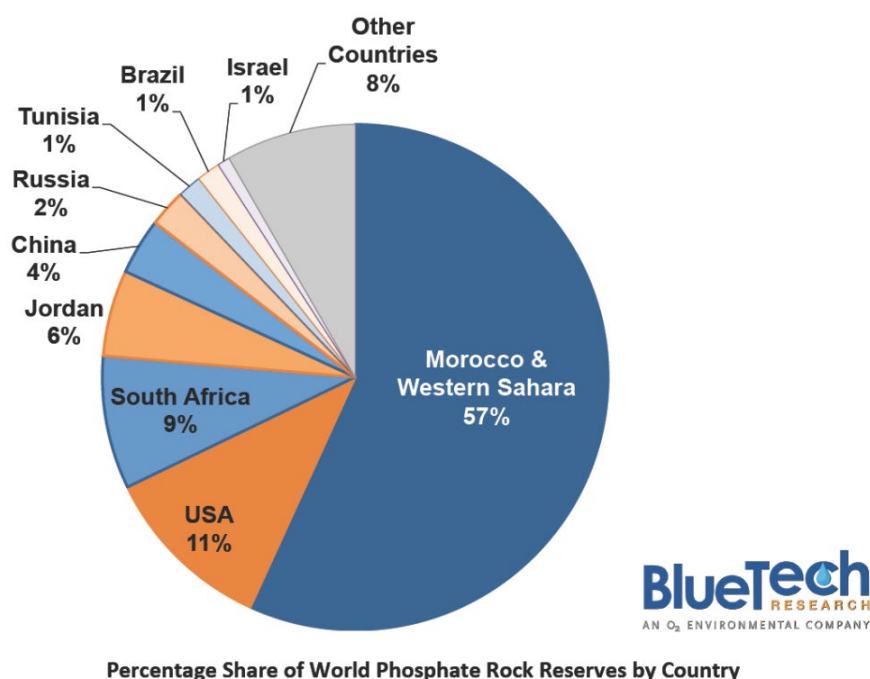


Figure 3: (Global phosphate distribution, 2013, retrieved from BlueTech Research)

However, since the Western Sahara holds the largest amount of phosphates in the world, it can be assumed that Moroccan occupation of the territory groups the two states together and disregards the SADR. The legitimization of this categorization by the European Union validates

Morocco's claim over the territory, and therefore de-legitimizes the status of the SADR. This also showcases an interdependent relationship between the European Union and Morocco, emphasizing globalization. The legitimization of Morocco by the European Union influences the power dynamics within North Africa, subsequently legitimizing the expansion of Moroccan borders.

Russian and American Involvement

Since Vladimir Putin took office, the Russian strategy for foreign relations has encompassed unpredictability, with the world taking notice as the war in Ukraine continues after the annexation of Crimea, and the creation of the Eurasian Union (Schumacher, 2015). Arms trade between Russia and Algeria increased by 10 percent between the years of 2003 and 2012, indicating the improving economic relationships between the two countries (Schumacher, 2019). Improved economic conditions indicate positive results from Russia's growing involvement in the Maghreb.

The relationship between Algeria and Russia transcends the supply of weapons, as the support of Algerian military forces means the support of the Polisario Front, which is currently housed within the borders of Algeria. In 2001, President Putin of Russia and President Bouteflika of Algeria signed a strategic partnership agreement that aimed at the facilitation of Russian arms deliveries and joint exploration of the hydrocarbon sector in Algeria's countryside (Schumacher, 2015). With the establishment of this relationship, Russia is able to influence the production of hydrocarbon energy within Algeria and moderate the establishment of power plants throughout the country. In particular, Russia is able to take advantage of the Arab Spring uprisings in North Africa in order to build a new sphere of influence. Expanding the Russian sphere of influence in

North Africa threatens the current balance of power, encroaching on American economic security (i.e. trade partnerships with Morocco), and thereby influencing Morocco's hold on the Western Sahara.

With the failure of democracy in Algeria, tension between Russia and Western powers may increase due to a Russian security doctrine previously administered to high-ranking military representatives from Algeria, and 40 other countries including Libya and Egypt. The doctrine issued in May 2014, characterizes the United States as "a dangerous nation seeking to dismantle Russian statehood and destabilize governments around the world," which can be perceived as Russia seeking influence in North Africa and the Middle East (Schumacher, 2015, 104). This security doctrine indicates a continuation of tension between Russia and the United States, dating back to the Cold War.

On February 22, 2019, students throughout Algeria began to protest the announced candidacy of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika running for his fifth term (Kadiri, 2019). President Bouteflika has been nicknamed "*el Marokki*" (the Moroccan) as he was born in Moroccan territory prior to the annexation of specific borders between Algeria and Morocco. President Bouteflika's nickname signifies the tension between the two countries, and his unpopularity with the majority of the country. The destabilization of Algeria, there was potential of these protests to lead to a revolutionary movement, could negatively impact the upcoming negotiation talks on the status of the Western Sahara (Kadiri, 2019). However, in the beginning of April 2019, Abdelaziz agreed to resign from his presidency, backed by military leaders in the Algerian government (Nossiter, 2019). This resignation still impacts on the stability of the Algerian government, and gives potential to an increased military rule. As a consequence, the change in

leadership will effect Algerian trade relationships, their tense relationship with Morocco, and their relationship with the Sahrawi refugees.

As for Morocco's relationship with Russia, the Kingdom is currently Russia's most important phosphate producer, upholding Moroccan position on Sahrawi self-determination, and Russia has never formally recognized the SADR (Schumacher, 2015). Since the Russian annexation of Ukraine, the sanctions on Russian trade relationships have led to greater economic dependency on Morocco, which is also a major importer of Russian wheat. The relationship is beneficial to both Russia and Morocco, as they are both able to export and import valuable resources to support their economies. The prospect of this relationship extending into new oil and gas agreements have the possibility of undermining or dismantling the relationships between the American and French relationships with Morocco, who depend on these two powers for economic and military support (Schumacher, 2015). The strengthening of Russo-Moroccan trade relationships will complicate the ceasefire in Western Sahara, as Russia's arms trade with Algeria indirectly supports the Polisario Front. Russo-Moroccan relationships would also impact American-Moroccan free trade agreements, again increasing tension between the United States and Russia.

As Russia has increased interest in North African and Middle Eastern states, the United States has not appointed an ambassador to Morocco since the new administration took office in 2017 (Laaroussi, 2019). Russia already has a strong relationship with Algeria, and the strengthening of relations with Morocco could become a threat to the United States. Since 1945, during the era of the Cold War, there has been consistent tension between the United States and Russia. These two superpowers have a reputation of fighting over spheres of influence due to ideological differences, upholding realist theory. This is exhibited through the foreign policy of

Eisenhower and Kennedy, at the height of the Cold War. As the United States developed relationships with countries in the Maghreb, keeping Russia out of the territory was a factor. Additionally, the Algerian support of the development of the Polisario Front made the United States fearful of the “sovietization” of the Western Sahara, increasing American support of the Moroccan occupation (Camprubi, 2015, 694). The development of left-leaning governments in the Maghreb would likely be threatening to the United States government, as it would decrease the success of their influence in North Africa.

The impact of NATO is also prevalent in the current state of the Maghreb and the Western Sahara. “[American] basic interests cannot be protected in North Africa without an arrangement acceptable at once by France and the North-African countries” (Hadhri, 2014). The United States was unable to support Algeria in their self-determination efforts because of their close partnership with France. The United States and France are both close allies with Morocco, two countries largely dependent on the import of phosphates in order to sustain their agricultural markets. This dependency on trade with Morocco can be thought of as a dependency on the Western Sahara, and therefore a dependency on the continued lack of recognition of sovereignty of the SADR.

Russia and the United States both depend on Morocco and Algeria for agricultural and energy production, indicating the abundance of resources in the Maghreb. Therefore, asserting influence in the territory is important to the national interests of Russia and the United States, aligning with realist theory. The national interests of these two global hegemon and the European Union, paired with the regional tension between Morocco and Algeria, and, by consequence, the forced indifference of the United Nations, leaves very little possibility for a

referendum occurring. The prevention of a referendum, in correspondence with liberal theory, signifies the engagement of Sahrawi populations as economic and political captives.

Implications and Recommendations

The United States and Russia's involvement in the Maghreb will continue to influence the status of the SADR because of the economic trade partnerships and interests in the area. The United States, close allies with Morocco, influences the decision on the referendum that could remove the Moroccan government from the Western Sahara. Meanwhile, the Russian relationship with Algeria, who explicitly supports the Polisario Front, signifies a competition for spheres of influence in the Maghreb. Morocco and Algeria are the two regional hegemons, with pre-existing border disputes and disagreeing positions regarding the Western Sahara. Morocco relies on the Western Sahara economically, exporting phosphates. Algeria relies on the Tindouf, where the Polisario Front is based, for oil and the recent expansion of hydrocarbon energy, in collaboration with Russia.

The tension in the Maghreb can be interpreted as a continuation of Cold War processes because of the significant involvement from Russia and the United States, both countries providing arms to Algeria and Morocco respectively. Their economic dependency on the Western Sahara and the Tindouf regions set a precedent of continued involvement in the Maghreb. As a result, with the lack of a referendum being passed to date, it is unclear whether upcoming deliberations will ameliorate rising tension. The realist power dynamics in the Maghreb are reinforced by liberal passivity, subsequently perpetuating a political standstill in regards to SADR sovereignty. Such a political standstill benefits both Russian and American economies.

To further understand the complexities of this geographical area, future research will need to examine the role of climate change on the global agricultural market, and how this will impact on the demand for phosphates. It will be important to consider the role of the agricultural market as Morocco's control of phosphate production accounts for most of their economic prosperity. With this, the development of alternative ingredients for fertilizer would decrease the demand for phosphate production. However, the development of long-term sustainable aid to the refugee camps in the Tindouf region may be more likely.

Conclusion

The future of the Sahrawi people will depend on emerging relationships among several geopolitical actors, both within and beyond the territory of Western Sahara. Although there is a resurgence of hope for independence, there is a long history of disappointment. The Sahrawi population has been, quite blatantly, forgotten by the international community. This disregard comes as a result of interests in both trade and influence in regions around the world, and specifically in the Maghreb. The structure of the international economy has come to marginalize the Sahrawi, with little to no potential for change.

This thesis has attempted to elucidate the geopolitical influences that have prevented independence for the indigenous Sahrawi in the Western Sahara territory. Limitations to this research reflect the ongoing nature of current efforts to renew discussion of the future of the Western Sahara, as there was no explicit resolution from the discussions in Spring 2019, likely attributed to the shift in power in Algeria. This lack of resolution combined with the recent increase of Moroccan development in the Western Sahara and the European Union's legitimizing

of Moroccan occupation of the territory, is likely to increase tensions and may lead to the resurgence of armed conflict in the Maghreb.

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