

Morocco's Strategic Use of Soft  
Power, Primarily with the United  
Nations in the Western Sahara  
Occupation;  
How has Morocco utilized soft power  
within the international community  
concerning the occupation of the  
Western Sahara, primarily in the  
context of the United Nations?

Evan Trinh, Dr, Kevin Trinh  
Higher Colleges of Technology  
December 12, 2024

Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
The Royal Kingdom of Morocco	4
The Western Sahara	5
The United Nations	7
Conclusion	10
Bibliography	11

## Abstract

---

Morocco strategically uses soft power to reinforce its sovereignty claim over Western Sahara, focusing on engagement with the United Nations and the broader international community. Through Morocco's economic soft power in its phosphate industry, overpowering hegemony, and continuous autonomy proposals to gain sovereignty and international favor, Morocco has sought to legitimize its position globally while countering opposing beliefs. Western Sahara has experienced this control of soft power, emphasized through liberalism in UN external assistance, restricted development, and its pursuit of self-determination within the bounds of the United Nations. Through institutional frameworks, Security Council dynamics, and postcolonial control, the analysis draws on case studies of UN negotiations, international diplomacy, and Morocco's outreach efforts. This paper highlights Morocco's soft power usage to influence international perspectives on Western Sahara and garner political and economic support, mirroring other conflicts worldwide.

## Introduction

---

It is widely agreed that traditional empire and colonialistic ideologies declined after World War II; however, they persist in the global political landscape. Decolonization in Western Sahara remains incomplete since Spain's 1975 withdrawal led to conflict between Morocco, Mauritania, and the Polisario Front, a political movement that seeks Sahrawi independence under the self-proclaimed sovereign state of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Mauritania withdrew in 1979, leaving Morocco in control of most of the territory. Despite a 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire and plans for a self-determination referendum, the conflict has remained unresolved and stagnant until 2020.

In 2020, the Western Sahara conflict reignited when Moroccan forces cleared Sahrawi protesters from a key trade route in the Guerguerat border zone, near Mauritania and the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>1</sup> The SADR withdrew from its agreed-upon 29-year ceasefire, citing Moroccan violence against Sahrawi's. Since protests against the UN's silence on human rights and self-determination violations for the Sahrawi population, the Polisario Front has resumed its violent resistance for independence in trying to liberate Western Sahara from Moroccan occupation.<sup>2</sup> Tensions have escalated as the Polisario Front restarted their violent resistance for autonomy. The Sahrawi people have faced significant struggles for independence, drawing international attention from protests in Tindouf camps to the UN General Assembly and Security Council.

The United Nations established MINURSO in 1991 to organize a referendum for Sahrawis to choose between integration with Morocco or independence, but no vote has taken place, leaving Sahrawi independence prospects uncertain. Despite over 30 years of MINURSO's presence, the lack of progress raises questions about the factors hindering a resolution and how power is being used. Originally mandated for one year, MINURSO has been repeatedly extended, presumably until October 2024 with plans of extension,<sup>3</sup> reflecting the ongoing struggles of a

---

<sup>1</sup> *UN Urges Talks on Western Sahara after Cease-Fire Breakdown* | AP News.

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-western-sahara-92e263197a6c7e427310387a335723a1>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Dahir, Abdi Latif. "Morocco Launches Military Operation in Western Sahara Buffer Zone." *The New York Times*, 13 Nov. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/world/middleeast/morocco-military-operation-western-sahara.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Security Council Extends Mandate of United Nations Mission in Western Sahara, Adopting Resolution 2654 (2022) by 13 Votes in Favour, 2 Abstentions* | *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15081.doc.htm>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2024.

50-year decolonization process and the lack of a middle ground reinforcing the need to reassess the soft power dynamics at play.

Examining Morocco's use of soft power reveals its impact on countries dealing with colonial legacies. Morocco's contemporary international diplomacy, economic initiatives, and resource influence can reflect how other post-colonial nations act in similar situations. Understanding these dynamics helps us see how soft power can address and intensify global political conflicts.

## Methodology

---

In this paper, I will explore the question "How has Morocco utilized soft power within the international community in regard to the occupation of the Western Sahara, primarily in the context of the United Nations?" The United Nations has been substantially influential in the dispute, however, involvement can be expanded to the international community. According to Joseph Nye, the pioneer of soft power, soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment.<sup>4</sup> This can be explored within the boundaries of Western Sahara, how the dispute is influenced by Morocco's aspects of soft power. I will take into account the perspectives of the Moroccan, Sahrawi, and the United Nations, and evaluate how diplomatic discussions and agreements have been come across and established. I will consider key events since 2007 such as the Morocco-Israel diplomatic normalizations in 2020, the proposed autonomy plan in 2007, the continuous resolutions passed in regards to the Western Sahara conflict, and the initiatives towards a referendum.

To evaluate the utilization of Morocco's soft power in the Western Sahara situation, I've used primary sources; such as letters from the Secretary-General, speeches, interviews with refugees and civilians who have been involved, and United Nations resolutions from the past 15 years; and secondary sources; such as news articles, research papers, and diplomatic analysis' as well as books to fully evaluate the perspectives of all state and non-state actors. I have used sources from official documents from embassies, humanitarian organizations, and detained journalists to cultivate an unbiased evaluation of the effectiveness of Morocco's utilization of soft power from the perspective of Western Sahara, Morocco, and the international prospect. The conclusion that I will draw for this essay is how the occupation of the Western Sahara reflects Morocco's usage of soft power.

Through the lens of Waltz's three levels of analysis, we can determine the different actors and perspectives in this issue. On the individual level, there is The Polisario Front led by Brahim Ghali, seeking independence for Western Sahara, King Mohammed VI of Morocco wanting full sovereignty with regional autonomy, and UN representative Alexander Ivanko, aiming to mediate a peaceful resolution through MINURSO's mandate for a referendum. Locally, the displaced Indigenous Sahrawi people are actively involved in protests in favor of the independence of the Sahwari population. At the level of states, the whole region of the conflict is directly involved in the affairs of the Western Sahara, this includes state actors of the governments of Morocco and the SADR. On the international spectrum, non-state actors have directly influenced the situation and its documentation; these include the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the African Union, and Amnesty International from which I have pulled information.

---

<sup>4</sup> Nye, J. (2017). Soft power: The origins and political progress of a concept. *Palgrave Communications*, 3(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.8>

## The Royal Kingdom of Morocco

---

In the complexities of global politics, the interplay between nation-states and international institutions often reveals the strategic maneuvering that defines contemporary global politics. Morocco's engagement with the United Nations exemplifies how a country can navigate and leverage the soft power of this global organization to advance its national interests. By examining Morocco's economic soft power, hegemony, and autonomy proposal in the Western Sahara dispute, Morocco has harnessed soft power and has bolstered its standing within the United Nations and the international community.

In the context of economic soft power and hegemony, Morocco is presented as stable due to its economic and political strength and as a reliable partner in a volatile region, when compared to its counterpart of the contested and unstable Western Sahara, leading Morocco to have a hegemonic-like control over the international community. Morocco's main export is phosphate, hosting 75% of the world's entire reserve, which amounts to 50 billion tons.<sup>5</sup> Phosphate is a vital mineral in fertilizer and as a result, Morocco has extensively eased the food crisis in Africa<sup>6</sup> while playing a strategic monopoly in international interests. Being a "gatekeeper of the world's food supply," according to Michael Tanchum, an associate senior policy fellow in the Africa Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), means that soft power is automatically granted to Morocco by the countries that partake in the agricultural industry, which is universal to all countries. Countries aligning their views with Morocco to fulfill their economic interests of obtaining phosphate creates a hegemonic dynamic for Morocco by influencing countries to benefit their cause towards the Western Sahara.

This mirrors the neocolonial characteristics of the France-Morocco relationship, where France maintains strong ties in trade, investment, and infrastructure post-independence. Similarly, Morocco could apply this model to Western Sahara in the SADR having phosphate reserves. Morocco would be able to offer limited control while maintaining influence over major decisions, benefiting Morocco much like a colonial power.

Morocco has continuously presented autonomy proposals to the Sahrawi as a pathway for autonomy, with the latest in 2007. This proposal, echoing the neocolonial dynamics of France-Morocco relations, offered self-governance over local administration, police, judiciary, and economic, social, and cultural development.<sup>7</sup> However, Morocco would retain full sovereignty over Western Sahara, controlling military, foreign relations, and national security.<sup>8</sup> This proposal ensures national stability but also prevents any rebellion against state intervention and allows Moroccan authorities to control foreign relations without input from the Sahrawi population. This lack of representation is unacceptable to the Polisario Front. Future conflict is likely, as Morocco will also have the right to control currency, flag, and national anthem<sup>9</sup>—key symbols of sovereignty. While the Sahwari is granted local sovereignty in terms of self-governance, the effectiveness, and degree of actual autonomy could be limited by Moroccan government oversight and interference.

Morocco's proposal can be seen as an exercise in soft power, aiming to gain international favor and legitimacy from the United Nations by appearing to address the Sahrawi's demands while maintaining essential control. By presenting a framework that ostensibly promotes local autonomy, Morocco leverages soft power to enhance its diplomatic standing and influence within the international community, all while ensuring its strategic interests are protected. With interests in territorial integrity, access to valuable natural resources, and bolstering its geopolitical influence internationally, and in North Africa, Morocco's proposal has garnered the international support of over 11

---

<sup>5</sup>*Morocco's phosphates cache eases Africa's food crisis – DW – 02/02/2022.* (n.d.). Dw.Com. Retrieved July 25, 2024, from

<https://www.dw.com/en/moroccos-phosphates-cache-eases-africas-food-crisis/a-60635396>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup>*Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region | URU,*

Retrieved July 26, 2024, from

<https://www.moroccoembassy.co.za/Moroccan%20initiative%20of%20autonomy.pdf>

countries that have ranged as far as the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez. Spain, as a former colonial power over Morocco, has had a historically tense and conflictive past with Morocco. Spain has also been a previous supporter of the Sahwari right to self-determination up to his endorsement of the autonomy plan. In his endorsement, he stressed that “Spain considers the Moroccan autonomy initiative, as the most serious, realistic, and credible basis for resolving the dispute.”<sup>10</sup>

The extent of support that Morocco has garnered is most evident in its application of soft power to please the international community in order to gain support. This soft power being obtained is further observed in Resolution 1754. The resolution which called for negotiations to achieve a mutual solution, welcomed and thanked Moroccan efforts in their compromise and attempted to move forward towards a resolution while the Polisario Front’s proposal was taken note of.<sup>11</sup> This is further demonstrated in the recent support for the African Union. Initially, the committee concluded that Western Sahara is a state and accepted it as a member. Morocco justified this due to partiality between the members of the African Union<sup>12</sup> and left the committee because they viewed the recognition of SADR as a violation of its territorial claims over Western Sahara. However, after the recent drop-out of discussions and full support of the UN-led initiative, due to Morocco’s potential contributions, the committee has regained Morocco’s favor leading to Morocco rejoining the African Union. The soft power and recognition gained by Morocco will undoubtedly sway the international community toward a solution in their favor.

Morocco's strategic engagement with the international community demonstrated through its economic dominance in the phosphate industry and autonomy proposal for Western Sahara, highlights a sophisticated use of soft power to advance its national interests of sovereignty over Western Sahara. By offering a degree of local governance while retaining critical aspects of control, Morocco ensures its strategic objectives are guarded, mirroring neocolonial tactics from its predecessor, France. The international support garnered, particularly from historically conflicted nations like Spain, highlights the effectiveness of Morocco's diplomatic efforts. Additionally, Morocco's economic soft power and leverage through its control of phosphate reserves enhance its influence, creating a hegemonic dynamic that supports its goals of control over the Western Sahara. Morocco's approach shows how countries can leverage soft power to advance their national goals within the framework of international institutions like the United Nations.

## The Western Sahara

The continuous fight for independence by the local Sahwari has taken a toll on its already vulnerable populations. Humanitarian aid and political backing have become tools of influence rather than acts of assistance and development. Western Sahara's reliance on external aid has subjected it to the agendas of powerful organizations and states, intertwining interdependence with political motives. As the Sahrawi people strive for independence, the extended timeline only exacerbates their struggle, allowing Morocco to solidify its control over resources and population dynamics.

International aid for Western Sahara, driven by principles of liberalism, highlights the region's critical need for support, with refugee camps depending heavily on external assistance; this grants substantial soft power to aid organizations and external actors, allowing them to influence the Polisario Front, potentially twisting liberalist ideals of interdependence and dependence. The Western Sahara has suffered from a refugee crisis for 50 years since the beginning of the conflict with Morocco, making it the world's 2nd longest-standing refugee situation. 88% of

---

<sup>10</sup> *Spain Officially Endorses Morocco’s Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/03/347753/spain-officially-endorses-moroccos-autonomy-plan-for-western-sahara>

<sup>11</sup> *United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1754*, Retrieved July 10, 2024 from <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1754>

<sup>12</sup> *AU limits its role in Western Sahara crisis | ISS Africa*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/au-limits-its-role-in-western-sahara-crisis>

Sahwari refugees suffer from food insecurity while 60% are economically inactive<sup>13</sup>. As a result, economic and humanitarian aid is supplied by various organizations, ranging from the World Food Programme, and the European Union<sup>14</sup>, to private corporations such as the Office Cherifien des Phosphates (OCP).

However, this influx of aid is not purely selfless; it carries with it the imposition of soft power by the donor bodies. The OCP, a Moroccan state-owned company, is critical to the Sahwari economy, controlling the Bou Craa phosphate mine, the biggest in the Western Sahara. While enabling employment and economic growth in the region<sup>15</sup>, the overarching Moroccan agenda can be strengthened due to the soft power granted in the development nurtured by the OCP. While protests against the OCP mining in the Bou Craa occur, this mine is a critical source of employment and economic growth, contributing significantly to the Gross National Income (GNI) and overall development of the Sahrawi population.

While the aid from the OCP facilitates economic activity, it also ensures that the Moroccan agenda is deeply ingrained in the region. This creates a predicament where the Sahrawi people find themselves torn between the struggle for the right of self-determination and the need for survival. While essential for daily sustenance and development, the economic aid reinforces Moroccan influence, undermining the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination. Protests against OCP's mining operations at Bou Craa reflect this tension, as the Sahrawi population grapples with the dual realities of economic dependency and political aspirations.

The liberalist ideals of interdependence and dependence are distorted as the Sahrawi people are tangled between economic necessity and political pursuit. The external aid, though beneficial in the short term, creates a cycle of dependency that hinders the region's long-term goal of independence, twisting the principles of liberalism to fit the strategic interests of powerful external actors.

Should Western Sahara eventually achieve independence, the delay in attaining the right to self-determination will likely result in an immense loss of resources and power for the Sahrawi people, primarily due to Morocco's continued control over the region's assets. As the conflict remains disputed, Morocco has been accused of mass immigrating illegal migrants to tip the population balance in its favor if a referendum were to take place. Morocco has given tax-free salaries as well as food subsidies to Moroccan civilians who moved to the Western Sahara<sup>16</sup>, as a result, two-thirds of the current population of Western Sahara -500,000- is of Moroccan descent. Economically, migration benefits the Sahrawi economy by expanding the host economy.<sup>17</sup> However, it skews the voting population in favor of Morocco, complicating negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front over voter eligibility. The Polisario Front argues for voter eligibility to be based on the 1974 Spanish Census<sup>18</sup>, including only those who resided in Western Sahara before Morocco's mass migration and their descendants. On the contrary, Morocco insists on having a revised criterion for voter eligibility, which favors the Moroccan migrants, with the five beings: a person has been registered in the [Spanish] 1974 census; a person lived in the territory as a member of a Sahrawi tribe in 1974 without being registered; a person is a descendant of persons belonging to either of the two first groups; a

---

<sup>13</sup>Nations, U. (2024, March 11). *Far from the headlines: After 50 years refugees from Western-Sahara are still in camps*. United Nations Western Europe. <https://unric.org/en/far-from-the-headlines-after-50-years-refugees-from-western-sahara-are-still-in-camps/>

<sup>14</sup>Algeria—European Commission. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/algeria\\_en#how-are-we-helping](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/algeria_en#how-are-we-helping)

<sup>15</sup>Western Sahara Resource Watch. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://wsrw.org/en/news/the-phosphate-exports>

<sup>16</sup> *The Conflict in Western Sahara | How does law protect in war? - Online casebook*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/conflict-western-sahara>

<sup>17</sup>*The Impact of International Migration on Economic Growth in the Global Economy—ScienceDirect*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780444537683000199>

<sup>18</sup>Wsahara. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Wsahara.htm>



person's father was born in the territory; or a person is a member of a Sahrawi tribe and has lived in the territory for six consecutive years, or all in all twelve years, since 1974.<sup>19</sup> Most criteria seem neutral, but the last requirement lets thousands of Moroccan migrants vote, favoring the pro-Moroccan side. This voter eligibility dispute is the main contention causing the stalemate, both parties cannot agree on a solution.

While the conflict is in a stalemate, due to its access to resources, Morocco can extract precious and profitable resources from Western Sahara before withdrawing from the region, exploiting the region indefinitely. With Morocco controlling over 80% of the Western Sahara<sup>20</sup>, the resource exploitation of their phosphate mines and fisheries provides Morocco with immense returns of profit. By delaying the referendum on Western Sahara's independence to an indefinite date, Morocco effectively ensures prolonged access to these resources, thereby reinforcing its economic and political foothold.

The indefinite postponement of the referendum serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it preserves the status quo, allowing Morocco to continue its resource extraction without legal or political repercussions of illegal occupation. Secondly, it undermines the Sahrawi people's aspirations for self-determination, as the indefinite delay weakens international pressure on Morocco. This tactic aligns with Morocco's broader geopolitical strategy, where economic benefits derived from resource exploitation translate into political stability and domestic support.

Moreover, the international community's response, or lack thereof, to Morocco's actions further exemplifies the complexities of soft power dynamics used by Morocco. By leveraging economic gains from Western Sahara's resources, Morocco can exert influence on global markets, particularly in the phosphate industry, which is crucial for agriculture worldwide. This economic leverage translates into additional diplomatic clout, enabling Morocco to garner support or at least muted opposition from key international players, including those within the United Nations.

---

<sup>19</sup>*The Unfinished Referendum Process in Western Sahara*-Terhi Lehtinen- Retrieved July 24, 2024 from <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/05/2001-journal-of-african-elections-v1n1-unfinished-referendum-process-western-sahara-eisa.pdf?x99184>

<sup>20</sup>*The Western Sahara conflict: A fragile path to negotiations*—Atlantic Council. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-western-sahara-conflict-a-fragile-path-to-negotiations/>



## The United Nations

---

The United Nations, as a non-state actor, plays a crucial role in global peace, bridging gaps that individual countries cannot. However, its intergovernmental nature poses challenges in conflict mediation. In the Western Sahara, Morocco's soft power directly influences peacemaking and humanitarian efforts, despite flaws in implementation and management, which can be understood through its institutional frameworks and resolution process.

The structure of the United Nations in the context of the Western Sahara is under the Security Council, having primary responsibility for international peace and security under the UN Charter<sup>21</sup>. The Security Council's presence in the Western Sahara can be seen in its first meeting in Resolution 377 in 1975 with the reaffirmation of the General Assembly Resolution 1514 to be applied to the Western Sahara, evoking the 34th Article in the UN Charter in the right of self-determination<sup>22</sup>, the principle that peoples have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and political status without external interference.

In its second meeting, the Security Council's implementation of a ceasefire through MINURSO lasted until 2020 and aims to organize and ensure a free and fair election<sup>23</sup>. While it has achieved numerous feats in monitoring, the referendum has yet to be achieved since its implementation in 1975, making it the longest concurrent decolonization issue in the geopolitical landscape<sup>24</sup>, further hinting at the soft power being utilized in delaying Western Sahara independence.

The continuous extension of the mandate can be linked to the structure of the United Nations Security Council, yielding critical amounts of soft power to the Kingdom of Morocco. The Security Council consists of 10 non-permanent members who are elected on a two-year term and 5 permanent members. The permanent members—China, France, The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States—were the main Allied powers post-WWII. They were granted seats to reflect their roles in maintaining peace and security, with veto power to block any substantive resolution.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of the Western Sahara conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco has strong diplomatic relations with France and the United States, garnering a liberalist relationship between countries. With France being a former colonial power over Morocco, France still has a strong bilateral relationship with Morocco, with Morocco being the main recipient of French investment on the African continent, France remains Morocco's largest trading partner to this day.<sup>26</sup> This bilateral relationship between both countries allows Morocco to exert soft power in favor of the country in Security Council discussions. With France holding strong ties with Morocco, it is ideal to cater to their economic allies, which is further demonstrated in supporting the Moroccan side over the Sahwari independence. The soft

---

<sup>21</sup> *Main Bodies* | *United Nations*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/main-bodies>

<sup>22</sup> *General Assembly Resolution 377* | *United Nations*. Retrieved July 27, 2024, from [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/IP%20A%20RES%20377%20\(V\).pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/IP%20A%20RES%20377%20(V).pdf)

<sup>23</sup> *Mandate*. (2016, October 26). MINURSO. <https://minurso.unmissions.org/mandate>

<sup>24</sup> *UN urges talks on Western Sahara after cease-fire breakdown*. (2021, October 29). AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-western-sahara-92e263197a6c7e427310387a335723a1>

<sup>25</sup> *Current Members* | *Security Council*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/current-members>

<sup>26</sup> *France-Morocco: A Rich Past and a Promising Future*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/06/219941/france-morocco-a-rich-past-and-a-promising-future>

power that Morocco holds over France, a veto power in a vital discussion on grounds of their own, gives Morocco substantial control over the mandates and resolutions to be turned over in their favor.

Additionally, the United States has strong relations with Morocco, further amplifying the soft power that Morocco holds in the Security Council and the liberalist relationship with the United States. With Morocco's successful determination to establish diplomatic relations with the United States since its independence in the Treaty of Friendship that was ratified in 1786,<sup>27</sup> Morocco remains one of the oldest and closest allies to the United States in North Africa. As of recent diplomatic relations, in 2020, Morocco has agreed to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel; with the United States mediating. This allows the United States to mutually benefit from established relations, further developing trust in Israel and Morocco when trade is desired. In return, the United States recognized Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara as well as administered a \$1 billion Moroccan arms deal in drones and precision-guided weapons<sup>28</sup>. The soft power dynamics of Morocco over the United States influenced the United States to adopt a more favorable stance toward Morocco in Security Council discussions concerning the Western Sahara issue.

Having two of the veto powers in Security Council discussions in favor of Morocco gives Morocco substantial control over the mandates and resolutions passed concerning the Western Sahara conflict. This liberalist approach to diplomatic ties with other countries allows Morocco to influence outcomes like the continuation of favorable mandates. The extension of the MINURSO for example, is more likely. These mandates can be tailored to align with Morocco's long-term strategies of autonomy and objectives. Furthermore, the ability to veto can lead to a stalemate in the conflict resolution process. If other members propose solutions that Morocco does not favor, the supportive veto powers can block these proposals, potentially leading to a prolonged status quo without substantial progress toward a mutually acceptable solution.

On the contrary, a realist approach can be seen in the two veto powers in the Western Sahara conflict. Because of the diplomatic benefits that France and the United States have when diplomatic ties are shared with Morocco, it is not ideal to sacrifice the economic and political when given the option to allow Sahwari independence. Advocating for Sahwari independence will affect the diplomatic ties with Morocco, this can be seen with Morocco canceling their annual U.S.-led military exercise after the Obama Administration backed an initiative for the UN to monitor human rights in the Western Sahara.<sup>29</sup> Threats to diplomatic ties justify the realist approaches that France and the United States can take, prioritizing their own political and economic interests with Morocco instead of the alternative, siding with Morocco's political opponent and losing diplomatic ties with an economically strong country.

The United Nations' role in the Western Sahara conflict being extremely influenced by Morocco exemplifies the limitations of international peacekeeping efforts. While the United Nations institutional frameworks and reliance on soft power aim to facilitate conflict resolution, the influence of powerful member states can hinder progress, justified by self-interest. Morocco's diplomatic ties with France and the United States demonstrate how soft power dynamics can shape Security Council decisions.

The situation in Western Sahara requires reevaluating Morocco's aid strategies and a stronger commitment to upholding Sahrawi rights. Genuine, agenda-free support is essential for the Sahrawi people to achieve independence and a future free from external manipulation. Resolving this conflict demands a concerted global effort to prioritize self-determination and justice over geopolitical interests.

---

<sup>27</sup>*History of the U.S. and Morocco*. (n.d.). U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Morocco. Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://ma.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/>

<sup>28</sup> *Exclusive-Trump administration moves forward with \$1 billion Moroccan arms deal* | Reuters. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-morocco-drones-exclusive-idUSKBN28L2TO/>

<sup>29</sup> *Morocco cancels war games with U.S. over rights*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2013/04/16/morocco-cancels-war-games-with-us-over-rights/2089089/>

## Conclusion

---

Ultimately, the case of Morocco and Western Sahara serves as a poignant example of how soft power can be wielded in complex geopolitical conflicts. It underscores the need for an equitable and transparent approach to international diplomacy, where the voices of marginalized and oppressed communities are given in the pursuit of lasting peace and justice.

The case of Morocco's strategic deployment of soft power in the Western Sahara conflict underscores the complex and often subtle ways nations can achieve geopolitical objectives without overt military aggression. By skillfully leveraging economic dominance, particularly through control of phosphate resources, diplomatic influence, and cultural outreach, Morocco has advanced its claims over Western Sahara, effectively navigating international forums like the United Nations. This conflict demonstrates that soft power, when effectively utilized, can prolong occupations, delay resolutions, and skew international perspectives to favor stronger state actors, often at the expense of weaker or marginalized populations, like the Sahrawis.

However, this situation is not unique to Morocco. It reflects a broader pattern in global politics, where economic interdependencies and diplomatic ties can be used to manipulate international responses to conflicts, allowing more powerful states to maintain control over contested regions. The protracted nature of the Western Sahara dispute—now in its fifth decade—shows the limitations of the current international frameworks, particularly within the UN, to adequately address and resolve issues of self-determination and occupation when strong geopolitical and economic interests are at play.

The findings of this research call for a more assertive and impartial role from the international community, particularly the United Nations, in resolving such conflicts. The continued deferral of the self-determination referendum for Western Sahara not only undermines the credibility of global institutions like the UN but also deepens the humanitarian crisis faced by the Sahrawi people. It is imperative that international actors push for reforms in how soft power is wielded in such contexts. This includes strengthening mechanisms for conflict resolution that prioritize the rights and voices of oppressed populations over the strategic interests of powerful states.

Going forward, it is crucial for international stakeholders to reassess the frameworks of international diplomacy that allow conflicts like the Western Sahara to stagnate. More direct involvement from neutral mediators, stricter timelines for referendums, and independent monitoring of resource exploitation are all necessary measures to ensure that justice is served. The international community must also hold accountable those who use economic and diplomatic leverage to perpetuate any form of occupation, ensuring that soft power is not weaponized against the principles of peace and self-determination.

In conclusion, Morocco's success in utilizing soft power to reinforce its territorial claims presents a clear challenge to the ideals of international justice. It is a call to action for global institutions and policymakers to confront these dynamics with greater resolve and innovation. Only through a concerted global effort, grounded in fairness and transparency, can the international community help bring about a just and lasting resolution to the Western Sahara conflict. The future of the Sahrawi people, and indeed many other marginalized communities facing similar struggles, depends on it.

Some weaknesses and limitations in my research are due to the limited coverage of my topic, a lot of my sources are biased toward the pro-Sahrawi side, leaving me with the challenge of obtaining comprehensive data due to mixed narratives and opinions. An inaccuracy that needs to be taken into account is the amount of representatives in the decision-making of Morocco, the suggestions and actions done by the representation of Morocco under the United Nations compared to the representation of Morocco under the King could slightly vary. Future research should incorporate more voices from the Sahrawi population and detailed demographics as well as a further investigation done alongside authorities or within press conferences with direct leaders.

## Bibliography

---

- Algeria—European Commission*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 24, 2024, from [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/algeria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/algeria_en)
- Brunow, S., Nijkamp, P., & Poot, J. (2015). Chapter 19—The Impact of International Migration on Economic Growth in the Global Economy. In B. R. Chiswick & P. W. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of International Migration* (Vol. 1, pp. 1027–1075). North-Holland. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53768-3.00019-9>
- Center, P. R. (2020, September 21). 3. Characteristics of the United Nations. *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/09/21/characteristics-of-the-united-nations/>
- Chip in to demine the world's longest minefield in Western Sahara*. (n.d.). Ekō. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from <https://pronto.sumofus.org/a/chip-in-to-demine-the-world-s-longest-minefield-in-western-sahara>
- Dahir, A. L. (2020, November 13). Morocco Launches Military Operation in Western Sahara Buffer Zone. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/world/middleeast/morocco-military-operation-western-sahara.html>
- DC, A. C. W. (2021, November 4). *The Polisario Front, Morocco, and the Western Sahara Conflict*. Arab Center Washington DC. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-polisario-front-morocco-and-the-western-sahara-conflict/>
- Dworkin, A. (2022, April 8). *North African standoff: How the Western Sahara conflict is fuelling new tensions between Morocco and Algeria*. ECFR. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/north-african-standoff-how-the-western-sahara-conflict-is-fuelling-new-tensions-between-morocco-and-algeria/>
- Fink, N. C., & Barakat, R. (2013). *Preventing Conflict and Terrorism: What Role for the Security Council?* Global Center on Cooperative Security. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20351>
- History of the U.S. and Morocco*. (n.d.). U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Morocco. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from <https://ma.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/>
- Human rights monitoring needed more than ever in Western Sahara*. (2020, November 30). Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/human-rights-monitoring-needed-more-than-ever-in-western-sahara/>
- Lehtinen, T. (2001). The Unfinished Referendum Process in Western Sahara. *Journal of African Elections*, 1(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.20940/JAE/2001/v1i1a4>
- Mauritania's withdrawal from Western Sahara | Events | World Perspective*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 16, 2024, from <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve/946>
- MIDEAST*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/WR96/MIDEAST-09.htm>
- Mine Action*. (2016, November 3). MINURSO. <https://minurso.unmissions.org/mine-action>
- MINURSO*. (n.d.). United Nations Peacekeeping. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minurso>

- Morocco cancels war games with U.S. over rights*. (n.d.). USA TODAY. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2013/04/16/morocco-cancels-war-games-with-us-over-rights/2089089/>
- Morocco's phosphates cache eases Africa's food crisis – DW – 02/02/2022*. (n.d.-a). Retrieved July 23, 2024, from <https://www.dw.com/en/moroccos-phosphates-cache-eases-africas-food-crisis/a-60635396>
- Morocco's phosphates cache eases Africa's food crisis – DW – 02/02/2022*. (n.d.-b). Retrieved July 23, 2024, from <https://www.dw.com/en/moroccos-phosphates-cache-eases-africas-food-crisis/a-60635396>
- Nations, U. (n.d.-a). *Main Bodies*. United Nations; United Nations. Retrieved July 21, 2024, from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/main-bodies>
- Nations, U. (n.d.-b). *Maintain International Peace and Security*. United Nations; United Nations. Retrieved January 31, 2024, from <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>
- Nations, U. (2024, March 11). *Far from the headlines: After 50 years refugees from Western-Sahara are still in camps*. United Nations Western Europe. <https://unric.org/en/far-from-the-headlines-after-50-years-refugees-from-western-sahara-are-still-in-camps/>
- News, C. L.-M. W. (n.d.). *France-Morocco: A Rich Past and a Promising Future*. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/06/219941/france-morocco-a-rich-past-and-a-promising-future>
- Polisario, F., & Africa, S. (2023). *Letter dated 19 October 2023 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4025985>
- Question of Western Sahara: Report of the Secretary-General (A/76/388) [EN/AR] - Western Sahara | ReliefWeb*. (2021, October 19). <https://reliefweb.int/report/western-sahara/question-western-sahara-report-secretary-general-a76388-enar>
- Rubin, B. R., & Jones, B. D. (2007). Prevention of Violent Conflict: Tasks and Challenges for the United Nations. *Global Governance*, 13(3), 391–408.
- Secretary-General, U. (2023). *Situation concerning Western Sahara: Report of the Secretary-General*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4023871>
- Security Council Extends Mandate of United Nations Mission in Western Sahara, Adopting Resolution 2654 (2022) by 13 Votes in Favour, 2 Abstentions | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 7, 2024, from <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15081.doc.htm>
- Site search | IASC*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 31, 2024, from <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/results?q=western+sahara>
- Sriram, C. L., Schnabel, A., Packer, J., & Touré, A. (2002). *Sharing Best Practices on Conflict Prevention: The UN, Regional and Subregional Organizations, National and Local Actors*. International Peace Institute. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09617>
- Stephen Zunes » » Self Determination Struggle in the Western Sahara Continues to Challenge the UN*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 23, 2024, from <https://stephenzunes.org/2003/09/01/self-determination-struggle-in-the-western-sahara-continues-to-challenge-the-un/>

- Tanchum, M. (2021). *The Post-COVID-19 Trajectory for Algeria, Morocco and the Western Sahara*. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28796>
- The Conflict in Western Sahara | How does law protect in war? - Online casebook*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/conflict-western-sahara>
- The end of the ceasefire in Western Sahara*. (n.d.). IISS. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/strategic-comments/2021/the-end-of-the-ceasefire-in-western-sahara/>
- UN urges talks on Western Sahara after cease-fire breakdown | AP News*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-western-sahara-92e263197a6c7e427310387a335723a1>
- Wayback Machine*. (2007, January 9). <https://web.archive.org/web/20070109235619/http://www.fpip.org/papers/sahara2003.html>
- Western Sahara | ReliefWeb*. (2023, October 31). <https://reliefweb.int/country/esh>
- Western Sahara | The United Nations and Decolonization*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 6, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt/western-sahara>
- Western Sahara, April 2024 Monthly Forecast: Security Council Report*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2024-04/western-sahara-12.php>
- Western Sahara: Morocco Cracks Down on Activists | Human Rights Watch*. (2020, December 18). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/18/western-sahara-morocco-cracks-down-activists>
- Western Sahara Resource Watch | The resource curse*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 23, 2024, from <https://wsrw.org/en/the-resource-curse>
- Wsahara*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2024, from <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Wsahara.htm>
- yrashed. (2023, August 3). The Western Sahara conflict: A fragile path to negotiations. *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-western-sahara-conflict-a-fragile-path-to-negotiations/>
- Zengerle, P., & Stone, M. (2020, December 11). Exclusive-Trump administration moves forward with \$1 billion Moroccan arms deal. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/exclusive-trump-administration-moves-forward-with-1-billion-moroccan-arms-deal-idUSKBN28L2TC/>