

Secondary' actors in the origins of the Western Sahara conflict: Arab mediation efforts.

Inmaculada Cordero Olivero and Encarnación Lemus López

Contemporary History Department, Seville University, Seville, Spain; History Department, Huelva University, Huelva, Spain

ORCID:0000-0002-8604-9168, Icordero@us.es; ORCID:0000-0003-2059-3619,

Lemus@dhis2@uhu.es

Secondary' actors in the origins of the Western Sahara conflict: Arab mediation efforts.

In the 70s of the last century, a latent conflict was generated in Western Sahara within the Maghreb that has survived to this day and in which, since 1974, the interests of the great powers have had much to say. Some of these actors or observers have already been studied, but we still know very little about the role played by other neighboring countries that generated dynamics of collaboration and mediation in the conflict.

This work analyzes the first actions undertaken by the Arab countries to try to reconcile positions and avoid an open fight. All those mediation efforts, carried out by actors with very unequal capacity for action and different motivations and internal and external interests, ended up failing. Behind them, France and the US, apparently neutral, promoted these meetings and talks with the aim of preventing a direct armed clash between Morocco and Algeria.

Keywords: Western Sahara, international mediations, Algeria, Morocco, UN

Introduction¹

It is not easy to find a better example than the Western Sahara conflict to observe, in addition to the contradictions between international legality and realpolitik, the limitations of mediation, a tool that has proven to be useful but complex in the contemporary international system (Zoubir 2001). Over the past 50 years, the former Spanish colony, the responsibility for which continues to be the subject of political debate in Spain, has “missed many opportunities” (Zoubir 1995) which have ended up converting this unsuccessful colonial venture into the archetype of a frozen conflict difficult to resolve and an example of what should not be done in other processes of post-Cold War negotiation.²

Following Spain's withdrawal in February 1976, the occupation of the territory by Moroccan and Mauritanian troops, and the subsequent outbreak of conflict between the latter and the Polisario Front, several African and Arab states have sought to achieve, if not an agreement, then at least a de-escalation that would reduce tension. This has been in parallel to the efforts of the UN Secretary General. These endeavours have been driven by a range of motivations, and have varied in terms of the scope of their actions, with the primary objective being to serve the interests of the major powers, particularly France and the United States. The examination of American and French diplomatic sources offers insight into the measures undertaken and the strategic vision of these two powers concerning the mediation endeavours. The present article commences with an examination of the historical framing of the conflict, followed by an analysis of the apparent reluctance of both powers to engage with the Arab 'good offices'. The article then proceeds to a catalogue of mediation efforts, focusing on three countries whose endeavours, for varied reasons, aroused particular interest in the US and France. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Libya.³

What is known as mediation—in reality intermediation—is one of the most adequate tools for peaceful international conflict resolution, understanding as such “any type of action performed by an actor not directly involved in a conflict or crisis aimed at ironing out or eliminating problems in the negotiations between the parties to the dispute and/or reaching a definitive solution to its causes” (R. Grasa, A. Blanc and P. Diago 2015, 22).

The United Nations (hereinafter UN) includes it among the forms of negotiation in which a third party intervenes.⁴ The interest that this tool has aroused not only in fields like political science and law, but also in those of sociology, psychology and history, has allowed for the topic to be addressed from different perspectives and employing different methodologies. Even though this academic interest is nothing new, the number of works in this respect and the social interest in this international tool have increased in parallel with the proliferation of conflicts since the end of the Cold War and the spread of the so-called “culture of peace”.⁵ It is thanks to this that we have a theoretical apparatus, a consensual definition of its typologies and a specific methodology for studying international mediation, adapted to the peculiarities of each conflict (Bercovitch 1982; 2009; 2011; Bercovitch and Jackson 1997; Touval and Zartman 1989; 1996).

Drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings outlined above, this paper will proceed to analyse the initial endeavours in the realm of mediation by third parties. A particular focus will be directed towards the mediation efforts initiated by major regional powers, namely Morocco and Algeria, in their efforts to mediate between the conflicting parties, namely Morocco and the Polisario Front⁶. It also intends to highlight some of the mistakes that doomed those initiatives to failure, the first of many ‘missed opportunities’ for reaching an agreement (López

García 2009)⁷. As previously mentioned, Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia intervened in the name of the interests of the great powers, but also in the name of their own strategic, historical and cultural vocations and incentives. On the other hand, it would soon become clear that, albeit still in the midst of the Cold War, their stances did not always have to do with ideological affinity. Indeed, “progressive Arab countries” like Syria and Iraq endorsed the objectives of the “moderate” Morocco (Mohsen- Finan 1997).

Mediating in what?

Following a period of over a decade during which the UN Resolutions calling upon Spain to initiate the decolonisation process in Western Sahara by means of a referendum on self-determination were disregarded and ignored, the Spanish government made a surprising announcement in 1974. This announcement stated that a referendum would be organised in the first half of 1975, and a Mission of the Fourth Committee was invited to analyse the conditions on the ground as regards the possibility of the process taking place. By the time of the referendum, the attitude of Morocco had changed drastically. Following a prolonged period of advocating for and supporting resolutions that advocated self-determination, the organisation began to exhibit annexationist tendencies, initially in smaller settings and subsequently in a more overt manner. In an effort to invalidate the impending referendum, at the 29th General Assembly, with the support of Mauritania, it requested that the International Court of Justice deliver a ruling on the nature of the Sahara upon the arrival of the Spanish and on the procedure for decolonisation. This was done in the hope that sufficient time would be granted to reach an agreement with Spain on the cession of sovereignty, or, if this proved unfeasible, to initiate the process of annexation.

In mid-October, the report of the Visiting Mission was published, which recognised the Sahrawi people's desire for independence. Concurrently, the ICJ's ruling that there was no sovereignty relationship with either Morocco or Mauritania and that the decolonisation procedure entailed a referendum on self-determination by universal suffrage was also published. Concurrently, the Green March was declared, which involved the incursion of civilians (350,000 of whom were to invade the southern provinces unarmed).

By this point, a partition agreement had been reached with Mauritania, which had also shifted its position on self-determination, affirming the incorporation of Spanish Sahara into Mauritanian territory, while the Seguiet el Hamra, encompassing the Bu Craa area with the phosphates, was to be transferred to Morocco and the Rio del Oro to Mauritania.

However, mounting pressure from the Green March, which commenced on 6 November with the head of state, the dictator Francisco Franco, on his deathbed, resulted in Spain signing the Treaty of Madrid on 14 November. This treaty recognised the partition of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania and fixed its definitive exit from the territory for 28 February 1976.

From the outset, the double occupation was met with armed resistance from the Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and the Río de Oro (the Polisario Front). Faced with the fragmentation of the territory, the majority of the population fled and took refuge in camps in the Algerian region of Tindouf. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) was then created immediately after the Spanish withdrawal, institutionalising a nation with its occupied territory.

This military conflict between Morocco-Mauritania and the Polisario was followed by a strong political confrontation between Morocco and Algeria. Algeria provided refuge for the population of the Tindouf region, while its territory housed Polisario bases and the SADR resistance. Since its formation in 1973, the Polisario had also received support from Libya. Conversely, in the broader international context, it is evident that Morocco, and to a lesser extent Mauritania, would not have pursued their irredentist annexationism without the unquestionable support of the US and France from the outset, a support that has persisted to the present day. The provision of arms by the US and France to the FAR and, to a lesser extent, the Mauritanian army, has been instrumental in enabling the Polisario to resist Moroccan incursions since the conflict's inception.

However, in the context of international relations, both intra-African and intra-Arab, the conflict was largely regarded as a lesser of two evils. This was due to the perceived risk of annexation being linked to the potential for a more significant open conflict between Morocco and Algeria. During the presidency of Houari Boumédiène, Algeria adopted a belligerent stance in its demand for the implementation of self-determination, supporting the Saharawi cause at the UN and the OAU. In contrast, the Arab League aligned with the Moroccan position. Conversely, the Kingdom of Morocco refuted the existence of a Sahrawi people and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), perceiving the Polisario as predominantly Algerian armed groups. Until 1979, neighbouring countries made various efforts to achieve a status quo in the region, a cessation of political hostilities between Morocco and Algeria, and consequently an end to the conflict with the Polisario. Despite this, negotiations were protracted, and never involved a return of Western Sahara to the SADR and its inhabitants.

This provides insight into the true objective of the Arab good offices efforts and partially explains their failure: the apparent absence of the Polisario Front from these initial actions. The present study seeks to explore the reasons for this apparent absence⁸. On 18 November 1976, the Polisario Front issued a press release that vehemently denounced the mediation efforts, particularly those of the Saudis, albeit in a discreet manner. A few days later, on 1 December, the Syrian Prime Minister conveyed to the OAU Heads of State a message from the Polisario Front categorically rejecting the good offices efforts, which it considered to be mere "manoeuvres" and a "dangerous" approach to the issue, because it placed it in a context that was not its own. Furthermore, it diverted the efforts being made at the time to address the issue in one of the most appropriate fora: the OAU⁹.

Three years later, in November 1979, the SADR prime minister again clarified the Sahrawi position in relation to those earlier Arab mediation attempts. In an interview with an Algerian newspaper, he stated that Arab countries had failed to live up to morality and dignity, referring specifically to another Saudi mediation attempt that had supported the aggressor (Ambassade Argel 7 novembre 1979). Morocco, for its part, accepted the Arab good offices, even though it was not they who had requested them, but Algeria. However, it made it clear from the outset that it would not accept bargains or concessions on its sovereignty and territorial integrity (Hernando de Larramendi 1997). In other words, to keep up the charade.

Mediating in the Western Sahara conflict?

International bodies, particularly the UN, the Organisation of African Unity (hereinafter OAU) and the Arab League, have written about the conflict, but little is known about the steps taken by those "brother" countries in its initial moments, when it would not even be possible to

talk about mediation, but “pre-mediation”: an initial attempt to convince the parties to the dispute to accept each other and to lay the necessary foundations for an international mediation. Needless to say, they could never have been considered as negotiations. For his part, Yahia Zoubir even shies from calling them “pre-negotiations”, for they would have been a peculiar sort of “pre-negotiation” or “strategic negotiation” in which there was no real intention to do so and any contact would have formed part of a calculated ploy, to his mind, by Morocco, with the aim of avoiding any real negotiations (Zoubir 1996).

The actions of the major powers have already been the subject of debate.¹⁰ In principle, the Western Sahara conflict did not involve, at least not directly, the two superpowers.¹¹ Morocco was on good terms with the Soviet Union¹² and on excellent ones with its traditional ally, despite the misgivings that part of the US administration and Congress had about Hassan II’s repeated requests for military equipment at the beginning of the conflict in order to “be on par with” Algeria, which also maintained a cordial relationship with both.¹³

This perspective is further elaborated upon by authors such as Oywind Osterud, who propose that the great powers adopt an 'indirect and secondary' role in this conflict:

External powers have been involved only indirectly, and fairly superficially. Morocco, of course, is a Western ally, fighting mostly with French and US arms, and financially also supported by Saudi Arabia. [...] The Cold War overtones to the dispute are secondary to the regional dynamics. The rivalry between two regional powers with different political and economic systems has obviously helped to fuel the prolonged fire (Osterud 1989, 311).

All considered, the non-intervention of France and the United States in these initial attempts to mediate in the conflict, when they might have been more useful, may seem surprising. Was it real or a mere strategy?

US diplomatic documents apparently confirm the superpower's scant interest in becoming embroiled in the quest for a negotiated solution at the start of the conflict. It is evident that Henry Kissinger's approach to the Moroccan question is one of disregard, despite the fact that his decisions consistently favour Morocco. Despite this, Kissinger's actions and decisions consistently favour Morocco, creating the impression of disregard for the issue. It should be recalled, Morocco had sided with the United States in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the conversations between Egypt and Israel, while also participating actively in the stabilisation of Zaire. The United States greatly valued its relationship with Morocco, but it also had vested interests in Algeria. As a matter of fact, an intelligence report, dated 1971, described it as potentially the most important country in the Maghreb owing to its geographical position, its natural resources—oil and gas—and its leadership (Airgram A-11 16 June 1971).

In October 1975, Kissinger replied to an enquiry made by Boumédiène with what the Republican administration's immovable posture vis-à-vis a mediation in these initial stages of the conflict would be: "As our public statements have made clear, we are not involved in any way in those discussions and are of course playing no mediatory role." (Department of State 26 October 1975, 98).

The United States appeared resolute in its reluctance to become directly implicated, provided that the interests of Morocco were not demonstrably jeopardized. In September 1976, the US administration advised its representatives against travelling to Rabat, without visiting

Algeria, as Hassan II would have desired, while ruling out a tour of both countries so as not to lead to speculation about a possible US mediation. Although there were differences of opinion in the US administration, it was decided to remain aloof because, curiously enough, there was not only concern about raising the suspicions of the two parties to the dispute, but also of the region as a whole (Embassy Rabat 27 September 1976)¹⁴:

A. To stay out: The Sahara conflict is not one which we can reasonably expect to influence nor one in which we have a vital stake. A war between Algeria and Morocco would touch a major American interest only if the LNG facilities at Arzew were attacked, and a military victory by either Algeria or Morocco would not be of crucial importance to us. We would therefore do better to limit our efforts, as we have been doing, to counseling moderation. Both sides have asked, and will probably continue to ask, that we play a mediatory role; at the moment, however, each is committed to a policy diametrically opposed to that of the other and appears interested in our "mediation" largely as a means of encouraging us to exert pressure on the other and of presenting statesmanlike image to the world.

B. To continue our present policies: With no political solution to problem evident, our present policy of neutrality on the substance of issue seems most logical. The administration seems to have succeeded in convincing the Algerian regime of its neutrality in the conflict, and we should strive to maintain this stance by avoiding taking positions on the issue in forums such as U.N. Our present level of military assistance to Morocco is accepted as a fact of life of the region. We believe it best to continue it at its current contemplated level.

C. To keep in touch with Soviets: A major threat to our interest would be an escalation of some future Algerian-Moroccan conflict in which we and the Soviets would find ourselves resupplying our respective clients. We have the impression that the Soviets, perhaps because of their interest in Moroccan phosphates, are more genuinely neutral on the Sahara question now [...] than they were in 1975 and 1976. It is obviously in US interest that they remain so. We believe it would be well to discuss issue regularly with the Soviets and to urge their continued neutrality. (Embassy Algiers 23 november 1977, 218)

Either way, it was a bothersome issue given the state of affairs in the years after 1973, when another conflict began to monopolise the attention of the European chancelleries: the Arab-Israeli issue. Be that as it may, at the end of the decade there was a change that, without being definitive, held the promise of a more favourable climate for negotiation thanks to the combination of three circumstances: the start of a new stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict, an incoming US administration, apparently now more predisposed to becoming involved in mediation efforts, and the change in the Algerian presidency, which the Moroccans saw as an opportunity for resolving the conflict in line with their interests.

On 11 April 1978, Boumédiène sent a letter to President Carter. Algeria believed that the new US administration would be willing to play a more active role in the mediation process, which, as already noted, had always been Algeria's goal. The president even sounded out the Americans on whether or not Morocco and Mauritania would be receptive to opening negotiations, assuring them that the Polisario's stance was reasonable and that it was willing to listen to proposals for finding a solution. Accordingly, he requested the US ambassador to contact the Mauritians and the Moroccans to explore their attitudes. Everything seemed to

point to the fact that the Algerians were very keen to open negotiations, but, according to Haynes, nonetheless did not want to take the first step, fearing that it would be interpreted as a cession. There had been talk about “saving the face” of Algeria, which had put paid to many of the previous efforts and which had made it quite clear that in this diplomatic game the qualitative emotional aspects were crucial (Kebdani 2013, 216-95).

Throughout 1978, there was what one American diplomat called a “déjà vu” of mediations. At the end of March 1979, a working group on the Western Sahara was created. On 5 April of that same year, its members met for the first time to explore the possibilities of US participation. Led by the undersecretary Harold Saunders, the group included representatives of the National Security Council, the Department of Defence (Intelligence Support Activity-ISA), the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency (hereinafter CIA), the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Department of State. Between April and May, arrangements were made with Madrid, Paris and a number of African capitals to determine the status of the OAU’s mediation efforts. Following this, it was suggested that the working group analyse the situation, to which end some solutions were prepared, along with a report on the difficulties that Morocco was having in its struggle against the Polisario (Department of State 28 April 1979, 239). A month later, the US Department of State arrived at the conclusion that the conflict could only be resolved through negotiation, but the Americans clearly failed to realise that it was they who had to want to make it happen:

We have told the French, the Spanish and interested OAU members that we favor mediation efforts and are prepared to be of assistance. The French have denied that they

are engaged in mediation and appear uninterested in working with us or anyone else to help resolve the conflict through diplomacy.

The Spanish are engaged in a mediation effort. Their Prime Minister has spoken with the Algerians and Polisario representatives in Algiers. King Juan Carlos is scheduled to visit Rabat in early June, and the Spanish Foreign Minister will be visiting Nouakchott. The Spanish are interested in working with us but have not indicated how they think we could be helpful. Head of State Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Traore of Mali have consulted with the parties to the Sahara conflict, in what the Nigerian Foreign Ministry has described as a fact-finding mission, rather than an attempt at mediation.

We believe it would be premature to decide to try to mediate the dispute ourselves, particularly while the Spanish are engaged in this process. We will continue to consult closely with them, as well as with the Nigerians and Malians (Department of State 25 May 1979, 173).

But this did not conceal the reality. At the end of October 1978, Deputy Secretary of State William Christopher met with Hassan II in Rabat.¹⁵ During his encounter with the king, the American diplomat tried to justify the involvement of his country in finding a solution to the conflict, while prudently throwing down the gauntlet of the participation of the Polisario in the negotiations:

Though the U.S. had no blueprints for solutions to the conflict in the Western Sahara, and wanted to be neither arbiter nor mediator, we felt the time was ripe for the King to take the lead toward negotiations. Our discussions with the Algerian Government led us to believe that President Bendjedid's government in Algeria does not wish to see a

change in the Government of Morocco and on the contrary views the continuation of Hassan's regime as important for stability of the region. We hope the King will now demonstrate the statesmanship he has shown throughout his life by entering into a new phase of negotiations, reflecting his country's renewed strength.

We have followed closely the twists and turns of the situation and believe that negotiations could succeed only if all interested parties participated. We are aware of the difficult situation concerning the Polisario and prescribe no formula but hope that the King will find some way to include the Polisario in the search for a peaceful solution (AmEmbassy Morocco 31 October 1979, 248).

It was then that Morocco masterfully deployed its battery of arguments. The king started by accusing his allies of irresponsibility in the climate of tension reigning in the region. Thenceforth, he exerted pressure first by underscoring the menace that the Soviets posed, by reminding them about the threat to Israel's survival and, after emphasising in this way how dangerous it would be for them to lose an ally like Morocco, by making a veiled threat to the position of the US Sixth Fleet. Lastly, the king underscored the danger of a strong Libya at a moment when Algeria was weak.

The only new development to emerge from the encounter was that the king combined pressure and threats with the announcement of a plan for finding a solution which, oddly enough, he kept under wraps:

His Majesty had a political plan in mind and [garble—would share?] it with President Carter when the time came. He would communicate it to the President personally. The year 1980 would be favorable to peace and negotiations, but Morocco

must have the assistance of all its friends in the U.S. and the Arab world (31 October 1979, 248).

As US diplomats themselves recognised, Morocco was applying “a policy of carrot and stick” at a time that it seemed to control. For its part, the United States, while continuing to support mediation efforts in which it wanted to involve African and likeminded Arab countries, Spain and, with a certain degree of reluctance, France, was sending Morocco military equipment by way of Iran and Jordan (U. S. Department of State 24 March 1979, 37).

At this point, the CIA claimed that any attempt at mediation was fatally flawed from the outset, because “For the most part, during the early phases of the war Morocco and Algeria tended to focus on fighting rather than diplomacy because both believed they could win. [...] In our view, third-party reconciliation attempts have foundered, in part, because of Algerian and Moroccan suspicions about the intent of mediating states.” (CIA 1987, 4-5)

In these initial years, France maintained a very unconvincing neutrality, since it underpinned and promoted the mediation efforts of Tunisia and Senegal—which had always been predisposed towards Morocco—whenever the actions of the Polisario undermined the interests of French companies. It seems evident that Morocco was more reliable and its influence in the region more desirable for the French than that of Algeria. Only in 1979, in view of a string of developments such as the death of Boumédiène the year before, the ideological conflict of the Algerian National Liberation Front (ALN) and the events unfolding in Iran, would the French, fearing the destabilisation of the region as a whole, be prepared to play a more active role in the quest for a solution to the conflict (Del Pino 1979).¹⁶

It has already been observed elsewhere that French neutrality was a guise and that of the United States, a pretence. At any rate, Tunisia and Senegal, both Francophiles forming an Arab-African tandem, were ultimately chosen as intermediaries. Furthermore, the United States encouraged the mediation of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. But they were not the only ones, since to these guided efforts other states, including Mali, Zaire and Guinea, contributed with initiatives that were more or less acceptable to the two powers, some of them to counter those of Libya, the most peculiar mediator.¹⁷

The first Arab attempts at mediation

In reality, the Arab League never lent the Polisario or Algeria its unflagging support, the institution solely being concerned about avoiding yet another conflict in the Arab world, because any schism tended to be exacerbated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the rifts to which it gave rise; at that specific moment, that between the supporters of Egypt and Syria. It was precisely for this reason that Morocco, a decisive mediator in this dispute, garnered some of its support. Against this backdrop, and although it sat on the side-lines of what were regional mediations, it also explains the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (hereinafter PLO) voluntary detachment from the Saharan cause, fearing that this new division would interfere in the support of the Arab community for that core conflict (Barbier 1976; Bontems 1984; Vergniot 1985; Berramndane 2000)¹⁸. For the aforementioned reasons, even prior to the departure of the Spanish troops from the territory of the Sahara, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia initiated their good offices between 29 and 31 January 1976.

It is known that the Arab country most active in avoiding the conflict was Tunisia which, moreover, had the endorsement of France and the United States. In fact, he was also the most active in trying to mediate between Morocco and Algeria. In November 1977, the US ambassador met with Habib Bourghiba, the Tunisian president, suggesting that he pull strings in the Arab League, not officially but “behind the scenes” (U. S. Department of State 7 November 1977)¹⁹. In any case, both the Polisario and Mauritania were shut out of the negotiations, the latter running the risk of coming out the worst from the attempt to broker an agreement between Algeria and Morocco²⁰. But in those mediation efforts Libya also appeared as one of the countries willing to act as mediators, while, on the other hand, the Algerians feigned a certain degree of receptiveness to the involvement of Saudi Arabia, a country with diplomatic expertise and money, something that, for its part, Libya was unwilling to accept.

In short, the problem of the Western Sahara had ceased to be a decolonisation issue between colonialists and the Arab world to become a conflict between Arabs. With the Alawite king and the Algeria of Boumédiène in opposing camps, in light of the rift between Egypt and Syria it might have been seen as a problem between monarchies and conservative regimes, on the one hand, and progressive Arab states, on the other,²¹ and, although this was not the case, the Arab League in fact avoided becoming fully involved in the dispute. At the end of January 1976, Boumédiène had telephone conversations with different Arab heads of state, but without drumming up any support, except from Gaddafi. The French ambassador to Tunis, literally reported that not even Iraq, politically very close to Algeria, approved of the creation of a new state, before adding that Sadat definitely would not side with Algeria (Ambassade Tunisie 29 January 1976).

The Egyptian good offices.

Egypt had begun to take steps in the autumn of 1975, although, in view of the remarks made by the US ambassador to Cairo, the possibilities of success were practically non-existent after the Moroccans' furious reaction to the hypothetical mediation of third parties in Madrid in June, insofar as it implied that there were doubts about its rights (AmEmbassy Cairo 14 November 1975). On the other hand, both the Moroccans and the Algerians had 'taken the initiative' with an eye to currying favour with the Egyptians, the former lending them assistance and support in Sinai and the latter purchasing Soviet armament for them (AmEmbassy Cairo 5 February 1976). Albeit an awkward position, it was at least adequate for attempting to mediate in the dispute (AmEmbassy Cairo 30 February 1976).

In an encounter with Hassan II and Boumédiène in 1976, the Egyptian vice-president Mubarak presented them with a proposal put forward by Sadat, in which he requested an immediate ceasefire and offered to host a conference for the ministers of foreign affairs of Algeria, Morocco and Egypt so as to address some basic issues: Algeria's acceptance of the division of the Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania and the withdrawal of the Algerian troops deployed in Amgala, in exchange for which Algeria's participation in the extraction of phosphates in Bu Craa would be addressed (Ambassade Cairo 4 February 1976). Not a word was said about self-determination: it appears that Sadat had not really understood Algeria's real motives. Anyway, Algeria did not accept this and Morocco declared that, at best, the issue would be more suitably addressed in the context of the Maghreb, rather than in a broader one.

The Americans and Algerians concurred in that the weakness of this mediation proposal was the lack of experience of the mediator (AmEmbassy Cairo 29 January 1976). For the Algerian minister of foreign affairs, the fact that Sadat had delegated the matter to Mubarak, who he regarded as a ‘better pilot than diplomat’, showed that the Egyptian president’s real objective was none other than to salvage his image as a statesman, which had been somewhat dented by the Syrian diplomatic success in the Lebanese conflict (AmEmbassy Algiers 17 February 1976).

He was not the only mediator whose capability and determination were questioned in the initial months of the conflict. The US ambassador to Algeria wrote the following about those who ought to have been key actors in any successful attempt at mediation:

[...] prospects for mediation dim as no Arab leader has moral authority to bring about solution. Mubarak is a zero whose only appeal was for Algerians and Moroccans to forget their differences and concentrate on larger struggle to the East. As for Saudis, Faisal had been ‘real king’ but Khalid, like Sadat, nothing more than tool of Americans. Bourguiba is a ‘nice old man’ but has sold out to French. His call for intercession by ‘Arab wise men’ miss-placed because, after all, ‘where are these wise men’ OAU offered more hope but was ‘manipulated’ by French (AmEmbassy Algiers 23 November 1977).

In the spring of 1976, the Moroccans now understood that mediation was no longer necessary, although, precisely at that time, the Algerians seemed to be more willing to accept it, even though the arrangements were made by a country like Senegal, which they knew was aligned with Morocco. When, a year later in November 1977, Mubarak travelled to Rabat and Algiers, after putting out feelers he discovered that Morocco was more flexible. Fearing what

might happen in the OAU, where Algeria had eight or nine faithful allies, it no longer fully rejected a solution that “saved Boumédiène’s face”. So as to counter the possibility that the African organisation might resolve the conflict, which was apparently what Algeria wanted, Hassan II sounded Mubarak out on the creation of a committee of Arab and African wise men, of heads of state, the latter then making the roundtrip from Rabat to Algiers for a shuttle-type mediation. The king buttressed his arguments by showing his willingness to hold a referendum, but with the Spanish census of 70,000 inhabitants and not the 300,000 that Algeria intended. In exchange for this, he demanded a ceasefire and the withdrawal of “foreign troops”. Moreover, according to US diplomats, Mubarak held that Morocco was willing to make concessions to Algeria as regards mining operations, plus the use of its Atlantic ports and railway lines.

Curiously, Morocco’s new predisposition now contrasted with Boumédiène’s attitude, who, as Mubarak would soon realise, was now much more obstinate in his rejection of the mediation of Arab and African heads of state, insisting instead on the OAU option; only after its involvement would he accept the committee of wise men. Algeria’s attitude was so bewildering for the Egyptians that they wondered whether Boumédiène was up against internal opposition bent on leveraging the matter to oust him. However that may be, at that moment the Algerians seemed to be living in dread of a reaction from France and were also worried about the help that Rabat was receiving from Saudi Arabia. As was to be expected, on this occasion nor did the Egyptian envoy obtain any concrete results for his pains. But he did not throw in the towel, for he believed that the liberation of French hostages in the hands of the Polisario, thanks to Algeria, might serve to create an adequate climate for a future mission.

In the summer of 1975, Iran also entertained the idea of mediating in the conflict. The fact that the Shah was well placed to use his good offices offered certain guarantees and there was also a precedent, since the Algerians had mediated in the conflict between Iran and Iraq. However, the initiative was vague and the Iranians were apparently waiting for the United States to take the initiative, before tagging along. But, as on many other occasions, US diplomacy took it upon itself to remind them that the United States preferred that another mediator, preferably from an Arab country, take the lead (AmEmbassy Rabat 12 June 1975).

Iraq also got its oar in. In December 1975, the US ambassador to Mauritania informed the secretary of state of a possible Iraqi mediation, in view of the presence of the country's minister of foreign affairs in the capital, on his way from Rabat (AmEmbassy Nouakchott 22 December 1975).

Syria, Algeria's "ideological brother", also displayed its good offices. Damascus dispatched a mission with "very important" participants—according to US diplomats—with the intention of redressing the balance of the international initiatives in favour of Algiers. Nonetheless, Syria's purported pro-Algeria stance was not apparently so clear, for a Moroccan detachment had served with the Syrian army in October 1973. The US ambassador suspected that Damascus' real objective was to neutralise Egyptian mediation efforts in order to not to leave the "path open" to Sadat (AmEmbassy Damascus 29 January 1976).

It is evident that the primary concern of the Syrian government pertains to the potential diversion of Arab attention away from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East towards this issue. French diplomats have observed that Syria's primary concern was that this issue would divert Arab attention from the ongoing Middle Eastern conflict. They asserted that all available

energies should be focused on resolving this conflict. Furthermore, the establishment of a diminutive state within the Sahara region was perceived to be incongruent with the Ba'ath party's doctrine concerning Arab unity²².

In November 1977, taking advantage of the Arab conference scheduled to be held in Tunis, even Kuwait tried its hand at mediation by proposing the creation of a sort of Arab international court for conflict resolution, capable of thrashing out a solution to the dispute. This small country's track record in this respect had been warranted by its intercession in the quadripartite committee of the Arab League in Lebanon, plus its efforts to mediate between Egypt and Libya and to bring about national reconciliation in Pakistan before Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had been deposed.²³

Yemen's good offices were also exceptional because, in its case, it sought a rapprochement between two protagonists neglected by other Arab countries: the Polisario Front and Mauritania. On 20 November 1978, a delegation from the Polisario Front visited Adem to ask for support in the context of possible negotiations with Mauritania. As they had done since 1977, the Yemeni authorities promised their support.

Saudi Arabia tries to mediate

Saudi Arabia had more chances of success. As Olivier Vergniot explains, although this Arab country staunchly endorsed the Moroccan thesis, to the point of becoming committed to both funding the Green March and supplying Spain with fuel in substitution for Algerian gas, which the country had stopped receiving as a reprisal (Cordero and Lemus 2015, 147), this did not imply that it declined to mediate, with Prince Faisal travelling to the Maghreb on several occasions between 1976 and 1979. These initiatives, as with all the previous ones, were doomed

to failure from the outset, because they never seriously considered the Polisario or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (hereinafter SADR) and owing to the fact that they insisted on tackling the conflict from an exclusively Algerian-Moroccan perspective (Vergniot 1985, 130).

In a confidential telegram, the US ambassador to Algeria asserted that Fahd was the most prestigious of all those Arab leaders who had become involved in the mediation efforts. The fact that Saudi Arabia possessed an efficient diplomatic corps and financial clout explains why Algeria welcomed that mediation. First in the winter of 1976, then in 1977 and November 1978 and, finally, in November 1979, US diplomats referred to the Saudi mediation efforts in an evidently approving tone. It is not that much store was set by their success, but the robustness of the mediator warranted the effort (AmEmbassy Algiers 16 November 1976). At any rate, the role attributed to the Saudis was none other than to employ their *savoir-faire* to create the right atmosphere for negotiations.

In February 1976, the Algerian press reported on an encounter between Saudi representatives and those of the Polisario in Algiers, exactly at the same time that the Saudi delegation was in Rabat. Morocco was exceedingly annoyed and made it clear that this had put paid to any attempt at mediation. In November of the same year, Prince Fahd travelled from Nouackott to Algeria, with an eye to taking further steps. On this occasion, he seemed to have reason to believe that the diplomatic impasse was not as absolute as before. Algeria's more conciliatory attitude in the UN possibly pointed to a certain willingness to negotiate so as to achieve a happy compromise. The initiative came after several months of Arab inaction and Prince Fahd was seemingly the most adequate person in the Arab world for managing the situation, for he embodied Arab fraternity and, moreover, his readiness to become involved in

the mediation did not seem to have anything to do with ulterior motives or vested interests. In sum, in the eyes of US diplomats he met all the principal requirements of a good mediator. This hopeful outlook was reinforced by the fact that Hassan II, in a TV interview, expressed his willingness to consider the matter of a referendum, albeit under certain conditions. Bouteflika apparently rejected this initiative, but, in the view of Ambassador Parker, "He perhaps takes it more seriously than he wants to let on." The diplomat informed the secretary of state that his Arab colleagues were not very optimistic, but also that "there are those who say that Fahd would not have become involved if there had been no possibility of success" (AmEmbassy Algiers 16 November 1976).

As a result of those efforts, there were rumours about a possible encounter between the ministers of Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, with Saudi mediation, in Switzerland before the end of 1976. On 7 December, Prince Saud went on a hunting trip to Algeria, with a message from Boumédiène. On the 16th, the Moroccan prime minister Ahmed Laraki informed the US ambassador about an encounter with Khaled, the king of Saudi Arabia, in Switzerland, where they had discussed the Saudi mediation and the idea of an OAU summit (AmEmbassy Rabat 16 December 1976). But all hopes were dashed when the Moroccan politician explained that in any mediation the Algerians would have to submit proposals, that they were up against many problems, including the difficulties in Mali and Niger, and that in this situation Algeria's sole intention was to distance Morocco from Mauritania. For this reason, Morocco preferred to talk more about Saudi good offices than about mediation per se.

Further futile steps were taken in 1977, notwithstanding the fact that, according to the Saudis, Algeria's economic weakness might favour an agreement. It already seemed clear to

them that ‘Boumedienne was the “principal obstacle” to a peaceful settlement in the Sahara, whether arranged under Saudi, OAU or other third party auspices’ (U. S. Department of State 29 November 1978). It was thus necessary to wait for winds of change, which did not begin to blow until the autumn of 1979. After a new effort on the part of the Saudis, the US ambassador reported that the Saudis and the French had organised an encounter between the Algerian president Chadli Bendjedid and Hassan II in Dakar. On 7 November 1979, the US ambassador informed the secretary of state that, thanks to the troubleshooting of the Saudis, it appeared that the Algerian leader was willing to meet with Hassan II at the Arab summit scheduled to be held in Tunis from the 20th to 23rd of that month. This time, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia—plus France and the United States—joined forces. Although it was believed that there was an internal struggle between hawks and doves in Algiers, it looked like the conflict had entered a new stage and that the previous efforts had at least managed to lay the groundwork for an encounter between the parties to the dispute, these being understood as Morocco and Algeria, when, in reality, that was the crux of the problem, and it all ended in nothing, as on previous occasions.

Libya: a singular mediator

However, if there was an Arab country with a commitment to mediating in this conflict then that was Libya. Rather than with ideological reasons, Libya’s interest in the Western Sahara conflict had to do more with issues that were as complex and contradictory as its leader: attaining a preeminent position in the Arab world, the region’s power games, old and new alliances between countries and so forth.²⁴ Muamar el Gaddafi’s attitude was not only at times self-serving, but also fickle when not openly contradictory. As a matter of fact, in 1975 Libya joined forces with its erstwhile enemy Algeria to champion the Sahrawi cause for self-

determination, by virtue of the defensive alliance signed between the two countries in Hassi Messaoud, whose aim was to counter Alawite expansionism for the purpose of preventing what they regarded as the dangerous Balkanisation of North Africa.²⁵ Nevertheless, the truth is that of all the mediations initiated in the 1970s, Libya's was the most favourable to the Algerian thesis and the only one that mentioned the Sahrawi people, at the end of 1975 and in the first quarter of 1976.²⁶

It was perhaps René Molinari—the first secretary of the embassy in Tripoli—who best interpreted Gaddafi's stance by describing it as being based on two convictions: on the one hand, the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and, on the other, his staunch defence of the United Maghreb (hereinafter UM). It was for these reasons that he opposed the creation of a new small country, instead of blurring the already existing borders, which was what could be gleaned from the first official statements swiftly released by his government on 19 October, immediately after the ruling of the International Court of Justice and Hassan II's call for the Green March, to which no reference was made (Ambassade Tripoli 4 November 1975). But the diplomat's studied ambiguity did not prevent Libya from continuing to support the Polisario or from increasing the aid that it gave the organisation, which was able to use this space as a refuge and base of operations.

In July 1975, the French ambassador to Libya, Jean Pierre Cabouat, continued to qualify Gaddafi's difficult position, the Libyan leader having even gone so far as to express his opposition to the creation of a new Arab state and to point out that there was only one free seat in the Arab League, namely, that of Palestine. However, already in December and following his personal encounter with Boumédiène, Gaddafi promised him his support, provided that

Algeria—always according to Cabouat—backed Libya in its refusal to allow Egypt to unblock Sinai in the peace negotiations opened with Israel, backed by Kissinger in Geneva (Ambassade Tripoli 20 December 1975). This information is fundamental for understanding the issue of the Western Sahara not now as the continued rivalry between Morocco and Algeria over borders and leadership in the Maghreb—as was the case—but also as a conflict that threatened to destabilise even more the Arab world, in a situation in which the rift between the supporters of Egypt and Syria (Vergniot 1985).

In brief, the conception of Arab unity, in general and Maghreb unity, in particular, prevented Gaddafi from making any statement unequivocally and emphatically against the annexation. Although, in an attempt to have it both ways, he made overtures to Algeria, took a stand in favour of the self-determination of the Sahrawi people and was, in fact, supplying the Polisario with arms through Algeria, but without taking a definitive stance on the annexation. At the beginning of January 1976, in a direct conversation with Ould Daddah, who was visiting Tripoli at the time, he suggested that, after the Spanish withdrawal, the territory remain temporarily under the control of a council formed by all the countries of the Maghreb—Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya—plus the Polisario and the Sahrawi National Council (SNC) (a body created by some of the members of the Djemaa). After a time, its ultimate fate would then be jointly studied by both the Sahrawi people and the ‘brothers of the Maghreb’. This idea was consistent with Libya’s defence of the UM, but as to Morocco and Mauritania it fell on deaf ears.²⁷ In reality, of all the mediation proposals those put forward by Libya were the only ones that took into account the opinion of the Sahrawi people, and which did not interpret the conflict exclusively in terms of Morocco and Algeria.

Following this encounter, Daddah visited Tunisia, where the minister of foreign affairs Habib Chatty was quick to inform France about the matters discussed, plus his own interpretation that Gaddafi and Boumédiène were trying to break the alliance between Mauritania and Morocco. He also suggested that, although Libya did not want a new country in the region, there were grounds to be concerned about the fact that the country was seeing eye to eye with Algeria, in view of the ‘alliance to form an Arab progressive front’(Ambassade Tunes 5 January 1976), that they had made for the purpose of countering Morocco’s support for Egypt.

Slowly but surely, the vagueness that Gaddafi had shown during the last quarter of 1975 began to dissipate when, days later, he recognised that his attempts at mediation had failed because the Sahrawi people did not want to be Moroccans, Mauriticians or Algerians, but themselves (Ambassade Tripoli 13 January 1976). Thus, on 27 February, following the final Spanish withdrawal, Gaddafi sent Hassan II a telegram in which he repeated his previous idea, before concluding, ‘Libya would be at its side if it were necessary to fight secessionists inside the borders of its kingdom or colonialists inside those of the Sahara, but that could not be the case if it made war on an entire people’ (Ambassade Tripoli 29 February 1976).

In line with the previous statement, following the proclamation of the SADR, the Libyan minister of foreign affairs convened the representatives—ambassadors or *chargés d’affaires*—of a number of countries with a view to urging them to recognise the SADR: of the Arab countries, only Somalia; of the European countries, only Spain; of the Eastern Bloc countries, all of them except for Rumania and Hungary; and of the ‘Third World’ countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Chad and Nigeria. According to Cabouat, they were all countries that might be

inclined to recognise the new state. However, Tripoli did not disclose whether or not they would do so. To Cabouat's mind, the reason behind this was that it would imply a break with Morocco and Mauritania, which would signify that Gaddafi would be deprived of the role of mediator that he was so keen to play (Ambassade Tripoli 14 March 1976). Most of those convened turned down the invitation and those who did indeed heed the call attended a press conference given by Ouali, the secretary general of the Polisario, and Mohammed Ould Zion, the president of the National Assembly of the SADR, on 16 March, but, given the lack of response, the issue of recognising the new state was quietly shelved (Ambassade Tripoli 17 March 1976).

Throughout this first stage of the Western Sahara conflict, Gaddafi did his utmost to strike a balance that enabled him to play the role of mediator, but this time trying to frame the existence of the Polisario, which he had nurtured in its struggle against Spain, in the ideological context of Arab unity, which was going to be difficult, if not impossible. This was how Ambassador Cabouat saw the problem (Ambassade Tripoli 24 June 1976).

In the following years, Libya would chop and change its stance of interference between the conflict and the ideal of unity, a vagueness that, with time, would not only affect this country but also the Maghreb as a whole, as evidenced by the agreement on the Great Maghreb that Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya signed in 1988, thus leaving the Western Sahara conflict in limbo, as Mortimer had foreseen (1993,181-2)²⁸.

Conclusions

When at the end of 1975, an agreement was reached on the Spanish withdrawal from the Western Sahara and its division between Morocco and Mauritania, the conflict escalated and acquired two dimensions: on the one hand, the advent of a people and a state, the SADR,

landless or expelled from the land that had once belonged to them; and, on the other, a low-intensity confrontation between Morocco and Algeria, when the latter opposed the fait accompli of the annexation and the creation of a country of asylum for the displaced Sahrawi people and a political and military base of operations for the Polisario.

Beyond respecting the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, the countries of the Maghreb leveraged the conflict to settle their differences, especially Morocco and Algeria in their jockeying for pre-eminence in the region, whereby its consideration as a regional conflict and the attention paid here to the reactions that it provoked in neighbouring countries. Overnight, the Western Sahara ceased to be a problem between a colonialist country and the Arab world to become an intra-Arab one that occurred at the worst possible moment. The new Sahrawi issue—the territory's occupation, its division into two parts and the obstacle of self-determination—emerged at a moment of open confrontation in the Arab world which explains the lack of support for the cause. In about 1975, the core Arab-Israeli conflict, which had subsequently led to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, had caused a schism between Egypt and Syria, following their defeat in the Yom Kippur War, after which the rift between the conservative Arabs and their radical or progressive counterparts, aligned with Syria, widened. Furthermore, the quarrel undermined good neighbourly relations, towards which progress had slowly been made at encounters like those of Nouadhibou in 1970 and Djerba in 1974, with Maghreb unity as the ultimate goal.

Consequently, there was no willingness to consider the creation of a small country whose future promised to be unstable and which would only increase the number of border areas in dispute in the Maghreb, when there was concern for sustaining the united support for the PLO

in its permanent confrontation with Israel. On the contrary, there was much diplomatic manoeuvring to avoid war being declared between Morocco and Algeria. As of the end of 1975, in addition to Senegal and Tunisia, many countries, including Syria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya, attempted patch up the relationship between the two countries.

Notwithstanding the importance of maintaining these contacts and/or 'cooling down' a conflictive situation, to all appearances the results were thin on the ground for endogenous and exogenous reasons. Perhaps because some of the basic requirements for a successful mediation were not met. It is true that the majority of the hypothetical Arab mediators had political or cultural links to the parties to the dispute: they shared the same space and had economic ties and common enemies in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Additionally, they did not arouse the suspicions of the adversaries, as did the two superpowers and France, despite the fact that some of them acted as their 'straw men'. However, they lacked access to the resources that would have enabled them to exert pressure on the two opponents, adequate strategies and/or a specific plan to achieve something more than the mere communication between them. All of them were unsuccessful in their attempts because they lacked real conviction based on impartiality, since, barring a few exceptions, they tried to avoid war by opening negotiations that, saving Algeria's face, which had played for high stakes in favour of the right to self-determination, led them to accept the annexation in exchange for getting a look into the extraction of phosphates or for improving their connections with the Atlantic so as to be able to export their natural resources.

With the exception of Libya, neither were the Polisario or the Sahrawi people taken into consideration in these many attempts to open negotiations, nor were they included among the parties to the dispute. But nor did Gaddafi openly and decidedly champion the Polisario,

because the creation of this small country was an obstacle to Maghreb unity, which depended on the blurring of the borders between the already existing countries. Even so, he requested the presence of the Polisario in the negotiations, provided cover for them in their territory and supplied them with arms.

In this respect, the importance of timing should be stressed. As Eduardo Ferrero observes, neither should a successful mediation be premature, to prevent the parties to the dispute from understanding it as an interference in their home affairs, nor tardy to the point that its effect no longer has any value. More specifically, this author explains that there must be a rapprochement before the parties to the dispute have taken permanent action that prevents them from backtracking, changing the situation to the disadvantage of one of the parties, or before the position of one of them is so strong that it is no longer interested in becoming embroiled in a renegotiation. It was precisely this trump card that Morocco played, never becoming fully involved in any negotiation, since its one and only proposal was the universal acceptance of the *fait accompli*.

References

Secondary

Barbier, M. 1976. "L'avis consultatif de la Cour de La Haye sur le Sahara." *Revue Juridique et Politique* (1): 67-103.

Bercovitch, J. 1984. *Social Conflicts and Third Parties: Strategies of Conflict Resolution*. Boulder, Colorado: Bowker Publishing Co.

- Bercovitch, J. 1997. "Mediation in International Conflict." In *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, edited by I. W. Zartman and L. Rasmussen, 125-53. Washington, DC: United States Institution of Peace Press.
- Bercovitch, J. and R. D. Jackson. 1997. *International Conflict: A Chronological Encyclopedia of Conflicts and Their Management, 1945-1995*. Washington, DC: Washington Quarterly.
- Bercovitch, J. 2009. *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-First Century: Principles, Methods, and Approaches*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Bercovitch, J. 2011. *Theory and Practice of International Mediation: Selected Essays*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Berramndane, A.2000. *Le Sahara enjeu maghrebin*. Paris: Karthala.
- Bontems, C. 1984. *La Guerre du Sahara occidental*. París: Puf.
- Cordero, I. and E. Lemus. 2015. "La cuestión del Sahara. Una visión desde el 'Quai d'Orsay.'" *Ayer* (99): 123-148.
- Cordero, I. and E. Lemus. 2109. "Mauritania y el Sahara español: entre Argelia y Marruecos (1969-1971)." *Historia y Política* (41): 305-333.
<https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/Hyp/article/view/60375/43862>
- Cordero, I. and E. Lemus. 2022. "Sahara Occidental: Actores y dinámicas regionales en los orígenes del conflicto (1974-1979)", *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* (52/ 2): 252-284.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.18077>
- Ferrero, E. 1987. "La Mediación: teoría y práctica." *Derecho PUCP: Revista de la Facultad de Derecho* (41): 37-59.
- Fisas, V. 2004. *Procesos de paz y negociación en conflictos armados*. Barcelona: Paidós.

Grasa, R., A. Blanc and P. Diago. 2015. "Informe general: "Análisis y resolución de conflictos como marco para la mediación. Una propuesta orientada a la formación de mediadores en y para la región mediterránea." In *La aplicación de la mediación en la resolución de los conflictos en el Mediterráneo (Iniciativa para la Mediación en el Mediterráneo)*, edited by C. Martínez Capdevi. Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación, 13-47.
[https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/ServiciosAlCiudadano/PublicacionesOficiales/La%20aplicaci%C3%B3n%20de%20la%20Mediaci%C3%B3n%20en%20la%20resoluci%C3%B3n%20de%20los%20conflictos%20en%20el%20Mediterr%C3%A1neo.%20\(Iniciativa%20para%20la%20Mediaci%C3%B3n\).pdf](https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/ServiciosAlCiudadano/PublicacionesOficiales/La%20aplicaci%C3%B3n%20de%20la%20Mediaci%C3%B3n%20en%20la%20resoluci%C3%B3n%20de%20los%20conflictos%20en%20el%20Mediterr%C3%A1neo.%20(Iniciativa%20para%20la%20Mediaci%C3%B3n).pdf)

Gulam, K. 2010. "*Talking to the Desert*": *Discourse, Power, and Libyan Geopolitics 1969-2009*. Ann Arbor, MI: Proquest. <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/55894/1/U584431.pdf>

Harto De Vera, F 2013. "La mediación y la investigación para la paz: la búsqueda de alternativas pacíficas a los conflictos en la arena internacional." *Política y Sociedad* 50 (1): 53-70.

Harto De Vera, F. 2005. *Investigaciones para la paz y resolución pacífica de conflictos* Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch.

Hopmann, P.T. 1990. *Teoría y procesos en las relaciones internacionales*. Spanish versión G. Sánchez. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL/PNUD.
<https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c7f5b61e-55c2-4155-9e6e-5d71c2a49713/content>

Hernando de Larramendi, M. 1997. *La política exterior de Marruecos*. Madrid: Mapfre.

- Joffè G. and E. Paolet. 2010. *Libya's Foreign Policy: Drivers and Objectives*. Washington: German Marshall Fund of the United States.
https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126134/Mediterranean-paper_07.pdf
- Kebdani, F. 2013. "Política exterior de Argelia durante el mandato del presidente Houari Boumediène, (1965-1978)". PhD tesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
<https://eprints.ucm.es/22367/1/T34649.pdf> Sahara.
- Kleiboer, M. 1996. "Understanding success and failure of international mediation." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40 (2): 360-389.
- Kriesberg, L. 2009. "The evolution of conflict resolution." In *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, edited by J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk and I. W. Zartman. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/ektron-files/the-evolution-of-conflict-resolution-louis-kriesberg.pdf?sfvrsn=9719bf93_7
- López García, B. 2009. "Sahara 2009: acabar con las ocasiones perdidas." *Política Exterior* (127): 113-126.
- Mohsen-Finan, K. 1997. *Sahara Occidental, les enjeux d'un conflict regional*. Paris: CNRS.
- Moore, C. W. 1996. *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mortimer, R. 1993. "The Greater Maghreb and the Western Sahara." In *International dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict*, edited by Y. Zoubir and D. Volman. Westport Connecticut: Praeger.
- Mundy, J. 2006. "¿Neutrality or complicity? The United States and the 1975 Moroccan takeover of the Spanish Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 11 (3): 275-306, DOI: 10.1080/13629380600803001.

- Murphy, J. 2010. "The Functioning of Realpolitik in Protracted Conflict and the Transformative Capacity of Self-Determination: A Case Study of Western Sahara, Africa's Last Colony." PhD thesis, Jaume I University.
- Osterud, O. 1989. "War termination in the Western Sahara." *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 20 (3): 309-317.
- Otayek, R. 1983. *Arabie Saoudite Afrique: Eléments pour une analyse de la politique extérieure d'un panislamisme conservateur*. Bordeaux: Centre d'Étude d'Afrique Noire, Institut d'Études Politiques.
- Otayek, R. 1986. *La politique africaine de la Libye 1965-1985*. Paris: Karthale.
- Pino, D. del. 1979. "La mediación francesa en el conflicto del Sahara se da como segura en Marruecos", *El País*, february 21, 1979.
- Ould Daddah, M. 2003. *Le Mauritanie. Contre vents et marées*. Paris: Karthala
- Solomon H. and G. Swart. 2005. "Libya's foreign policy in flux." *African Affairs* 104 (416): 469-492.
- St. John, R.B. 1987. *Gaddafi's World Design: Libyan Foreign Policy, 1969-1987*. London: Saqi Books.
- Touval S. and I. W. Zartman. 1989. "Mediation in International Conflicts." In *Mediation Research*, edited by K. Kressel and D. G. Pruitt, 115-137. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Touval, S. and I. W. Zartman. 1996. "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era". In *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and responses to international conflict*, edited by C. Crocker, F. Hampson and P. Aall, 445-461. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Vergniot, O. 1985. "Le conflit du Sahara Occidental dans les relations inter-arabes." *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, (XXIV): 125-36.

Vinyamata, E. 1999. *Manual de prevención y resolución de conflictos: conciliación, mediación, negociación*. Barcelona: Ariel.

Zartman, I. W. 1978. (ed.) *The Negotiation Process*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Zartman, I. W. and S. Touval. 1985. "International mediation: conflict resolution and power politics." *Journal of Social Issues* (41): 27-45.

Zartman, I. W. 1989. "Prenegotiation: Phases and Functions." *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 44 (2): 237-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002070208904400202>

Zartman, I. W. 2008. "Ripeness: the importance of timing in negotiation and conflict resolution." *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2008/12/20/ripeness-the-importance-of-timing-in-negotiation-and-conflict-resolution/>

Zoubir, Y. H. 1995. "Protracted conflict and failure to achieve prenegotiation in the Western Sahara conflict." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 20 (2):1-44.

Zoubir, Y.H. 1996. "The Western Sahara conflict: a case study in failure of prenegotiation and prolongation of conflict." *California Western International Law Journal* 26 (2): 173-213.

Zoubir, Y. H. 2001. "La tercera vía: "realpolitik" frente a legalidad internacional". *Nación Árabe* 15 (45) : 73-84.

Primary Sources

Airgram A-11 U.S. Department of State, June 16, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76*, vol. 5, part 2, documents on North Africa, 1969-1972. Washington DC: United States

Government Printing Office, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d25>.

Mémorandum ambassadeur de France en Algérie à M. Guiringaud, ministre français des Affaires étrangères, décembre 6, 1976, Rabat, 558PO/1, 228. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

Memorandum Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Western Sahara: Scenarios for a Diplomatic Solution. An Intelligence Assessment”, 1987, 4-5, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88T00096R000600720010-7.pdf>.

Memorandum from the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Tarnoff) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) 1, U. S. Department of State, March 24, 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. XVII, part 3, North Africa, 37. Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Memorandum from the Executive Secretary of the Department of State to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, U. S. Department of State, April 28, 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. XVII, part 3, North Africa, 239. Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v17p3/d239>.

Memorandum from the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Tarnoff) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) 1, U. S. Department of State. 25 May 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. XVII, part 3, North Africa, 173. Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Telegram 171816z/1976 AmEmbassy Algiers, February 17, 1976, Algier 00408, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA).

Télégramme 40237/38 Ambassade Argel, Novembre 7, 1979, Ambassade Rabat 558PO/1, 228, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

Telegram 02728 161709Z AmEmbassy Algiers, November 16, 1976, (NARA), <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=52746&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

Telegram 02958 01 of 02 231858Z AmEmbassy Algiers, november 23, 1977, (NARA), <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=272820&dt=2532&dl=1629>.

Telegram 1630Z from the AmEmbassy Algiers to the Department of State, AmEmbassy Algiers, November 23, 1977, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, volume XVII, part. 3, North Africa, 218, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v17p3/d218>

Telegram 11545 1411202 AmEmbassy Cairo, November 14, 1975, (NARA).

Telegram 01197 291549Z, AmEmbassy Cairo, January 29, 1976, (NARA) <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=134800&dt=2082&dl=1345>

Telegram 01237 301342Z AmEmbassy Cairo, January 30, 1976, (NARA) <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=134618&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

Télégramme 173/74 Ambassade Cairo, February 4, 1976, 457 Autres Embassades II, Archives du ministère des Affaires Etrangère, Paris (MAE).

Telegram 01237 3013422 AmEmbassy Cairo, February 5, 1976, (NARA).

Telegram 19105 AmEmbassy Cairo, November 16, 1977, (NARA).

Telegram 00502290 07072 AmEmbassy Damasco, January 29, 1976, (NARA).

Telegram 02634, AmEmbassy Noaukchok, December 22, 1975, (NARA).

Telegram 770/771 Ambassade Nouakchott, Novembre 2, 1976, Ambassade Rabat 558PO/1, 220, (MAE).

Telegram 2787 AmEmbassy Rabat, June 12, 1975, (NARA).

Telegram 05219 271528Z AmEmbassy Rabat, September 27, 1976, (NARA)
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=336692&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

Telegram 06 746 161759Z AmEmbassy Rabat, December 16, 1976, (NARA)
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=75303&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

Telegram 1705Z AmEmbassy Morocco to the Department of State, AmEmbassy Rabat, October 31, 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. XVII, part 3, North Africa, 248. Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Télégramme Ambassade Rabat, Janvier16, 1980, Rabat, 558PO/1, 228, (CADN).

Telegram 254913 Department of State to the Embassy in Algeria, U.S. Department of State, October 26, 1975, Washington, 2149Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976*, vol. e-9, part 1, documents on North Africa, 1973–1976, 98, Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Telegram 203832, U. S. Department of State, August 25, 1977, (NARA),
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=194978&dt=2532&dl=1629>

Telegram 266033, U. S. Department of State, November 7, 1977, (NARA),
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=257126&dt=2532&dl=1629>.

Telegram 301676, U. S. Department of State, November 29, 1978, (NARA).

Télégramme 93/96 Ambassade Tunisie, January 29, 1976, Tunisie 457, *Autres Embassades II*, (MAE).

Telegram 08339 191023Z AmEmbassy Tunis, November 18, 1977, (NARA).

¹ This work is the result of research funded by projects: "The management of fishing resources in Western Sahara. Economy, government and representation around the exploitation of the Sahrawi fishing ground", UPO-

1381097, FEDER Andalusia 2014-2020. "Building democracies: actors and narratives in the processes of modernization and change in the Iberian Peninsula (1959-2008)", PID2019-107169GB-100/AEI/10.13039/501100011033, AEI/Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain.

² For a theoretical summary and the state of the question on international mediation, its 'golden rules' and other factors determining its success or failure, an aspect that cannot be addressed here, see Kleiboer (1996), plus the now classic works of Zartman, (1978) and Zartman and Touval (1985). For a historical overview of negotiation and conflict resolution theory, particularly for the 1970s, see Kriesberg (2009).

³ This work serves to complement the research that has been previously published on the subject of the mediation, parallel in time, of several African countries: Tunisia, Senegal and Mali. The first two of these nations are particularly noteworthy in their actions as proxies for French interests. Due to limitations in the available space, it is not possible to incorporate the significant mediation efforts of Tunisia, an additional Arab country, in this discussion. For further details, please refer to: Cordero I. and Lemus E. (2022) .

⁴ For an analysis of its typology, actors and dynamics, see the works published by Fisas in the framework of the project of the Culture of Peace School of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) (www.pangea.org), above all Fisas (2004).

⁵ A diachronic overview of the history of research on mediation framed in the 'culture of peace' in Harto de Vera (2005). This author has published a state of the question on the topic (2013).

⁶ A prerequisite for the success of any mediation is that the mediator be recognised as such by the parties to the dispute. In a process that is not an arbitration but a voluntary facilitation of encounters, the mediator acts as a catalyst, avoiding misunderstandings; an educator, transmitting proposals between the interested parties and facilitating their receptivity; sometimes the bringer of bad news and, in this sense, an 'agent of reality' in the eyes of the parties; and much more frequently a victim of the conflict. Irrespective of whether the mediator is a public figure and/or state, it is essential to possess specific qualities: intelligence, objectivity, flexibility, reputation, experience, confidence and neutrality. However, it does mean that the mediator does not have his own reasons to become involved, ranging from avoiding a conflict, whose consequences may pose a threat to his interests, to increasing his influence in terms of national and international prestige, (Ferrero 1987, 56). And the timing of

mediation is just as important as the mediator: neither too early, so as to prevent it from being understood as meddling in home affairs, nor too late, when any attempt would be pointless. In this respect, see Zartman (1989; 2008); Moore (2014); Vinyamata (1999).

⁷ On the right conditions for a successful mediation, see Bercovitch (1984; 1997) and Hopmann (1990).

⁸ Mauritania's limited role in these Arab good offices efforts may also come as a surprise. See this issue in a paper we have already published: Cordero, I. and E. Lemus (2019). The memoirs of its former leader Moktar Ould Daddah offer a wealth of information to understand the country's position on the Sahara issue: Ould Daddah (2012).

⁹ It is interesting to note that French diplomats have observed that the Algerian press has not reiterated the message conveyed by Syria. They have identified two potential explanations for this: firstly, the presence of divergent opinions between the Polisario and Algeria regarding the stance to be adopted in response to the Saudi mediation initiative; and secondly, an Algerian gesture of courtesy towards the Saudis. It is evident that Saudi Arabia's role as the mediator could not be overlooked, as it was the entity facilitating the dialogue. (Embassade Argel 6 décembre 1976).

¹⁰ See Murphy, (2010). On the US intervention, see pp. 295-306, on the French efforts, 307 and ff.

On the ground, the United States government was afraid that the Portuguese fervor, which had brought the Communist Party to power in Lisbon, would by extension move into Spain, an already unstable country due to the death of Franco and downfall of his regime. The United States did not want to lose its military base access to Southern Europe and Mediterranean, which a regime change in Spain might have effectively endangered. In military terms, French North Africa was of particular interest to the United States because of its 'strategic significance' as a site for military bases. [...] Henry Kissinger announced that the United States would not 'allow another Angola on the East flank of the Atlantic Ocean' (referring to Western Sahara), (2010, 295-96).

¹¹ The most recent works based on declassified documents include Mundy (2006).

¹² On 9 March 1978, a significant political agreement was reached between Morocco and the USSR, commonly referred to as the 'contract of the century'. This accord signified the establishment of the USSR as the inaugural Soviet client in the Third World. In January 1980, a French diplomat informed the Ministry that the

Soviets had confided in him, stating that although they had supported the Algerian resolutions on the Sahara at the UN, they considered Algiers to have overstepped the mark. The diplomat expressed the Soviet view that the viability of a small, independent Saharan state with limited resources and an undefined population was questionable. This, it was claimed, was the reason why the Soviet Union had not recognised SADR. The diplomat further asserted that the Soviet Union insisted that Spain should play a central role in resolving the conflict by preparing a conference, with the support of the major powers, for which Mali and Tunisia were working. This conference, it was claimed, could be accepted by Morocco and Algeria. (Ambassade Rabat, 16 janvier 1980).

¹³ The conflict would at first be chiefly regional, at least in appearance. It is perhaps for this reason that it can be referred to as a frozen one, for nor is it possible to claim that there was an ideological division of forces that prompted the “progressive” African states to rally around Algeria and the Polisario and the “moderate” states to do so around Morocco, insofar as Iraq and Syria swung towards the Alawite kingdom, as already observed.

¹⁴ All considered, the position was clear. The Department of State included the following objectives with respect to Morocco for 1978, which were then transmitted to Anderson as follows:

[...] help the king to find a formula permitting resolution of the Western Sahara impasse on terms which do not damage his position. Encourage third party mediation while avoiding direct US involvement. -- through our military assistance activities, maintain U.S. influence with the Moroccan officer corps, the group most likely to provide leadership should the king die or be overthrown. -- Respond positively to Moroccan requests for support on international issues, e.g., vote for Moroccan candidates seeking election to posts in international organizations. (U. S. Department of State 25 August 1977)

¹⁵ Warren Christopher was the deputy secretary of state during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, between 1977 and 1981, before being sworn in by Bill Clinton as the 63rd secretary of state.

¹⁶ On this issue, see Cordero and Lemus (2015; 2019).

¹⁷ Although this work focuses on the mediation efforts of Arab countries, another is being written on those of African countries. In her PhD theses Murphy paints an interesting picture with many actors involved in the conflict. Although they are by no means closed categories and some of those actors hedged their bets throughout the dispute, the former would have included the Polisario, Morocco and Mauritania, Spain would have

had a foot in both camps, and the latter would have included Algeria, France and the United States. Murphy (2010, 279-280, 286-288).

¹⁸Moreover, at time when the Lebanese Civil War had just broken out: <https://otralectura.com/2017/06/20/la-guerra-del-libano-1975-1990/> However, French diplomacy has been interpreted as reflecting a potential mission of armed combatants led by Yasser Arafat in November 1976, traversing the regions of Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. (Ambassade Nouakchott 2 novembre 1976).

¹⁹ On the 18th of that month, Tunisia submitted a new mediation proposal to the Arab League, pursuing its own political and economic interests and prestige. On the Tunisian and Senegalese mediation work, we have already published the work reviewed in note 4.

²⁰ (AmEmbassy Tunis 18 November 1977). In this confidential telegram, the embassy explains its reason for becoming involved in the mediation:

General and to Tunisian interests. Government of Tunisian [sic] does not have particularly high regard for Ould Daddah regimen or does it have any significant interests in Mauritania. Algeria and Morocco present different situations, and Tunisia does have close ties and/or common interests with both countries. Government of Tunisian [sic] shares with King Hassan's government the same generally moderate outlook, and there is a long history of Tunisian-Moroccan cooperation on both bilateral and multilateral issues. At same time, Tunisia's relations with Algeria are improving and got [sic] gives great importance to trans-Tunisia-Algeria-Sicily gas pipeline, as agreed upon last summer. This project is of particular economic significance to Tunisia and Government of Tunisian [sic] is obviously concerned that open conflict could delay completion of projector [sic] even put whole pipeline scheme into question. Conference could indeed claim that it had achieved its purpose of 'reestablishing Arab solidarity' and Bourguiba's messages seem to us to have been little more than one aspect of this general policy.

²¹ In order to understand the reasons behind these developments, the particular struggles for power and influence between Saudi Arabia and Egypt at a regional level, at least between 1967 and 1972, should be borne in mind. See Otayek (1983).

²² However, Syria gradually moved closer to the Polisario Front's cause until it became its ally, a position it maintains to the present day. Indeed, Syria recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1980.

²³ The matter was addressed in a conference of ministers of foreign affairs of the Arab League in Tunis, but always “behind the scenes and never officially”.

²⁴ For Libya’s foreign policy in the 1970s, see Joffé and Paoletti (2010).

²⁵ By virtue of this agreement, Algeria undertook to lend Libya its unconditional support against Egypt in the border conflict between the two countries in 1977. The truth is that, after the failure of the proposed unification of Tunisia and Libya in Djerba in 1974, the relationship between Algeria and Libya slowly deteriorated, until in 1980 the rift widened even further when Libya was accused of supporting the attempted rebellion in Gafsa, whose aim was to overthrow Bourguiba. In addition to a progressive rapprochement between Algeria and Tunisia, in the following decade Libya and Morocco also reached an understanding. After the failed attempts to create a permanent alliance with Algeria and Tunisia and apart from the treaty that the former offered the latter, Libya mended fences with Morocco, until both signed the treaty instituting the Arab-African Union in August 1984. It would be short-lived, “But for Morocco, it had served its purpose for it had detached Libya from the Algerian embrace and reduced the threat from the continuing war in the Western Sahara,” (Joffé and Paoletti 2010, 68).

²⁶ Two of the differences of opinion on Libyan foreign policy at the time. Nonetheless, both concur in that, as of 1969, Gaddafi wanted to attach greater importance to the foreign policy of a ‘small’ country, a foreign policy that should be ‘far-reaching’ or, at least, very ambitious. The former emphasises the contradictions and swings of the Libyan leader and his links to destabilising and/or terrorist movements in Africa during the 1970s, while the latter highlights his pan-Arabism and socialism. See Otayek (1986) ; Solomon and Swart (2005); St. John (1987); and Gulam (2010).

²⁷ Selon un de nos collègues yougoslaves, le colonel Gaddafi aurait proposé au président Boumédiène de recourir, pour éviter un conflit fratricide entre arabes maghrébins, à une formule de compromis tendant à donner au Sahara occidental un statut transitoire aux termes duquel celui-ci serait placé sous le contrôle d’un directoire composé de représentants des cinq pays du grand Maghreb (Mauritanie, Maroc, Algérie, Tunisie et Libye) auxquels pourraient se joindre des membres du Conseil National Saharien et du Polisario. Les espagnols partis, le destin de ce territoire arabe serait ainsi déterminé à la fois par son propre peuple et par ses frères du Maghreb. (Ambassade Tripoli 4 January 1976).

²⁸ It is worth noting that Libya had previously signed the Uxda treaty with Morocco in 1984. This agreement marked a break with Morocco's foreign policy and effectively divided the Maghreb into two blocs: on the one hand, Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia, which had signed a treaty of brotherhood and concord in 1983, and on the other, Morocco and Libya.