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MOROCCO'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SPAIN IN LIGHT OF THE 2021 CRISIS

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Abstract

Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. The relationship between them is one of the oldest in history, known for its commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, as well as its conflicts. It is impossible to deal with the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain, and vice versa. Generally speaking, these relations have been characterized as particularly complex and conflictual. So, it's only natural that Spain has an important place in Morocco's foreign policy (a country with which there are many conflicts and interests). It should also be noted that Morocco also takes an important place in Spain's foreign policy. The two countries have important economic and commercial ties and have entered the same value chain. In terms of security partnerships, Spain considers Morocco a strategic partner in the fight against illegal migration, drug trafficking, terrorism, and cross-border crime. On the cultural front, the two countries work together to promote social and cultural understanding of each other, to overcome mutual ignorance of each other's societies beyond stereotypes, and also to promote the Arabic and Spanish languages. But at the same time, there are conflicts, such as the delimitation of Moroccan maritime territory and the use of geostrategic resources between Morocco and the Canary Islands, claims to Ceuta and Melilla and Morocco's northern islands, agricultural competition, and geopolitical competition in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, especially with the inauguration of several Moroccan ports. Thus, the past Spanish position against Morocco's high interests regarding the Moroccan Sahara, particularly with Donald Trump's historic decision, represents the main cause of several previous crises and the 2021 crisis. This crisis was an occasion for the two kingdoms to negotiate their relations, based on mutual trust and respect. After the normalization of these relations, we have observed an increase in cooperation between the two states.

Keywords

Moroccan Foreign policy, Morocco-Spain relations, Cooperation, Conflicts, Crisis.

Resumo

Marrocos e Espanha são dois países vizinhos que partilham as margens do Estreito de Gibraltar, no Mediterrâneo ocidental. A relação entre ambos é uma das mais antigas da história, conhecida pelos seus intercâmbios comerciais, humanos e culturais, bem como pelos seus conflitos. É impossível abordar a geopolítica e a história de Marrocos sem mencionar a Espanha, e vice-versa. De um modo geral, estas relações têm-se caracterizado por serem particularmente complexas e conflituosas. Por isso, é natural que a Espanha ocupe um lugar importante na política externa de Marrocos (um país com o qual existem muitos conflitos e interesses). Deve também referir-se que Marrocos ocupa igualmente um lugar importante na política externa da Espanha. Os dois países mantêm laços económicos e comerciais importantes e integram a mesma cadeia de valor. No que diz respeito às parcerias de segurança, a Espanha considera Marrocos um parceiro estratégico na luta contra a migração ilegal, o tráfico de droga, o terrorismo e a criminalidade transfronteiriça. No plano cultural, os dois países colaboram para promover a compreensão social e cultural mútua, para superar a ignorância recíproca sobre as respetivas sociedades para além dos estereótipos e também para promover as línguas árabe e espanhola. Mas, ao mesmo tempo, existem conflitos, tais como a delimitação do território marítimo marroquino e a utilização de recursos geoestratégicos entre Marrocos e as Ilhas Canárias, as reivindicações sobre Ceuta e Melilha e as ilhas do norte de Marrocos, a concorrência agrícola e a concorrência geopolítica no Mediterrâneo e no Atlântico, especialmente com a inauguração de vários portos marroquinos. Assim, a posição espanhola no passado contra os interesses fundamentais de Marrocos relativamente ao Saara marroquino, em particular com a decisão histórica de Donald Trump, representa a principal causa de várias crises anteriores e da crise de 2021. Esta crise constituiu uma oportunidade para os dois reinos negociarem as suas relações, com base na confiança e no respeito mútuos. Após a normalização destas relações, observámos um aumento da cooperação entre os dois Estados.

Palavras-Chave

Política externa marroquina, Relações Marrocos-Espanha, Cooperação, Conflitos, Crise.

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MOROCCO'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SPAIN IN LIGHT OF THE 2021 CRISIS

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Introduction

A foreign policy is the instrument by which a state attempts to shape its international political environment, by which it tries to preserve situations that are favorable to it and to modify situations that are unfavorable to it (Bichr Mohamed, 1991). A country's foreign policy encompasses the strategies it employs to safeguard its national and international interests, as well as the mode of interaction with other states and non-state actors, which can be non-violent or violent (Frazier Brionne, 2021). It is characterized as the raw material par excellence of International Relations (Battistella Dario, 2012).

Decision-making is considered the operational base of foreign policy, through which states strategically arbitrate, prioritize national interests, and deliberate on external diplomatic crises under identified constraints. for assessing systematically this diplomatic behavior, foreign policy analysis relies on theoretical paradigms, notably rational choice theory, in order to understand how decision-makers estimate alternatives, balance risks, and maximize strategic utility.

As for Morocco's foreign policy, it is considered one of the sovereign domains, where it is largely exclusive to the king (Mohammed El Khaldi, 2020). It has undergone a great change over the last 24 years. Since the arrival of King Mohammed VI, it has been characterized by firmness, particularly regarding the Sahara issue (Kerdoudi Jawad, 2021).

Morocco maintains relations with many countries, but Spain remains the country with which it maintains the most relations. Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the coasts of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. Relations between them are one of the oldest relationships between states in history, known for their commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, but also for their conflicts. So, these are relations with two determinants. It is impossible to discuss the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain and vice versa. Generally, these relations have been characterized as particularly complex and conflictual (Fatima Lemharhar, 2017).

After Donald Trump's statement, the crisis between the two began to escalate, following Spain's stance on the American decision, but he remained silent. In April 2021, the crisis

escalated following the reception of the Polisario militia leader at Logroño Hospital via a forged passport, which angered Morocco and called into question mutual trust. The 2021 crisis between the two countries highlighted the conflictual nature of their relationship, despite the significant cooperation that had existed prior to this crisis. So, how do the decisions taken by Morocco during the crisis with Spain reveal a logic of containment, appeasement, or strategic redefinition of bilateral relations?

This article will treat the constants and the decision-making process in Morocco's foreign policy. It will also examine the significance of Spain in Morocco's foreign policy. We will therefore examine the areas of cooperation between the two countries, and finally, we will address aspects of the 2021 crisis and Morocco's management of it, using rational choice theory.

For the methodology, this study is based on a collection of academic articles and, to a lesser extent, press articles, as well as a collection of official statements from officials in both countries. This work is also grounded in a personal analysis of Morocco's foreign policy decisions during the 2021 crisis.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This analysis led us to study theories of decision-making in foreign policy, namely rational choice theory, prospect theory, polytheistic theory and cybernetic theory. and to show why rational choice theory was chosen in this case.

Rational Choice Theory: Generally, rationality focuses on optimizing a choice under identified constraints (G. Allison et P. Zelikow, 2000). Or, a process is rational when it is intended to optimize the feasibility of the final choice (Valerie M. Hudson, 2014). Allison observed that rationality is based on a strictly Hobbesian notion of consistent calculation or adaptation by maximizing profit within specific constraints; that is, the rational decision-maker prefers the alternative that provides the right results (Allison G. T., 1971).

The fact that actors' actions are guided by profit maximization derives from microeconomics and is a central concept in all social sciences. Focused on Foreign Policy Analysis, the state acts as a rational actor in the sense of pursuing its interests (Frédéric Charillon, 2002). Rational choice theory contributes to explaining the position of states in international negotiations (Jean-Frédéric Morin, 2013). For example, the states that strongly advocate for the fight against illegal immigration are often those that are most vulnerable to this scourge. Spain and Finland do not have the same vision of illegal immigration from the Mediterranean; the Iberian country is more vulnerable, while the Scandinavian country is further from the Mediterranean. The rational choice model is based on four fundamental concepts, which are as follows:

*Goals and Objectives: The utility function reflects a person's interests and reference values. At the moment of decision-making, the actor possesses a utility function that allows them to rank the possible consequences following the actor's values and the goals they have set.

*Alternatives: According to this theory, a rational actor must choose between multiple alternatives. This is represented through a decision tree in decision theory. An alternative



can consist of more than a single action, but it must always be specific enough to be distinguished from other alternatives.

*Consequences: Each alternative has consequences, or results if it has been chosen. At this level, theories are distinguished based on the actor's ability to measure the consequences of each of the chosen alternatives.

*Choices: Rational choice easily aims to choose the alternative that has consequences, which are ranked at the top of the preference in the decision maker's utility function.

Prospect Theory, also known as loss aversion theory, is a psychological theory of decision-making under risk conditions. Developed by psychologists D. Kahneman and A. Tversky in 1979, it is one of the main contributions of the behaviorist school of psychology, which aims to study behavior. The model is used in various fields, notably in the analysis of decision-making in economics and politics, particularly in international relations. Indeed, this theory convincingly demonstrates that most individuals have a particular fear of loss; that is, the psychological pain following a loss is greater than the pleasure generated by an equivalent gain. Prospect Theory distinguishes two phases in the decision-making process: an editing phase, which consists of a preliminary analysis of the proposed prospects, which usually results in a simpler representation of these prospects. In the second phase, which is an evaluation phase, the proposed prospects are assessed, and the prospect with the highest value is chosen (D. Kahneman, and A. Tversky, 1979).

The prospect theory has major implications for foreign policy, such as the delimitation of national borders or international agreements. In international negotiations, a negotiator from country A considers the concessions of a negotiator from country B to be less valuable than any concessions they have made (Valerie M. Hudson, 2014). This theory shows that the gains made must be twice the losses incurred to compensate for them (Morin, Jean-Frédéric, 2013). This fear of losses justifies a state A being more willing to go to war to defend a territory than to conquer it.

Polyheuristic Theory: This theory was developed in the early 1990s by Alex Mintz. His work on this theory remains the most innovative among rationalist interpretations of foreign policy decision-making. It appears to blend rational choice theory, centered on formulating predictions, with cognitive theory, which focuses on identifying the actual processes that govern decision-making. In some circumstances, polyheuristic theory resembles the approach adopted in prospect theory (Alden Chris 2017).

The process of this theory is represented by two successive phases based on distinct cognitive processes. The first phase is called dimensional; it eliminates, from the outset of the process, clearly inadmissible options. Decision-makers move on to the next stage, which is decision-making, once the number of possible options is significantly reduced. This phase corresponds more closely to the logic of rational choice theory, involving maximization to select an alternative from the subset of possible alternatives (Raymond Dacey, Lisa J. Carlson, 2004).

Cybernetic theory: Cybernetic theory aims to help decision-makers simply make decisions by choosing the first satisfactory option, recognizing that decision-makers can choose and maintain policies that do not maximize their utility. Herbert Simon



emphasizes the complexity of the environment and the limitations of human capabilities, making the principle of pure rationality unrealistic.

The cybernetic decision-making process is less exhaustive due to cognitive and motivational constraints. The decision-making process is less complete because not all alternatives are considered across all available dimensions (Mintz, Alex & Geva, Nehemia & DeRouen, Karl. 1994). Decision-makers cannot access all relevant information, process all received information, recognize all possible actions at their disposal, and evaluate all the outcomes of an expected action (Morin Jean-Frédéric, 2013).

According to Herbert Simon, actors navigate the complexity of the real world and choose the first satisfactory option, a process he calls "bounded rationality." In the field of foreign policy, this theory was developed by John Steinbruner in his work "The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis 1974".

Based on my studies and my perspective, I have adopted rational choice theory because Moroccan behaviour exemplifies it: a graduated pressure that minimizes costs, with the most damaging options deliberately held in reserve—in other words, utility maximization under constraint.

For the methodology, this study is based on a collection of academic articles and, to a lesser extent, press articles, as well as a collection of official statements from officials in both countries. This work is also grounded in a personal analysis of Morocco's foreign policy decisions during the 2021 crisis.

In methodological aspect, this work is a qualitative and a single-case study covering in majority the period between 2020 and 2024, from the Trump recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara in December 2020, through the April 2021 the beginning of the bilateral diplomatic crisis, and the normalization in Mars 2022, to the consolidation of the normalized of these relations by 2024. This period was taken because it forms a new incident in Morocco- Spain relations and is bounded and well-documented, especially in press articles and official statements. The academic sources were chosen for their direct relevance to Moroccan-Spanish relations and to the foreign policy decision-making theory.

Among the limitations of this work is the lack of direct questioning of those in charge; indeed, the rationale behind the choices is thus deduced from the chronology and the results, not confirmed by internal accounts. There is also the scarcity of academic sources analyzing this crisis. Little quantitative data is available on the real impact of the decisions (economy, tourism, security), beyond a few examples such as Operation Marhaba. The time frame is limited, as the crisis and its normalization are recent (2020–2024). We still lack the perspective to judge whether the redefinition of relationships is lasting or merely temporary.

Moroccan Foreign Policy (constant, decision-making process)

Morocco's foreign policy is considered realistic on the one hand and idealistic on the other; it is one of the sovereign domains. It has undergone significant changes over the past 2 decades. Since the arrival of King Mohammed VI, it has also been characterized by firmness and concrete retaliatory measures whenever Morocco's higher interests are

affected, particularly regarding the Sahara issue (Kerdoudi Jawad, 2021). With the arrival of King Mohammed VI, significant changes have emerged in the strategic orientations of Morocco's foreign policy, as well as in its mode of action, particularly in the management of the Sahara issue, where Morocco has moved from defensive to offensive diplomacy, adopting a more combative foreign policy (Nizar Messari, 2020).

Although Morocco has the Sahara issue as the main objective of its foreign policy, it has worked to achieve several goals. Moroccan foreign policy has enabled it to achieve multiple strategic objectives, including opening up to new geographical areas of the world by pursuing a multifaceted policy of openness, both diplomatic and economic. This is the case with Morocco's orientation toward East and Southern Africa and Latin America, as well as a strategy of alliances with major and medium-sized powers.

Among these objectives, Morocco's integration into the global economy has also become a major player in the global value chain, and it seeks to position itself in the new world order, especially after the COVID-19 crisis.

Regarding its neighbors, Morocco is generally a respectful country, despite its existence in a more or less conflict-ridden environment (Rachid El Houdaigui, 2003). Regarding solidarity, the Kingdom is known for showing solidarity with many countries around the world. We can cite Moroccan donations to many African countries as part of the fight against COVID-19.[1], or the medical and humanitarian aid provided to Lebanon following the explosion in the port of Beirut[2]. Also, it's solidarity with Portugal during the fires in September 2024 (Ghita Zine, 2024), and with Spain following the floods in the Valencian Community (Francis Shwarz, 2024). As well as Morocco's involvement in several peacekeeping missions. All of these elements demonstrate that Morocco presents itself with a perspective of solidarity and sharing.

Regarding partnership, the North African country aims to develop strategic partnerships with many countries around the world in different geographic areas, as well as within the framework of international organizations to combat global challenges. Morocco stands out as a reliable partner among many countries.

The constitution of Morocco defines the constant of Moroccan foreign policy. So, the constitution puts the construction of the Maghreb Union as a strategic option. Also, it puts, as an important points, the deepening the sense of belonging to the Arab-Islamic Ummah and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity with its brotherly peoples, the consolidating relations of cooperation and solidarity with African countries, particularly the countries of the Sahel and Sahara, and also strengthening South-South cooperation generally. Furthermore, the constitution places an important place the intensifying close cooperation and partnership relations with Euro-Mediterranean neighboring countries, and expanding and diversifying its friendly relations and its human, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural exchanges with all countries of the world[3].

Morocco, through its constitution, gives primacy over domestic law to international treaties that it ratifies, with respect for its immutable national identity, the publication of

[1] Communiqué du MAECA du Maroc, du 14 Juin 2020, https://shorturl.at/lSKwZ
[2] Communiqué du MAECA du Maroc, du 06 Août, 2020 https://shorturl.at/eDXZO
[3] Moroccan constitution 2011

these conventions in the official journal, as well as harmonization with national legislation.

But before all these elements, Morocco has put the Sahara issue, which is a sacred subject for all Moroccans, at the center of its foreign policy action, which is observed in the daily work of Moroccan diplomacy, this is revealed in the constitution (articles 42 and 59) and in royal speeches, such as the statement of King Mohammed 6 in the speech on the occasion of the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, "I would like to send a clear message to everyone: the Sahara issue is the prism through which Morocco considers its international environment. It is also clearly and simply the yardstick that measures the sincerity of friendships and the effectiveness of the partnerships it establishes."[4].

The Palestinian cause is also one of the constants of Morocco's foreign policy (البلعمشي, 2021). The Moroccan position on the Palestinian question is irreversible. King Mohammed 6, as Amir Al-Mouminine and President of the Al-Quds Committee, places it as a priority of Moroccan foreign policy and puts it on the same level as the territorial integrity of the Kingdom.[5]

Morocco's foreign policy decisions are developed and monitored by several institutions and bodies, but the Royal Institute remains the primary decision-maker (Mohammed ELKHALDI, 2020). Each country chooses its own decision-making and management process. Some countries rely on certain government agencies, while others adopt a closed and centralized decision-making system (Hassan-Yari, 2003).

In Morocco, the foreign policy decision-making system is centralized. According to the Moroccan Constitution, the King has a set of strategic powers and responsibilities in foreign policy matters. Initiatives and broad guidelines are in the hands of the King. He also carries out routine acts regarding the accreditation of ambassadors, as well as ratifying and signing treaties[6].

The counselors of the King have a leading advisory role, participate in certain royal activities, and accompany the King on his visits abroad. Security services can be considered military and security advisors, and provide information, which forms the basis of any relevant diplomatic decision (Mohammed EL KHALDI, 2020).

The government intervenes in the foreign policy decision-making process through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which executes and directs the Kingdom's diplomatic activities and coordinates the external actions of the various Moroccan ministries, institutions, and agencies[7]. Also, the government intervenes through the foreign affairs departments of the various government sectors. The prime minister ensures interministerial coordination in matters of foreign policy, represents the King at high-level summits, and can sign treaties. Parliament plays a legislative role by approving treaties, is Responsible for overseeing the government, and has a diplomatic role where it maintains relations with other parliaments (Mohammed ELKHALDI, 2020).

[4] Royal speech on the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, August 20, 2022
[5] Communiqué of the Royal Cabinet of March 15 2023
[6] Moroccan constitution 2011
[7] Le décret N° 2.11.428 relatifs aux attributions et à l'organisation du ministère des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération

Other institutions that participate in the development of foreign policy, which have a marginal role in the decision-making process, such as Civil society, Political parties, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM), Public opinion, and Think-tanks.

Therefore, Morocco's foreign policy decision-making system initially follows a bureaucratic logic, that is, at the time of its development by the highest authority (the King and the Royal Councilors), and an organizational and administrative order in its execution (Government, embassies, etc.).

In terms of diversification of allies, Morocco has an international relations strategy. His history, his strategic position, and his identity allow him to develop relations with several countries and several spaces. At the multilateral level, Morocco is a member of several international organizations (AU, UN, FAO…).

At the bilateral level, Morocco maintains relations with regional groups (EU, ASEAN, VISEGRAD…), and also with States. Morocco has strengthened relations with many African countries. Thus, Morocco has established strategic relations with Japan, India, China, and Russia as part of its strategy of diversification of their allies. This Moroccan strategy is also manifested by the deepening of relations with the United States of America and Latin American countries. Thus, Morocco maintains relations with many European countries, but Spain is the country with which Morocco maintains the most relations.

Relations with Spain

Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. The relationship between them is one of the oldest between states in history, known for its commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, but also for its conflicts. It is impossible to deal with the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain, and vice versa. So, these are relations with two determinants.

These relations are governed by the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, signed in 1991 and entered into force in 1993. Morocco and Spain maintain relations within the bilateral and multilateral framework (EU, UN, NATO, UPM, 5+5).

Cooperation with Spain

In Political matters, the two countries hold high-level meetings to discuss issues of common interest and ways to develop bilateral relations, as well as specialized meetings between different ministries. Between the two Kingdoms exist too many official visits from high-level responsible. Also, Spain represents Rabat's interests in Brussels.[8]. Since 2022, Spain has supported the Moroccan position over the Sahara issue. Generally, the two countries have maintained a relationship of prosperity, mutual respect, and cooperation.

[8] MAP, "Catherine Colonna: «la France et l'Espagne sont les "avocats" du Maroc au sein de l'UE»", 05 Décembre 2005, https://shorturl.at/ysUQK

Regarding security cooperation, Morocco is a strategic and important partner for Spain in the fight against illegal immigration, drug trafficking, terrorism, and cross-border crime. According to many Spanish statements, migrant flows to Spain have decreased thanks to joint work with Morocco. Cooperation has expanded from the exchange of information to the organization of scientific conferences on security risks and ways to coordinate to address them. This explains why they have been able to build bridges of trust to address cross-border terrorism, as many terrorist cells have been jointly dismantled. This gives us an idea of the degree of coherence between Morocco and Spain.

In the cultural area, the two countries are working together to promote social and cultural understanding and to address the mutual ignorance between their respective societies. The two states have a common culture, and they want to promote it, also working to promote Spanish in Morocco and the Arabic language in Spain. also, the two-kingdom work to promote scientific exchange.

The economic sector remains the main point of cooperation between Morocco and Spain (A. M EL JOUAD et A. Ouedghiri, 2025), where the Iberic country is Morocco's leading trading partner since 2012, and an important investor in Morocco.

Table 1. Moroccan-Spanish trade Exchange between 2019 and 2023

	Moroccan Imports from Spain	Moroccan Exports to Spain
2019	8.454.045,62	6.962.384,51
2020	7.351.502,48	6.371.727,22
2021	9.499.704,75	7.300.886,07
2022	11.748.223,25	8.692.311,15
2023	12.145.545,10	9.032.160,93

Source: self-elaboration, data from ICEX, www.informesestadisticos-est.icex.es

This table shows the development of trade exchange between Morocco and Spain, which broke records, with bilateral trade exceeding 21 billion euros in 2023[9] (). A new paradigm has emerged in Morocco-Spain relations, with the two countries integrated into the same value chain. Trade between them is largely based on the integration of Moroccan and Spanish companies into the same operations, particularly in the automotive, agri-food, and textile industries (Moreno Luis & Fernández Ana, 2019).

Economic cooperation between them is also evident in other economic areas such as energy, particularly renewable energy, as well as in transportation, where the two countries are well connected: almost all Moroccan airports have connections with Spanish cities. At the maritime level, there are Moroccan ports connected to Spanish ports for the transport of goods and passengers. The two countries are aiming to build an underwater road between the two sides, to boost the exchange of goods between the two countries in particular and between Europe and Africa in general (A. M EL JOUAD et A. Ouedghiri, 2025).

[9] ICEX www.informesestadisticos-est.icex.es

Conflict with Spain

Although Morocco and Spain share many interests, there are conflicts and competition between the two neighbors. There is the former Spanish position over the Sahara, which represents the main cause of several previous crises and the 2021 crisis. Morocco's claim to Ceuta and Melilla and the northern islands of our country, which have been occupied by Spain for over 500 years. Every official visit to these two enclaves by a high Spanish responsible irritates Morocco, which officially protests.

There is also the issue of maritime territorial delimitation (Victor Luis Gutiérrez Castillo, 2022). Following the Moroccan parliament's vote on two bills on this issue in 2020, this decision angered Spain and the government of the Canary Islands, which unilaterally took the same step in 2010. Morocco's goal is to extend its maritime territory to 350 nautical miles (648.2 km) to include the tropical mountain range, which is not included in the Canary Islands' maritime territory. This Maritim mountain is rich in minerals and a geostrategic interest (L.O. Kfouri and All, 2021).

There is also a big cultural misunderstanding between the two peoples, which comes down to historical elements, the impact of the media (in Spain), and other elements. Competition between ports, especially between Tangier Med and Algeciras, which Spain considers Tangier Med port a danger to Spain[10]. There is also a competition to attract foreign investment.

The Agricultural competition is one of the competitions between Morocco and Spain. Since the past five decades, both countries have exported the same fruits and vegetables at the same times of year, to the European and other global markets (Josep M. Jordan Galduf, 1997).

Management of the 2021 Crisis by Morocco

Following Donald Trump's statement, a crisis between the two began to erupt, following Spain's position on the American decision, but he remained silent. The crisis escalated in April 2021 following the reception of Brahim Ghali at the Logroño hospital using a forged passport, which angered Morocco and called into question mutual trust. So, Morocco made some decisions to manage this political crisis with Spain. The following table shows us an illustration of the Morocco-Spain political crisis.

Table 2. An illustration of the Morocco-Spain political crisis

Morocco's Main Decision	➢ It froze relations with Spain (not completely)
Moroccan Foreign Policy Actors (involved 2021 Crisis)	➢ The King (Central Core of Moroccan Foreign Policy) ➢ The King's Advisors ➢ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ➢ The Moroccan Ambassador to Spain ➢ External Intelligence ➢ The Internal Security Services

[10] Marinas de Andalucia, "Tánger-Med: un «peligro real»", 7 Septiembre 2009, https://marinasdeandalucia.com/tanger-med-un-peligro-real_aa3345.html

Morocco's action	➢ He informed the Moroccan and Spanish public opinion about the existence of Ibrahim Ghali on Spanish soil, with a forged passport. ➢ He accused and protested against Spain through official statements ➢ Morocco suspended dialogue with the Sánchez government ➢ He summoned its ambassador to Madrid ➢ He lifted the control over emigration for two days ➢ He excluded Spain from the African Lion 2021 ➢ He excluded Spanish ports from Operation Marhaba 2021
Actions that Morocco could have taken, but didn't	➢ Suspension of security agreements ➢ Suspension of the fishing agreement ➢ Suspension of economic agreements ➢ Suspension of judicial agreements
Morocco's Desire	➢ Recognition of the Moroccan identity of the Sahara ➢ Respect for the Partnership with Morocco

Source: self-elaboration

Analysis of Moroccan decisions in this Crisis with Spain

According to my analysis, I observe that Moroccan decisions in this crisis are therefore made according to rational choice theory, who is generally focuses on optimizing a choice under identified constraints.

Analysis of Moroccan decisions according to Rational Choice Theory

The following table shows us the Modeling of Morocco's external action according to the CR theory during the 2021 crisis.

Table 3. Modeling of Morocco's external action according to CR theory during the 2021 crisis

Goals and Objectives	➢ Recognition of the Moroccan Sovereignty over the Sahara ➢ Respect for Morocco
Alternatives	➢ Freezing relations entirely ➢ Freezing only political and diplomatic relations
Consequences	➢ In case of "freezing relations entirely", Morocco could suffer significant economic losses even more profoundly if it has frozen economic agreements. ➢ In the 2nd case, the economic losses could be long-term, especially in terms of investment, which always requires strong political relations.
Choice	➢ Freeze only political and diplomatic relations

Source: Self-elaboration

Morocco's decisions regarding the crisis were made according to the rational model, whose objective was recognition of the Moroccan Sahara by Spain, and the main decision was the suspension of relations, but not entirely. Morocco has shown that it is a prudent country, not a reckless one. It did not want to play all these cards from the outset to put pressure on Spain, but chose to do so gradually. It did not use high-impact cards such as the suspension of security agreements, the fisheries agreement, economic agreements, and judicial agreements, which demonstrated the rationality of Morocco's



decision regarding its crisis management, minimizing risks and losses as much as possible, and maximizing profits.

The measures taken by Morocco had an impact on Spain. For example, the losses following the elimination of the Spanish phase of Operation Marhaba amounted to approximately 1.15 billion €[11]. However, they were not as serious as the other actions, which led Spain to calculate the expected losses from the crisis with Morocco if it continued.

Morocco's objective was not the suspension of relations with Spain per se; rather, it was Spanish recognition of its sovereignty over the Sahara and respect for the partnership by the Iberian country. If we follow the chronological evolution of the crisis since its outbreak, we observe that Morocco's steps have been gradual, and the statements of its actors have been fair, reasonable, orderly, and consistent. This is not the case with the statements of the Spanish leaders. In every statement or action, Morocco waited for Spain's reaction, whether Spain would maintain its position or change it. What demonstrates rationality here is that Morocco maintained its prudence and acted in response to Spanish actions and statements.

Undoubtedly, the crisis benefits neither Spain nor Morocco. But sometimes, triggering a crisis can be the best solution to resolve a conflict. crises are opportunity for countries to renegotiate the foundations of their relations. It should be noted that Spain's losses seemed greater. With this crisis, Morocco succeeded in pressuring Spain into negotiations for the new foundations of relations between the two countries.

Bueno de Mesquita, in his utility model, emphasizes that the most common assumption is that a country that initiates a war can only initiate it when it believes the war will produce positive expected utility (G. Allison et P. Zelikow, 2000). If we transpose this to Morocco, Morocco couldn't enter into a crisis with Spain if the losses were lower than the expected gains, in other words, if it was sure that it would achieve its goal.

Normalization and progress of these relations

For Morocco, the normalization of relations depended primarily on a positive and clear position from the Spanish state regarding the Western Sahara issue. Signs of normalization began to emerge, as confirmed by King Mohammed VI in his speech commemorating the Revolution of the King and the People on August 20, 2021. The King confirmed that Morocco and Spain had begun negotiations in a climate of calm, complete transparency, and a spirit of responsibility (Discours royal à l'occasion de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple 20 Aout 2021).

A telephone call was held between Nasser Bourita and José Albares to discuss the matter (Marruecom, "Marruecos-España: Bourita y Albares han acordado reunirse", 22 septiembre 2021, https://marruecom.com/2021/09/22/marruecos-espana-bourita-y-albares-han-acordado-reunirse/). Spain initiated actions regarding the Western Sahara issue, with Minister Albares meeting twice with Stefan de Mistura and also with Antony Blinken (Europa Press, "Albares y Blinken acuerdan unir fuerzas para resolver el conflicto

[11] Maritime News, "Opération Marhaba: "Le Maroc a porté un coup de 1,15 milliard d'euros à l'Espagne" (médias espagnols)" 9 juin 2021, https://shorturl.at/htqxC



del Sáhara, que dura ya demasiado", 18 enero 2022, https://tinyurl.com/mst6ptr7). Other gestures included the visit of the Spanish monarch to the Moroccan stand at the Fitur trade fair in January 2022. Furthermore, Spain decided to assist Morocco in securing its LNG supply.

On March 18, 2022, the Spanish head of government, Pedro Sanchez, sent a letter to King Mohammed VI, in which supported the plan of the autonomy over the Sahara and he considered it as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for resolving this conflict[12]. This step gave new impetus to the relationship between the two countries and the deepening of their strategic partnerships.

The visit by Pedro Sanchez to Morocco in April 2022 was the occasion to agree on a lot of points and to make a roadmap de 16 points that recognize the importance of the Sahara issue for Morocco. This roadmap will manage the relations between the two states in all areas of cooperation on the basis of understanding and mutual trust. And also, King Mohammed 6 and President Sanchez agreed about the updating of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, signed in 1991[13].

After that, various bilateral meetings were organized between the ministries of foreign affairs of the two Kingdoms, and diverse summits were organized between the Moroccan and Spanish responsible, to prepare for the organization of the 12th High-level meeting between the two governments.

The two countries decided to organize this RHN following the normalization of relations between them. This RHN was held in Rabat on February 02, 2023, and was attended by 15 Moroccan and 12 Spanish ministers. At the summit, both parties expressed their commitment to maintaining the excellent relations between them and confirmed their willingness to constantly deepen them. They also stressed that the summit represented an opportunity to implement the goals of the roadmap agreed between the two countries during Pedro Sanchez's visit to Morocco in April 2022. This meeting had three dimensions: the first is political and diplomatic-strategic, the second economic, and the third cultural and human[14].

For the political and diplomatic-strategic dimension, the two governments demonstrated their commitment to preserving and strengthening Morocco-EU relations. The two countries affirmed their commitment to the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration, border control, and pledged to build an area of peace, stability, and integration in the Western Mediterranean. The two sides also welcomed the results achieved by their cooperation on irregular immigration and the fight against terrorism, as well as their cooperation on regular migration, and their collaboration and coordination on the Marhaba 2022 operation[15].

As for the economic dimension, both parties demonstrated their willingness to intensify the economic partnership, through the promotion of greater and mutually beneficial integration of value chains, and the promotion of the significant development of economic

[12] Communiqué Du Cabinet Royal: L'Espagne Considère L'initiative Marocaine D'autonomie Comme La Base La Plus Sérieuse, Réaliste Et Crédible Pour La Résolution Du Différend Au Sujet Du Sahara Marocain Du 18 Mars 2022
[13] déclaration conjointe:Maroc-Espagne du le 7 avril 2022, https://shorturl.at/OfpK3
[14] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[15] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne

cooperation between them, which has given new impetus to trade, favored by geographical proximity and part of the reconfiguration of the global geopolitical context. The two Kingdoms agreed to promote trade and investment, intending to carry out joint development projects on the basis of a win-win partnership, taking advantage of the Moroccan New Investment Charter. A financial agreement was signed between the two Kingdoms of €800 million with the aim of promoting bilateral trade and investment to unprecedented levels[16].

The two countries expressed their appreciation for the importance of cooperation in decarbonizing the economy through joint projects, which will offer significant potential for investors, particularly in renewable energy and energy efficiency. In the water sector, the two countries decided to strengthen cooperation in this area, particularly in water desalination, integrated water resource management, and wastewater reuse[17].

For the cultural dimension and human ties, the two countries have a common and special cultural and human heritage, so they decided to develop a new "human network" through several actions such as town twinning, partnerships between universities, student mobility, joint actions of associative actors, creation of study committees and research institutes, to achieve an inclusive partnership that serves both peoples.[18].

During his last visit to Morocco in February 2024, the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez, declared that the relations with Morocco are on the right road, and the two governments work profoundly to deepen the cooperation between them in all areas, above all in the economic area. Pedro Sanchez stated that Spain would invest 45 billion € in Morocco between 2024 and 2050, and this will be an opportunity for Spanish companies to work in Morocco, especially in infrastructure[19].

After the normalization of the relations between Morocco and Spain, the Iberian country usually defends Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. For example, the Spanish government defended its decision well before the Spanish Senate[20], and even before ministers belonging to Podemos, reminding them that foreign policy issues, including the Moroccan Sahara issue, are the responsibility of the Socialist Party, to which the Prime Minister belongs (نبيل درويش، 2024). In addition, the Spanish Prime Minister met with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2023, during the 78th session of the General Assembly, where they discussed the progress of the Moroccan Sahara issue[21].

Conclusion

The results of this analysis confirm what the king said in the speech of the Green March on 06 November 2021, "Morocco Will Not Have Any Economic or Commercial Transaction that Excludes Moroccan Sahara."[22], and what he said in the speech of August 2022,

[16] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[17] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[18] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[19] conférence de presse de Pedro Sanchez, 21 Fevrié 2024 https://shorturl.at/CvgPa
[20] Europa Press, "Albares no aclara el acuerdo con Marruecos y dice que Rajoy ya estaba a favor", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tng7sAnsuFw
[21] "غوتيريش يطلع سانشيز على مخرجات زيارة دي ميستورا للصحراء المغربية"، مدار21، https://madar21.com/182317.html
[22] Discours Royal de la Marche verte 6/11/2021

Sahara is the Lens through which Morocco looks at the World[23]. And the Sahara is the barometer of the Morocco-Spain relationship.

We have observed the importance of Spain in Moroccan foreign policy, and how the relations between the two kingdoms have improved after the change of the Spanish position over the Sahara issue. We have looked at how the partnership between the two countries is developed in all fields, above all in the economic area. For example, the trade exchange between the two states scores 21,3 billion € in 2023 and 22,5 billion € in 2024[24].

Morocco and Spain are in the obligation to cooperate and to establish good relations, because they have and they will have common risks. Undoubtedly, Morocco-Spain cooperation will be strengthened by the organization of the 2030 World Cup, which will be co-organized by Morocco, Spain, and Portugal. How will this sports event foster cooperation between Morocco and Spain?

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