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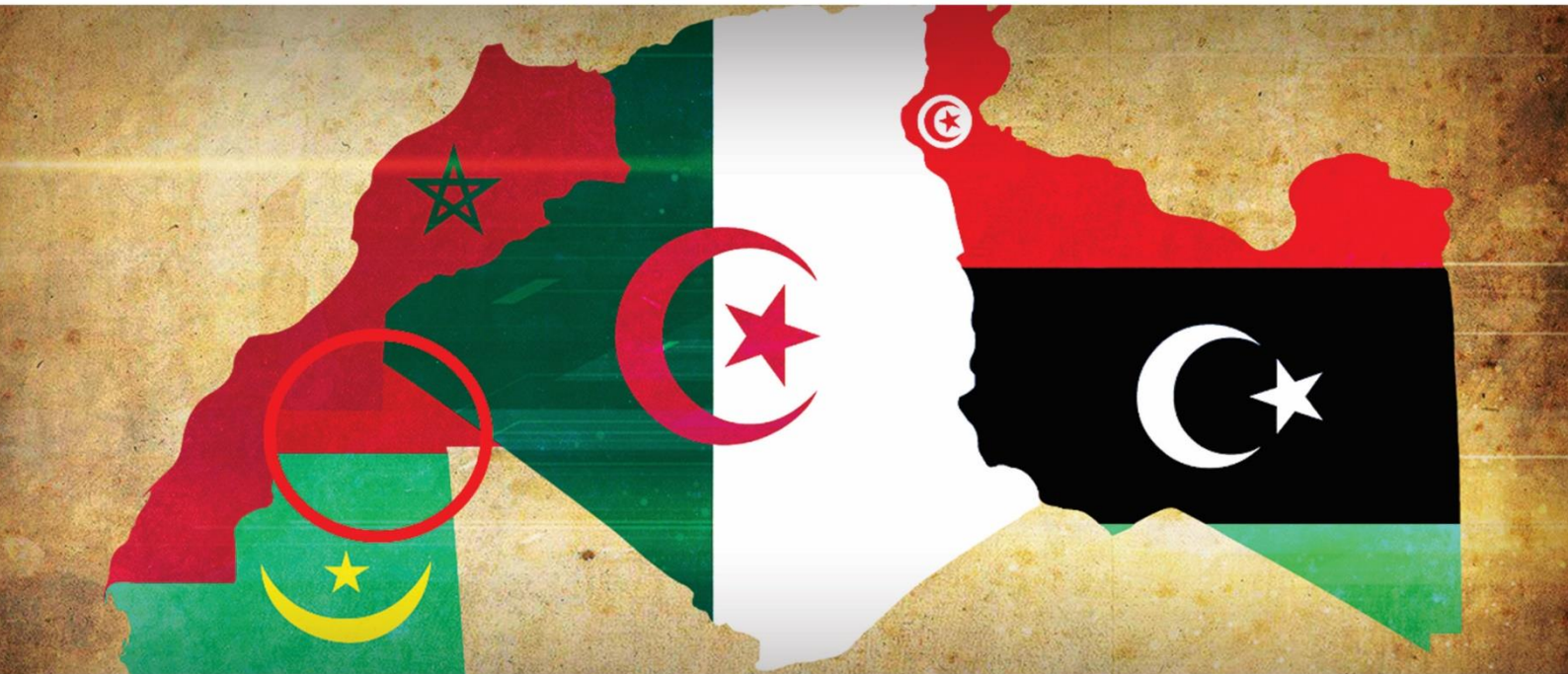
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Dr. Samar Khamlichi



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## Western Sahara & Algeria's Presidential Election Dilemma

Dr. Samar Khamlichi

### The Western Sahara affair and the presidential election dilemma in Algeria: no change of position

Since the withdrawal of Abdelaziz Bouteflika from the presidential election candidacy and his resignation as President of the Republic, the role of the army has been displayed more prominently. The presidential elections used to be held quietly for a five-year term, without any blatant popular protest against the regime or against the intervention of the army in the political life of Algeria or in its foreign policy. Indeed, Bouteflika was re-elected in 2014 for a fourth term with 81.49% of the votes, despite the fact that most political parties boycotted the ballot. The results would have been rigged and despite this fact, especially after the Arab uprisings that began in 2011, the Algerian people were not as mobilized as it is the case in 2019. The army is often involved in the decision-making process in Algeria, but today it is in a dilemma between the guarantee of peace and state sovereignty and the demands of democracy. Now, after the cancellation of elections provided in July 2019 by the Constitutional Council, Algeria stands with no elected president and its foreign policy remains unclear. Eventually, the past Algerian regimes supported for years the Polisario Front<sup>1</sup>, but today the political regime in Algeria is divided into different points of view. Therefore, what about the changes in the Algerian foreign policy, especially the Moroccan Sahara affair? Would Algeria change its position with the future regime and the future president?

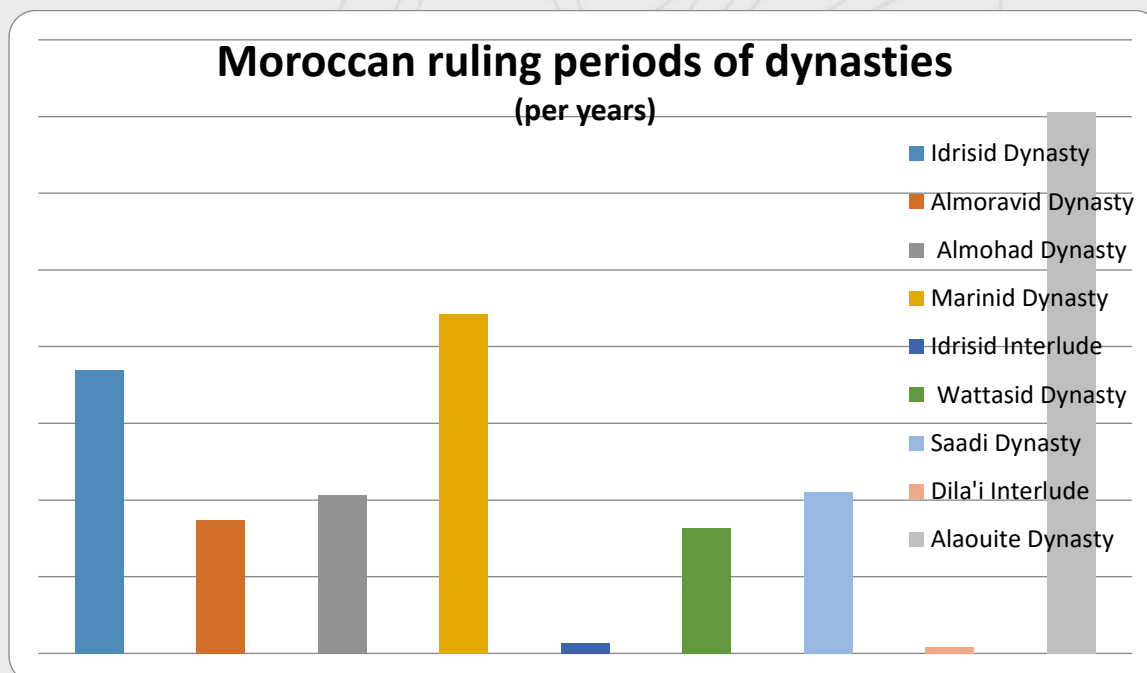
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<sup>1</sup> The Polisario Front is also called Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia El-Hamra and Rio de Oro, is a western sahara moroccan separatist group, founded by El-Ouali Mustapha Sayed, aiming to divide the Western Sahara and to found the so called « Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic » (SADR).

## I. The Western Sahara as part of Morocco's history

First, we would like to remind that the Western Sahara has a long history as part of Morocco. In fact, as in all African countries, European powers colonized and shared Morocco between them from Tangier situated in the north, till Mauritania in the south<sup>2</sup>.

Before the colonization periods, Morocco had a historical reputation of a powerful State through its different ruling dynasties: Idrisids, Almoravids, Almohads, Marinids, Wattasids, Saadis, Dila'is and the last dynasty of Alaouites in power from 1666 till today. As his Majesty King Hassan II said: « *Morocco is an old sage who must be respected* ».

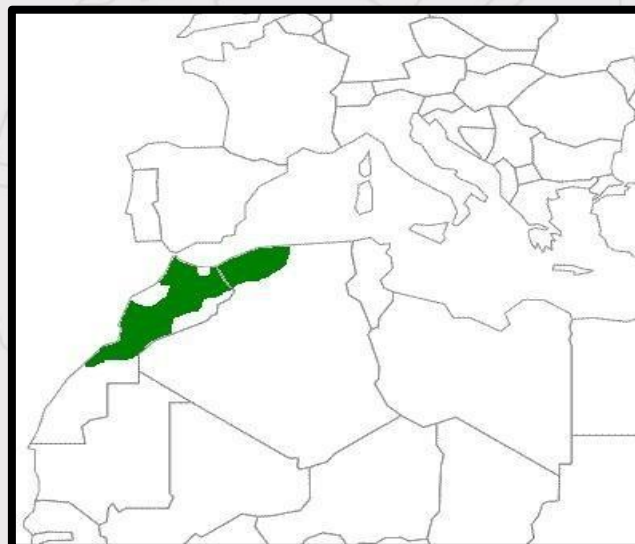


<sup>2</sup> Mauritania was linked to Morocco in the period of Almoravid dynasty and was the region from which the Almoravids moved in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to be established in the north. Gascoigne, Bamber. "History of Spain" HistoryWorld. From 2001, ongoing.  
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=1764&HistoryID=ab50>

## The Idrisid Dynasty (789-985)

The Idrissid story begins when a descent of the Prophet Mohammed of the 'Ali family (fourth caliph of Islam) and his freedman Rachid Ben Morched El Koreichi, take refuge in the Middle Atlas, fleeing the threat of the Abbasids<sup>3</sup>. First, they stay in Egypt before settling in Walilah current Morocco (Volubilis), under the protection of the Berber tribe of Awarbas. Succeeding to rally the tribes to his cause, Idriss is invested Imam and found the city of Fez in 789 under the name of Idriss I<sup>st</sup>. This is the beginning of the Idrissid dynasty.

### Morocco under the Idrisids in 900<sup>4</sup>



The Caliph of Baghdad "Haroun al-Rashid" knew about the success that Idriss I<sup>st</sup> has gained in Morocco and the allegiance to him even in Egypt. That's why he sent a so called Sulayman al Zindhi to assassinate him and that's what really happened. After a while, Haroun al-Rachid thought that the threat was beaten but Idriss I's wife was

<sup>3</sup> The Abbasids Dynasty in the orient arabic region had massacred Alides and their supporters during the battle of Fakh near Mecca.

<sup>4</sup> Histoire du Maroc, archive 2006.



pregnant. So, Idriss II was born and educated under the supervision of Rachid who was the right-hand man of Idriss I<sup>st</sup>. Year after year, he's got the sense for politics and made a stunning speech at the age of 11 at the ceremony of allegiance. He said: *"Praise be to Allaah. O people, I have been pledged. This is something in which the reward is paid to the poor and to the abominable. We thank God on the path of intention. Do not extend the necks to others. What you ask of the truth is that you find it in us"*. And then, he called people to make a pledge to him and to adhere to his obedience. People wondered at his cleverness, his statement and the strength of his mind at his young age. Over the years, by his wisdom and sense for politics, he managed to federate more tribes, the number of his faithful increased and the power of his army developed. The idrissid kingdom thus encompassed the entire territory stretching from Tlemcen in the east to Souss in the south.

The idrissid dynasty, at least in its infancy, professed Shiism and more precisely the Zaidisme, reputed to be the most moderate of the Shiite rites. Feeling cramped in Walilah, Idriss II left it for Fez, where he founded the district of Kairouanaise<sup>5</sup> on the left bank (Idris I was established on the right bank, the district of Andalous). The idrissid kingdom generally knew an important phase of urbanization, illustrated by the creation of new cities like Salé, Wazzequr and Basra, inspired by the Iraqi Basrah. These cities were centers of diffusion of Arab culture and vectors of Islamization. In 985, the Idrissids lost all political power in Morocco and were massively exiled in Al-Andalus. Installed in Malaga (Spain currently), they recovered little by little their power, to the point of generating a dynasty during the time taifas, the Hammudites<sup>6</sup>. Among the other dynasties, the Idrissid dynasty is the sole model of a soft imperialism

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<sup>5</sup> The Kairouanese come from powerful Arab and Persian (Khorasan) families established in Ifriqiya since the Abbasid era. They were expelled from Kairouan because of the political persecutions inflicted by the Aghlabids. The Andalusians who settled in Fez were opponents of the Umayyads, originating from the suburbs.

<sup>6</sup> Dynastie marocaine, archive.

only based on soft power not on the military conquest, another source of conflict with the Abbasids.

### The Almoravid Dynasty (1042-1147)

Marking a clear break with the exercise of power as it was conceived and practiced since the time of the Prophet, the Almoravid dynasty was an imperial berber state founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the so-called Abdallah Ibn Yasin with its capital Marrakesh.

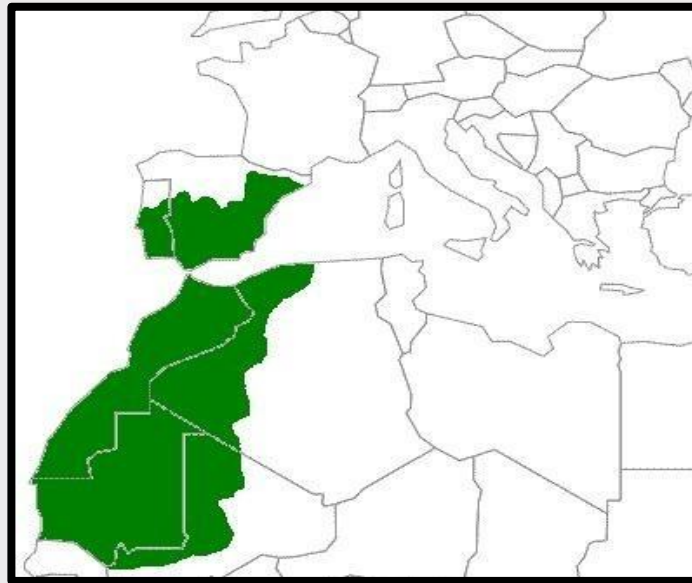
Settled in 1042, the Almoravid Dynasty dominated an empire extending from the Eastern borders of the Maghreb to Andalusia. This Berber dynasty was founded from a nomadic clan from the Sahara, the Almoravids proceeded in these different territories to a remarkable unification, based mainly on Islam and the concept of holy war. They also promoted a refined civilization, influenced by the Andalusian culture, of which they were close. Politically, Almoravid military interventions against the Christian reconquest in Spain showed their vital role, and also legitimated their positioning as defenders of Islam<sup>7</sup>. That's why; they won the respect of the Abbasid caliph as an interventionist and imperial concept defender.

### Morocco under the Almoravids in 1145<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tatiana Pignon. Les almoravides, l'Andalûs et l'Afrique musulmane (1042-1147). *In*. Les clés du moyen orient, 22/02/2013.

<sup>8</sup> Histoire du Maroc, archive 2006.



### The Almohad Dynasty (1121–1269)

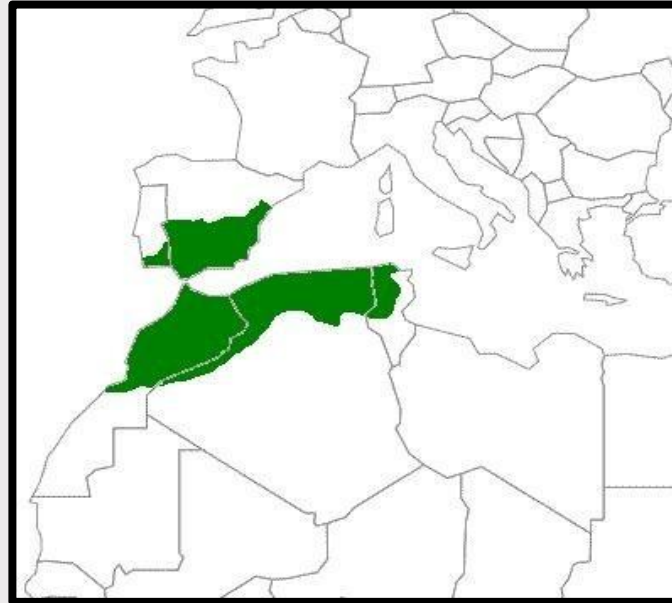
The Almohad dynasty is a rigorous religious movement composed of Berber tribes whose core is the Masmudas tribe. This movement started the reconquest of Morocco which will end with the bloody capture of Marrakech and will found the empire of Morocco. This empire has left an impressive number of monuments, walls in Morocco and Spain, including the famous Giralda of Seville and its equivalent in Rabat in Morocco, Hassan Tower. The empire knew the emergence of artists and philosophers like Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Avicennes (Ibn Sina).

Its biggest victory in Andalusia (Spain today) is the decisive victory of Alarcos in 1194 won by Caliph Yacoub Al Mansour on the combined forces of the reconquista led by the King of Castile Alfonso VIII. The decline of the Almohad dynasty will begin after the decisive defeat of Las Navas de Tolossa in 1212 against the same king of Castile<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Charif Kadiri. Les huit dynasties de l'histoire du Maroc. *In. Histoire.online*.

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## Morocco under the Almohads in 1147-1269<sup>10</sup>



### The Marinid Dynasty (1244-1465)

The Merinid dynasty is a movement composed of a Berber tribe which was to the service of the Almohads then broke up with them. It was based in the north of Morocco and their influence was situated between Taza and Fez taken in 1248. In 1269 they definitively overthrew the Almohads taking Marrakech in 1265. It must be remembered that it was the last Moroccan dynasty to intervene episodically in Andalusia where they won some notable victories between 1275 and 1340 but their defeat in Tarifa marked the end of their interventions in the Iberian Peninsula<sup>11</sup>.

## Morocco under the Marinids in 1420<sup>12</sup>

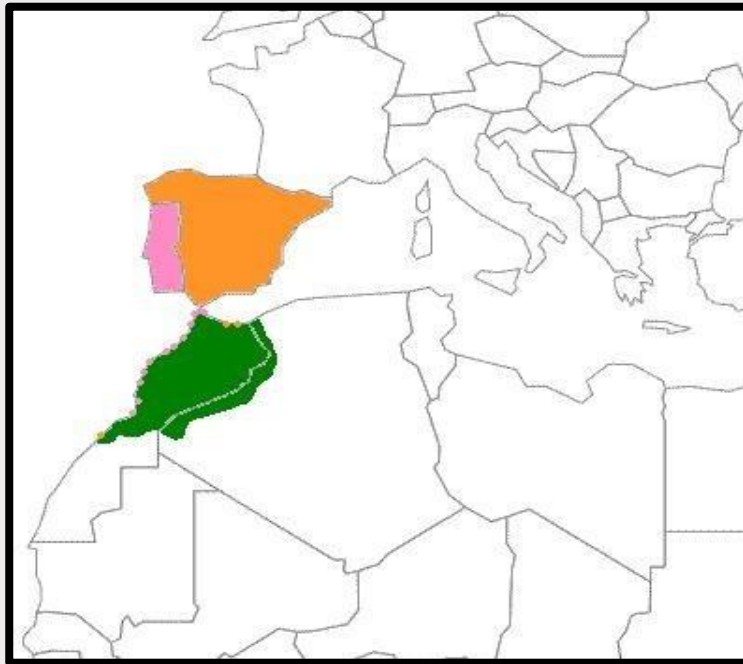
<sup>10</sup> Histoire du Maroc, archive 2006.

<sup>11</sup> *Opcit.* Les huit dynasties de l'histoire du Maroc. *In. Histoire.online.*

<sup>12</sup> Histoire du Maroc, archive 2006.



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### The Wattasid Dynasty (1472-1554)

The Wattasid movement created secretly a small Berber dynasty Morocco in a context of political, social, cultural and financial crisis. The Wattasides were in the service of merinides as viziers, they ended up proclaiming sultans in 1472. They ruled in a small kingdom of Fez in a divided country before being definitively expelled from power by the Saadians in 1554<sup>13</sup>.

### The Saadi Dynasty (1549-1660)

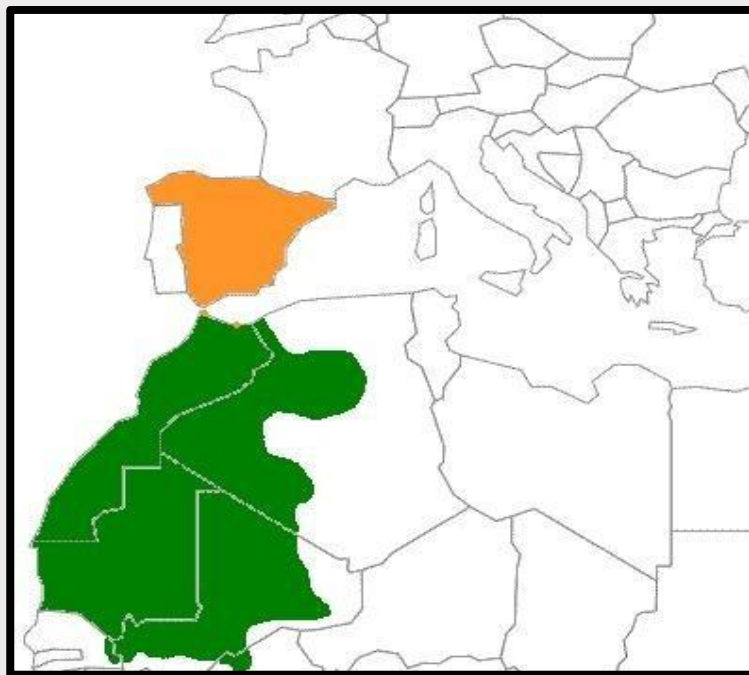
The Saadi Dynasty was a great Shereefian Arab dynasty reigning over Morocco from 1549 to 1660. In 1554, the Saadians overthrewed the Wattassides. Then they managed to wage the war against the Portuguese and finally drove them out of the country. Their main victory was in 1578 called battle of Oued el Makhazine. The Saadi empire extended to Timbuktu and Gao. The gold flowing from the south made the

<sup>13</sup> *Opcit.* Les huit dynasties de l'histoire du Maroc. *In. Histoire.online.*

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fortune of Sultan Al Mansour called "the golden" or "the victorious". However, civil wars have facilitated access to power by the Alawites, a dynasty that currently reigns in Morocco<sup>14</sup>.

### Morocco under the Saadians in 1640<sup>15</sup>



### The Alawite Dynasty (1631-today)

Since the second half of the 17th century until today, the Alawite dynasty is the only one that has managed to establish the stability of the state of Morocco. It is an Arab Sherifian dynasty that came from Hedjaz to settle in Tafilalet (southern Morocco) since 1631, when Moulay Ali Cherif became the founder and the Prince of Tafilalet. It was a period of instability during which the country was fragmented into several independent states, then Moulay Rachid, third Alawite prince of Tafilalet, managed to reunify the country between 1664 and 1669 and founded a central power, thus

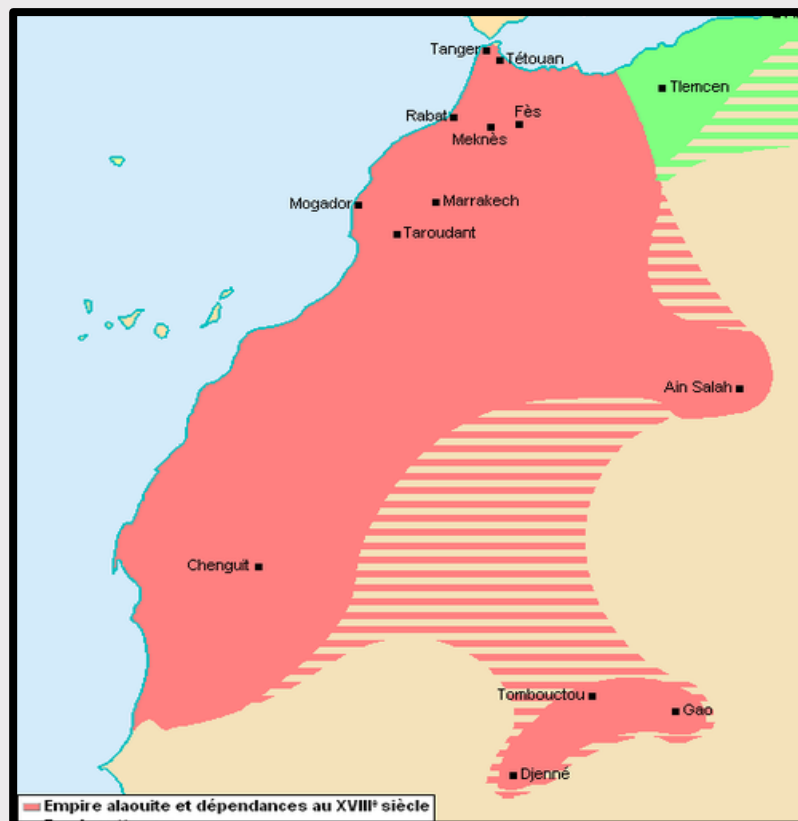
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Histoire du Maroc, archive 2006.

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marking the beginning of the Alawite dynasty, which is still at the head of the kingdom of Morocco Nowadays<sup>16</sup>.

### Morocco under the Alaouites in the 1700s



After all, and following the diagram of the moroccan dynasties above, it can be deduced that Morocco was pacifically founded by the Idrisid dynasty. The following dynasties continued the expansion of the state pacifically and sometimes militarily. Nevertheless, the proximity to Europe, the past history of the Arab conquest and the lack of economic development, put Morocco under the European greed since the 1800s:

<sup>16</sup> *Opcit.* Les huit dynasties de l'histoire du Maroc. In. *Histoire. online.*

- In 1844, the Sultan Abd Errahman was defeated by the French at the battle of Isly;
- In 1860, the Spanish power conquered Tetouan (Northern Morocco) and imposed heavy war indemnities on Morocco;
- In 1864, the signature of the decree that opened Morocco to foreign trade;
- In 1906, the conference of Algeciras placed Morocco under the tutelage of the European powers and Tangier (Northern Morocco), under the status of "international city";
- In 1907, the occupation of Oujda (eastern Morocco) by the French power;
- In 1912, the treaty of Fes for the organization of the French Protectorate in the Sherifien Empire of Morocco, signed by the Sultan Abd al-Hafid. Under the French-Spanish agreement, Spain took the North and the South (Tarfaya).
- In 1956, after the struggle periods Morocco attained independence from France and recovered the North from Spain, after the signing in Paris of the joint declaration ending the protectorate;
- In 1957, Mohammed V took the title of king in August.

### I. The rise of the conflict on the Western Sahara

After the independence in 1956, the status of the Western Sahara became a real political problem for Morocco. The beginning of the conflict is mainly related to Algeria, when it started with the Moroccan claim of Tindouf and Bechar provinces in the eastern, after the independence of Algeria in 1963. Years after, Morocco recovered the Southern Sahara from Spain including the Western Sahara, so Algeria knew that the neighbor would ask for Bechar and Tindouf again. Therefore, to distract it from these provinces, Algeria created a political movement called "Polisario Front" in the Western Sahara by the aid of Cuba and some Sahrawi separatists. In fact, Guevara would expand its political influence in the Maghreb, so he had Algeria as a strategic ally because both regimes adopt the communist concept. The beginning of a friendly



relationship was when Guevara visited Algiers. On the theoretical level, he helped Algiers set up the Polisario creation project. In practice, training trips to Cuba and revolutionary training camps were progressively installed in Tindouf to train the future guerrillas of the Front<sup>17</sup>.

### Chronology of events on the Western Sahara, since 1958

- In 1958, agreement between Spain and Morocco on the retrocession of the province of Tarfaya;
- In 1963, Sand War between Morocco and Algeria after the independence of the latter, resulted after the Moroccan claim of Tindouf and Bechar provinces situated in the eastern (Algerian cities currently);
- In 1973, Morocco recovered all the colonial lands, and the creation in the same year of the Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia El-Hamra and Río de Oro) in Western Sahara, claiming independence from Morocco;
- In 1974, crisis between Morocco and Algeria because of the Western Sahara and the claim for it before the International Court of Justice in the Hague;
- In 1975, launch of the "Green March" (peaceful popular march) for Western Sahara at the initiative of Hassan II. After this, a tripartite agreement was signed in Madrid between Morocco, Spain and Mauritania on 14 November, devoted the division of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania;
- In 1976, violent clashes at the beginning of the year between Moroccan and Algerian troops in Amgalla (Western Sahara). On February 27, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Tindouf (Algeria) and the break of the diplomatic relations between Morocco and Algeria;

<sup>17</sup> Histoire secrète du front polsario, cf. [www.sahara-question.com](http://www.sahara-question.com)

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- In 1979, Mauritania overturned the agreement with Morocco and withdrew from southern Western Sahara under a peace agreement signed with the Polisario Front. The Moroccan army deployed immediately on the whole territory;
- In 1980, 1980. Morocco begins construction of "protective walls" in Western Sahara;
- In 1982, SADR is admitted to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), from which Morocco will withdraw two years later;
- In 1988, re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Algeria.
- In 1988, Morocco and the Polisario Front agree to a UN plan for a ceasefire and a referendum on self-determination.
- In 2004, Morocco under the reign of Mohammed VI is in favor of a definitive and global solution based on a large autonomy of the Western Sahara<sup>18</sup>.

### The presidential elections in Algeria and the Western Sahara affair: No change of position

Since the resignation of the President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2019, the political stability in Algeria remains ambiguous. In fact, the organization of the elections for the choice of a new president was doomed to failure, till the cancellation of these elections by the constitutional Council, provided in July 2019. Today, with no elected president, according to some analysts, the Algerian foreign policy remains ambiguous in regards to Morocco. Indeed, the Western Sahara affair and the support to the Polisario Front is the main question. Would the future President change the position of Algeria regarding to the Western Sahara? The answer seems negative.

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<sup>18</sup> O. Pironet. Maroc : chronologie historique, [www.monde-diplomatique.fr](http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr)

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## Algeria is a military State with civilian openings

It is recognized that in every republic in the world, domestic and foreign policies change according to the political agenda of the new president. As for example, regarding the Western Sahara issue, since his arrival in power in 2019, the new president of El Salvador has withdrawn his recognition of SADR. Should we wait for the arrival in power of a new Algerian president who would do the same? The answer seems negative.

Indeed, Algeria is a military state with civil openings for the functioning of state institutions. The origin of this situation goes back to the 1950s, since the creation of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic. This government –in-exile was created by the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the objective was the independence from France. It was therefore necessary to establish the Ministry of Armaments and General Liaisons in 1957 which was the intelligence service of the NLA. Algeria had its independence through the main role of the army and it was from there that the military began their domination of power. It is everywhere, from the presidency to all public institutions through 30 security services, independent of each other, but under the tutelage of the surveillance and security department (SSD) responsible for coordinating these services. In the presidency, there is the High Security Council (HSC), which is responsible for controlling and giving the President opinions on all matters relating to national security; it is made up of generals of the army. In addition, the branches that belong to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Justice and others, are all under the control of the military through the presence of the military intelligence staff, which follows all the movements of ambassadors, consuls, judges, etc.

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## Algeria will not change its position regarding the Western Sahara

After the cancellation of the elections in July 2019, Algeria has today a provisional president since 09 April 2019, for a 90-day mandate, his name is Abdelkader Bensalah, Moroccan (naturalized citizen). It should be noted that he does not have the right to submit his candidacy for the presidency, given his status as temporary president (Algerian Constitution). The choice of the new president remains quite difficult for the constitutional council or rather the army. Today, a large part of the intellectual elite supports a very charismatic political figure, the diplomat Idriss El Djazairi, former adviser of Houari Boumediene, former ambassador of Algeria in Washington DC and former permanent representative of Algeria at the United Nations in Geneva. However, given his old age and because he is the descendant of Emir Abdelkader<sup>19</sup>, he is far from being accepted to present his candidacy and to be the president of Algeria. if the political situation in Algeria remains unstable, the army continues to ensure the functioning of the state with the support of the people especially after the detentions ensured by General Gaid salah against corrupt politicians. After all, Algeria's position with regard to Western Sahara will change if the army changes its perception of things, which is far from possible.

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<sup>19</sup> Emir Abdelkader belonged to the Idrissids that ruled Morocco.