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# **Grey Geopolitics: Morocco And The Strategic Use Of Hybrid Warfare In Spanish Territories In North Africa**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

In March 2023, Enaam Mayara, President of the Moroccan Senate and fourth authority of the country, stated that Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish cities located in North Africa, were occupied territories and Morocco would recover them "without employing any force" (Pina, 2023). A year before, on 19 March 2022, Morocco's monarch, King Mohamed VI, published part of a letter from the Spanish Prime Minister where Spain recognised the 2007 Moroccan Autonomy Plan as the most "serious, credible and realistic"<sup>1</sup> solution for all parties, changing this way the traditional Spanish posture on this topic (González, 2023). And less than one year before, in May 2021, over 9000 people had tried to enter Spanish territory through Ceuta's border illegally (European Parliament, 2021). Authors from the academic domain have situated these events within the Grey Zone, arguing that this type of action carried out by Morocco can be considered Hybrid Threats (Baques et al., 2021; Jordán, 2018a). Hybrid Warfare has emerged in the last previous years as an essential security concept that international organisations and states have defined as part of the Modern Warfare of the 21st century. The security phenomenon is becoming a very attractive tool for those lacking the capacity to achieve their strategic goals using traditional means. However, the analytical approach towards Hybrid Warfare has always used the same paradigmatic cases, mainly focusing on Russia, China and Hezbollah.

Regarding the specific case of Morocco and Spain, most of these analyses focus only on specific events, using the general characteristics stated in most of the Hybrid Warfare theoretical frameworks to analyse

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<sup>1</sup> These are the translated literal words written by the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to Mohamed VI. The entire letter can be found in the article by Miguel González (2023) from the Spanish media outlet El País. Also, see Moroccan Royal Office official declaration by Kingdom of Morocco (2022).

them and frame them as such. In this specific case, there is a lack of a comprehensive approach to why and how Hybrid Warfare is being employed as a strategy by Morocco against Spain. Because of this, there is no overall assessment of this case that allows us to understand the roots of the conflict, why is Hybrid Warfare the chosen approach, which type of tools Morocco is using, and what we can expect in the future. Furthermore, the main approaches taken by academics and journalists have been mainly focused on the territorial claims towards Ceuta and Melilla and the possibility of Morocco trying to revert Spanish sovereignty. There has not been an approach that puts Western Sahara as the key to understanding and analysing this case and Morocco's actions.

### 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation has two main goals. The first one is to argue that Hybrid Warfare can work as an analytical concept beyond the paradigmatic cases like Russia, China or Hezbollah. The goal is to use pre-existing Hybrid Warfare analytical frameworks as a base (MCDC, 2017; MCDC, 2019; Giannopoulos et al., 2021), and taking advantage of the flexibility of the concept, use additional analytical concepts fitting the characteristics of this case study to compensate for the analytical limitations.

The second one is directly related to the title of the dissertation, and it is to answer how and why Morocco is using non-traditional methods strategically to achieve traditional geopolitical goals by providing a comprehensive analysis of the Hybrid Warfare strategy employed overall. For that, the research question is divided into two that will allow us to understand the roots of the conflict, what Morocco intends and how it intends to achieve it by using Hybrid Warfare. In this case, the goal is to answer these questions regarding the Spanish territories in North

Africa, emphasising Ceuta and Melilla as the main scenarios of Morocco's actions. The two main research questions that will help to achieve this are:

1. Why is Morocco using Hybrid Warfare strategically against the Spanish territories in North Africa?
2. How is Morocco using Hybrid Warfare strategically in the Spanish territories in North Africa?

As mentioned previously, the two questions will be answered using the Hybrid CoE and MDCD analytical frameworks (Giannopoulos, 2021; MCDC, 2019) based on strategic goals, actors, domains, tools and phases to provide a comprehensive analysis that allows the dissertation's final chapter to give a general assessment, including possible future implications.

## 1.2 OUTLINE

The dissertation is divided into 8 Chapters. Chapter 2 is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature surrounding the Hybrid Warfare concept. It is not part of the dissertation to argue the novelty or continuity of the concept; however, it is to understand the common understanding of the concept within the academic domain. This Chapter will also explain the existing Hybrid Warfare analytical frameworks I will use during the analysis and other important concepts. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology followed during the dissertation. Highlighting the reason for choosing a single case study method, the use of mainly secondary sources, the additional analytical concepts and the overall limitations in terms of methodology. Chapter 4 aims to answer the first part of the research question: Why is Morocco using Hybrid Warfare strategically in the Spanish territories in North Africa? It is one of the most important chapters of the dissertation, so it will help to contextualise the case and state the roots of the conflict in terms of strategic goals and

actors. Chapter 5 is the empirical section and aims to analyse the different tools and actions employed by the hostile actor in the chosen scenario regarding domains and tools. Chapter 6 addresses the last part to position the case as a strategy, not in isolated events. It explains the difference between phases and will analyse two paradigmatic events regarding the transition from the priming phase into the destabilisation phase. Finally, Chapter 7 will assess and understand the key aspects of Morocco's overall Hybrid Warfare strategy, including future possible possibilities after Morocco has achieved its primary strategic goal.

## **2. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Most of the articles, work and research papers related to or focused on Hybrid Warfare always begin with the difficulty of finding a unique, comprehensive definition for the concept. This thesis does not intend to change or propose a unified definition. On the contrary, it has been an advantage to situate ourselves in a wide social scientific debate. Hybrid Warfare has worked for this thesis as an umbrella term. Logically, all supported by academic evidence and argumentation, the strength and weakness of the concept are the same: flexibility. In this sense, the main difficulty of this case study was building an analytical framework that would allow us to analyse with a certain degree of depth the hybrid strategy that Morocco was using against the Spanish territories in North Africa while keeping the analytical rigour of pre-existing frameworks. As the introduction mentions, Hybrid Warfare case-study research focuses mainly on the same paradigmatic actors (MCDC, 2017). As such, the first goal was to find a framework consistent with the general understanding of Hybrid Warfare and comprehensive enough to be applied to a particular context like Morocco and the Spanish territories in the North of Africa.



This section aims to set a solid theoretical and analytical framework that links, explains and justifies how this case will be analysed during Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the dissertation. It is necessary to propose a small but comprehensive literature review on the concept of Hybrid Warfare, so this will allow us to understand the strength and weaknesses of the concept. The first part of this section will conclude by arguing that Hybrid Warfare is a useful explanatory concept that must be used as an umbrella concept. Four other theoretical concepts will supply the analytical limitations: grey zone, coercive migration, coercive diplomacy and economic coercion. These concepts will also be situated in the academic debate and theoretically developed, signalling the most important parts used for the dissertation case study. Viewed this way, if Hybrid Warfare is being used as an umbrella concept, the other concepts would be used as axes to complement the analytical limitations. Those have been chosen based on the particularities of this specific case study.

## 2. 1 HYBRID WARFARE: AN UMBRELLA TERM

Hybrid Warfare is a contested concept in the academic domain; nevertheless, widely used by the main international security actors to describe and identify current security threats and challenges and to build recommendations on how to counter this specific type of threat. The present dissertation will use the definition provided by MCDL (2017) that defines Hybrid Warfare as "*the synchronised use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects*" (MCDL, 2017:1).

One of the main debates concerns the novelty of the concept itself. For that, authors signalling similar precedents to the modern concept highlight terms like Fourth Generation Warfare, Unrestricted War (Qiao et al., 1999) or Compound War (Huber, 2002). In this sense, one of the main defenders and considered the primary author of the modern

approach to Hybrid Warfare, Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman (2007), argues that although it shares characteristics with these concepts, the novelty can be found in the multi-domain character of Hybrid Warfare. He stated: "*Hybrid Wars can be waged by states or political groups, and incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder*" (Hoffman, 2007: 8). It is the character of blurring modes of War identified by Hoffman the one we cannot find in others like Compound Wars or Unrestricted Warfare (Bekic, 2022). As Hoffman stated "*these forces (conventional/irregular; terrorist acts; criminal disorder) become blurred into the same force in the same battlefield*" (Hoffman, 2007: 8). In terms of conceptualisation and modern contributions, it is relevant taking into account today's international context and one of the main focuses within the research of Hybrid Warfare to mention the contributions of the Russian General Gerasimov (Gerasimov, 2016 cited in Bekic, 2022) and the doctrine under his name: "*Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template (...)*." He strongly highlights the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals, growing and exceeding the force of weapons in their effectiveness. Moreover, as we will see, the character of the actor's ability to deny involvement in hostile activities (Bekic, 2022).

Following the novelty character of the concept, as Hoffman, many authors support these views on Hybrid Warfare (Schmid, 2021; Wither, 2016). However, they argue that Hybrid Warfare does not change the nature of Warfare, nor turn it into a new category, therefore, being entirely compatible with the definition of War by Carl Von Clausewitz (1832). They argue that it is more a change in degree. Hybrid Warfare,

as Clausewitz argued about War, continues to be a continuation of politics by other means.

Those authors who accept the analytical use of Hybrid Warfare as a concept identify some shared characteristics regarding this phenomenon:

- Ambiguity: In Hybrid Warfare, deliberate ambiguity results from calculated decision-making (Mumford, 2020). In this sense, according to Mumford (2020), the objective of ambiguity is not necessarily to hide the hostile actor behind the activity but to avoid a legitimate response by the target actor. Similarly, the same author highlights the novelty of ambiguity within Hybrid Warfare is that it is deliberate and can be considered the result of calculated decision-making.
- The blurred character between peace and War: It is used as a way of deniability for perpetrators, maintaining action just below the threshold of War so retaliation or escalation is avoided (Mumford, 2020; Hoffman, 2007). In this sense, the blurring character can be seen that in the highest intensity level of Hybrid Warfare, there is still a lack of conventional force, the traditional modes of retaliation are muted, the thresholds of response are blurred, and the kinetic use of force is avoided (Mumford, 2020; Jordán, 2020).
- Multimodal character: It refers to the convergence and combination of several modes of Warfare (Hoffman, 2007). It is the intentional use of several instruments of power at a multi-dimensional level in an integrated way (Jordan, 2018b).
- Synchronised use of instruments of power: Hybrid Warfare refers to the coordinated application of numerous instruments of power to address specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities throughout the whole range of societal functions (MCDC, 2017). This

synchronisation is intended to create specific synergies between the different actions carried out by the hostile actor (Baqués et al., 2021).

Considering these factors, an additional interesting characteristic of Hybrid Warfare, according to Mumford (2020), is the "implausible deniability" achieved by combining all these characteristics. Hybrid Warfare does not need secrecy to be successful. Implausible deniability, in this sense, can be a deliberate powerplay aimed at signalling something whilst utilising enough ambiguity of action to avoid retaliation or escalation.

However, these are just general characteristics that are not enough to analyse and understand the strategic implications of Hybrid Warfare or the conceptualisation of Hybrid Warfare as a strategy which will be a relevant part of achieving the outcome of this dissertation. This approach by the academic literature has been part of the effort to make Hybrid Warfare valuable and applicable to real contexts. It has allowed international organisations and nation-states to publish counter-Hybrid Warfare official guidelines.

Within the strategic approach to Hybrid Warfare, we will locate concepts like Grey Zone (Jordán, 2018b), a wide range of hybrid threats typically employed within Hybrid Warfare, like cyber-attacks (MCDL, 2017), states exploiting existing criminal networks (Giannopoulos et al., 2021) or the strategic application of the use of (ambiguous) force to gain territory or attaining another strategic goal (Mumford, 2020). The present dissertation will base the general analytical framework on MCDL's (2017) and Hybrid CoE's (Giannopoulos et al., 2021) work on identifying Hybrid Warfare in democratic societies. Interestingly, the authors of this work highlight some aspects already mentioned previously but with a much more specific tone.

We can argue, based on the previous characterisation, that the effectiveness and dangerousness of Hybrid Warfare reside specifically in the ability of the hostile actor to synchronise various instruments of power to exploit ambiguity, non-linearity and the cognitive elements of Warfare (MDCD, 2017) by keeping implausible deniability and achieving traditional strategic goals. It uses them along the horizontal and vertical axis. This strategy must be context tailored to remain below the response threshold. Moreover, there must be an opportunity to apply for it. These instruments of power can be military, political, economic, civilian or informational means that at the same time are targeted at the political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructure vulnerabilities of the target country to escalate in a vertical (intensity) and horizontal (synchronisation) manner to achieve the desired goals while avoiding a response or making that response more difficult or inefficient (MCDC, 2019). Based on this, the general analytical framework applied to the case will be summarised in terms of actors, strategic goals, domains, tools and phases.

## 2. 2 GENERAL ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The general strategic analytical approach towards Hybrid Warfare comprises four main pillars: actors and strategic goals, domains, tools and phases (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; MCDC, 2017; MCDC, 2020). The structure of the dissertation is based on this. Chapter 4 will be answered in terms of actors and strategic goals. Based on the context characteristics of this case, chapter 5 will identify and analyse the different tools and domains, allowing analytical axes to adapt to the particularities. Finally, Chapter 6 will approach the case in terms of phases.

- Actors and Strategic Goals: According to the MCDC analytical framework (2019), hybrid threat actors wish to undermine or harm

democratically established governments or alliances. The actor has clear objectives but limited ability to reach them using traditional means. The actor is the one that will select a combination of tools, namely hybrid threats, to achieve strategic objectives (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). In this case, we will focus on state actors; however, a non-state actor can also employ Hybrid Warfare. Regarding state actors, O'Rourke (2018) differentiated between revisionist and rogue states, situating China and Russia as the former and Iran and North Korea as the latter. The revisionist actors employ ambiguous means to avoid triggering a decisive response by the target actor but achieve in a nonviolent way strategic leverage (Monaghan, 2019).

- Domains: Each tool targets one or multiple domains by creating or exploiting a vulnerability or taking advantage of an opportunity (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Even though the domains are completely contextual-based, the common characteristic is that they should not be examined in isolation. One effect in one specific domain can cause cascading effects in another (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; MDCD, 2019). In this specific report, 13 domains are mentioned. For the particular case of the dissertation, we will only analyse some of them.
- Tools: An actor can employ the means or actions to achieve these strategic goals. Hybrid Threats use multiple, ambiguous means to target vulnerabilities to achieve goals gradually without triggering decisive response (Monaghan, 2006). One single tool can be intended to affect various domains (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Moreover, its use is intended to achieve strategic leverage over the target actor (Monaghan, 2006). I will develop the specific tools employed for the analysis in the "Analytical Axes" Section.

In this context, to identify the different tools employed by the hostile actor, the dissertation will use the MCDL (2019) concepts of critical functions, vulnerabilities, synchronisation of means (horizontal escalation), and effects and non-linearity. The first category will be key to understanding the selection of the scenario and the implications of the actions taken by Morocco. The second category has already been mentioned in the common characteristics, and it will be one of the main goals of the dissertation to extract trends in terms of horizontal escalation, including the identification of tools employed. Lastly, it will also be part of the end of the case to extract conclusions on the overall effects achieved by Morocco during the different events.

- Phases: The Hybrid CoE report identifies three phases: priming, destabilisation and coercion. However, they are based primarily on Russian and Chinese case studies and research. This dissertation intends to identify the different phases specific to this case study once we have a complete understanding of the case and what is the characteristic that allows us to differentiate between phases. In this sense, the “priming phase” is the most basic when the hostile actor intends to make a configuration of the environment to achieve certain conditions that will allow it to employ different Hybrid threats and achieve its objectives (Baqués et al., 2021). The destabilisation phase is defined as the “*stage in which the (hostile) actor intensifies the activity in the manner of a campaign (multiple operations), or to use for one operation to achieve the designated goals*” (Giannopoulos et al., 2021: 40). It differs from the priming phase in that a specific pre-aimed aim exists. Activity will become more visible and aggressive, and one of the reasons why this may happen is due

to the actor's frustration with the status quo situation. The character of "implausible deniability" remains, even when the activity intensity is higher. Even though it will not be relevant for the analysis of this case, the coercive phase is where the attribution of the actions is possible, and the "Hybrid Warfare/War" character is more predominant (Giannopoulos et al., 2017).

### 2. 3 GREY GEOPOLITICS IN THE GREY ZONE: THE SCENARIO

The Grey Zone is a concept often linked to Hybrid Warfare. Grey Zone refers to a scenario where a Hybrid Warfare strategy is employed. In this sense, the grey zone would refer to the territories of Ceuta and Melilla. However, the Grey zone does not have to be purely geographical (Jordán, 2018b); within the multi-domain character of Hybrid Warfare, the grey zone is the scenario where these instruments of power are directed to achieve specific objectives.

Some authors, like Bernabé-Crespo (2020), distinguish and separate the concept of Hybrid Warfare and Grey Zone, stating that the main difference between both concepts is that the employment of violent direct tools exists in Hybrid Warfare, opposite to Grey Zone, where this possibility does not exist. However, as Jordan (2018b) and the analytical frameworks used in this dissertation (MCDC, 2020; Giannopoulos et al., 2018) argue, Hybrid Warfare does not necessarily entail using violent tools or traditional force.

Grey Zone denotes a geographical space in an intermediate position between a conflict or crisis and a regular peaceful situation (Jordan, 2018b). Within the grey zone, the main target is the civilian population and their reactions to the different Hybrid Threats (Baques et al., 2021). The Grey Zone will be subject to several measures and actions from the Hostile Actor (Baques et al., 2021). With this interpretation, Grey Area has another important aspect. In the scenario, the hostile actor can



employ Hybrid Threats strategically without making the target actor respond decisively (Monaghan, 2019). Monaghan sees the Grey Zone as part of a continuum of conflict, where the increase of vertical escalation is less probable than the horizontal synchronization of means (See Figure 1).

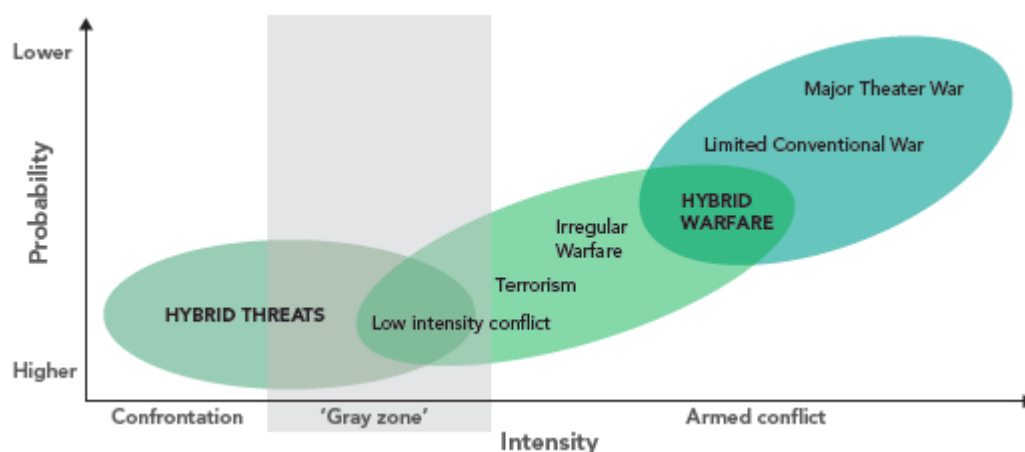


Figure 1. Representation of Gray Zone as continuum of conflict. (Monaghan, 2019, p.87)

## 2. 4 ANALYTICAL AXES: COERCIVE MIGRATION, DIPLOMATIC COERCION AND ECONOMIC COERCION

### 2.4.1 COERCIVE MIGRATION

Coercive migration will be used to address the geographical domain and the opportunistic character of Hybrid Warfare. Coercive migration will be considered a Hybrid Warfare tool and be used to analyse the different effects in various domains, referring in the case study to the different events on the Spanish borders of Ceuta and Melilla and the local and national effects.

Most of the time, various motives and goals are involved in using migrants as a weapon. According to Greenhill (2010), migrants and refugees have frequently been used as bargaining chips in foreign policy negotiations to manipulate a target. As the research on the political

tactics used by transit states, migration and geostrategy are linked. Adamson and Tsourapas's (2019) distinction between coercive and cooperative migration diplomacy is particularly helpful. In the former, a zero-sum game, the coercer aims to obstruct the target state's strategic options. In the latter, however, it is anticipated that all sides will gain from any diplomatic agreements regarding migration. Adamson and Tsourapas (2019), reinforcing the importance of transit states, demonstrates this contrast by pointing out that a state's geostrategic location and the number of migrants it harbours decide whether a "blackmailing" or "backscratching" tactic would be adopted.

In these circumstances, according to Nye (2004), in contrast to other traditional coercive means of hard power, such as military force, the weaponisation of migration in this situation falls under the grey area of power. Prior to Nye's study, Weiner (1992) established that the instrumentalisation of migration is a way in which *"one state seeks to destabilise another, force recognition, stop a neighboring state from interfering in its internal affairs, prod a neighbouring state to provide aid or credit in return for stopping the flow"* (Weiner, 1992: 102-103).

Greenhill (2010), being one of the main authors of reference in this sense, provided a comprehensive typology of the most frequent ways in which migrants are instrumentalised, *"often for specific political and/or military ends"* (Greenhill, 2010: 6). Similarly to Hybrid Threats objectives, the cases concerning migrant instrumentalisation include a hostile or antagonistic actor using its capacity to control the flow of people into the target state to achieve different goals, including influence its politics and gain concessions from it (Greenhill, 2010). She defines coercive migration as *"those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and economic concessions from a target state or states"* (Greenhill, 2010: 116). She understands coercive migration primarily as a strategy

of weaker states attempting to coerce stronger nations. Three types of actors using coercive migration: generators, agents provocateurs and opportunists. The generators will directly create or threaten to create cross-border population movements unless the target agree to their demands. The agents provocateurs do not create crisis directly by deliberately act in ways to incite others to generate cross-border population movements. Finally, the opportunists do not play a direct role in creating a migration crisis by simply exploiting for their gain the existence of outflows.

According to her analysis, a hostile state's success or failure depends primarily on the target state's vulnerability to coercive migration. The factors that contribute to vulnerability are:

1. Strong polarisation within the target society regarding the issue of (illegal) migration.
2. High "hypocrisy costs": the potential damage to an actor's reputation due to an actual or perceived discrepancy between the country's commitment to liberal values and actions taken toward migrants that go against those values.
3. Strong criticism by the political opposition within the country regarding the handling of a particular migrant crisis

Three other important factors to take into account are the geographic proximity to the source of migration, the size of the migrant continent in question, and the prize experience with mass migration. All of these factors will impact in one way or another depending on the characteristics of each case.

Authors like Daniel Fiott and Roderick Parkes (2019) consider that migration coercion can be framed in a larger strategy against the target state. As a result, migration coercion can be employed as part of a Hybrid Warfare strategy combining border tensions with other actions like disinformation campaigns.

#### 2.4.2 DIPLOMATIC COERCION

According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), regular diplomacy relies on negotiation, positive inducements and assurances to solve conflicts peacefully between nations. On the opposite side, diplomatic coercion can be framed within the influence theory, but stating that this method combines threats and the use of symbolic force with positive inducements and reassurances (George, 2003 cited in Viggo Jackobsen, 2016). By influencing, war is avoided but the same goals can be achieved. In this sense, the symbolic force is used to support diplomacy and enhance the prospects of a negotiated settlement instead of other type of confrontation. Threats, in this scenario, are only employed to stop or undo undesirable actions already taken by the other actor (Viggo Jackobsen, 2016). Symbolic threat within diplomatic coercion is necessary to achieve fear of unacceptable escalation on the target and get it to the negotiation table. However, it is also necessary to give the target positive inducements to allow to comply with the coercer's demands and reassure the coerced party that compliance will not result in additional demands and more threats in the future (Viggo Jackobsen, 2016).

Within Hybrid Warfare, diplomatic coercion will be employed along plausibly deniable actions in other areas of the grey zone, such as migration instrumentalisation, cyber-attacks or disinformation campaigns. The actor employing diplomatic coercion will focus on supporting its threats with horizontal escalation rather than vertical or explicit threats, with the goal of changing the other parts' decision-making process. It is important to mention that the use of coercive diplomacy will increase due to factors like a strong interest in war avoidance, fear of escalation and other consequences and a reluctance to use force.

### 2.4.3 ECONOMIC COERCION

Economic power is mostly used to punish or reward other parties, depending on whether they respond in the way the stronger party wants, as Richard N. Cooper (2004 cited in Iskandarov et al., 2022) states. Economic dependence is the most significant threat to any nation's economic security. The primary guarantee of independence is, in turn, the state's economic security.

The use of overt and covert economic measures to influence the actions of states, non-state actors, or populations is called economic coercion. Within Hybrid Warfare, economic coercion creates effects in different key domains. Economic sanctions, trade restrictions, resource manipulation, and financial pressures are all included. Economic coercion aims to take advantage of a target's economic weaknesses, shake up the target's stability, and force the target to comply with the coercer's demands. It complements and reinforces both military and non-military activities by exerting pressure on the target population, infrastructure, and economic systems. Hybrid actors aim to weaken the target's resilience, disrupt decision-making processes, and gain leverage in the conflict by targeting key economic sectors like energy, finance, or trade.

Pursuing foreign policy objectives by leveraging the security externalities of economic interactions has been a traditional source of state power and influence (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). In today's world, characterised by globalisation, economic relations are exploited for strategic purposes. In this sense, the strategic objective of hybrid warfare in the economic domain is to weaken the target state comprehensively, undermining public confidence in democracy and the government (Iskandarov et al., 2022).

Economic coercion can vary depending on the hostile actor, the target actor's weaknesses, opportunities and means available. In this sense, it can go from boots to commercial blocks, pressure businesses and

sabotage the supply chain (Baques et al., 2021). Economic coercion is usually enabled by a certain degree of interdependence between actors (MCDC). Interdependence implies a degree of cooperation and reliance between actors that allows any major disruption in that cooperation will involve costs to both parties (Gillespie, 2006). The interdependence affects the economic realm and others, like security.

## 2. 5 OTHER CONCEPTS: BORDERS, STATE SECURITY AND NATIONAL INTEREST

The management and security of state borders will be an important part of this dissertation. It is important to understand what they are and why they are subject to securitisation. The state can be defined as a political entity that conforms to a country or territory and has sovereign and independent power. It has three main components: territory, population and government (Barbé, 1993).

For a state to be recognised by International Public Law, it must have the following conditions: possess a territory delimited by borders; have a population; possess a government, capacity to have international relations with other States. For a nation-state, borders and territorial integrity are a key part of the state's existence as a way of international and external delimitation. In this respect, it is a key part of the national interest to defend and protect the defence and security of a state, including territorial integrity (Herrerro de Castro, 2010).

## 2. 6 TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Besides providing a comprehensive theoretical background on the different concepts that will be applied in the analysis of the present case study, my intention was to highlight the necessity of using specific complementary analytical concepts to adapt to the contextual demands of the present case study. Generic Hybrid Warfare analytical framework

will help us to analyse and answer the first question of the case study: Why is Morocco using Hybrid Warfare as a strategy against Spanish territories in North Africa? In this sense, the goal is to contextualise the case in terms of actors and strategic goals.

The specific analytical axes will help us answer the second part of the question: How is Morocco using Hybrid Warfare as a strategy against Spanish territories in North Africa? In this sense, we will focus on the specific domains and tools used by Morocco to pursue its strategic goals using three different analytical concepts: the coercive use of migration, diplomacy and economy.

Lastly, there is only one factor without being addressed: the different phases within Hybrid Warfare in this specific case. Given the non-linear and ambiguous character of Hybrid Warfare, using concepts like vertical escalation and horizontal synchronisation of means will be important to differentiate between the priming and destabilisation phases.

The last part of the dissertation will focus on putting together all the different parts in terms of actors, strategic goals, domains and tools and use them to draw conclusions that will help to create a comprehensive picture of how and why Morocco is using Hybrid Warfare and the different trends and periods within this strategy.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 SINGLE-CASE STUDY APPROACH**

This dissertation examines and analyses the strategic use of Hybrid Warfare by Morocco over the Spanish territories in North Africa. The research method chosen, a single case-study approach, allow for a detailed investigation of the specific context, factors and dynamics, achieving the outcome of answering both research questions and providing a comprehensive overview of the case.

The single case study allows deep analysis and understanding of the specificities of this case. This point was part of the research problem. Most academic analyses focused on Hybrid Warfare were done over some of the most paradigmatic cases and actors. For this reason, the analytical framework used by the authors was not practical to be applied in different contexts. The single case study allows us first to understand contextual factors and, later, apply and use general theoretical frameworks and other analytical concepts to understand this case correctly.

On the other side, the authors focusing on this specific case from the Hybrid Warfare perspective have only studied a few isolated events in the relation between Spain and Morocco. Examples of this would be in the “Observatorio de Ceuta y Melilla”, where the reports only mention isolated actions carried out by Morocco, or, in the case of Jordán (2018a), when he focused on the occupation of the “Parsley Island” in 2002 only briefly mentioning the roots of the conflict. In this sense, the single case study has provided enough flexibility to conduct deep research on the contextual factors and roots of the conflict before going into the different actions carried out by the hostile actor. As Eisenhardt (1989) stated, single case studies can indeed contribute to theory building or, in this case, refinement of different analytical approaches to Hybrid Warfare.

However, as with any other research method, there are considerable weaknesses. Due to the specificity of this case, it will hardly be useful to make assessments or draw conclusions applicable to other cases. This does not mean that the analytical framework will be completely unpractical, but it will need to be adjusted to fit the case characteristics. Furthermore, another important factor is the limitation in terms of data availability and accessibility. Driving away from major paradigmatic cases also means lower availability of data. As will be mentioned during



the dissertation, especially during Chapter 5, this has been a significant limitation in the case study. When bringing conclusions on how Morocco is employing Hybrid Warfare, most of the sources available on the different actions are from media outlets, which can rest accuracy to the analysis.

### 3.2 CASE SELECTION

As mentioned, the motivation behind choosing this specific case was to supply the lack of a comprehensive approach to Morocco's actions over Ceuta and Melilla. All the analyses, most done by the Spanish academic community, have been focused on very specific episodes. Few of them address the roots of the conflict and the reason why Morocco is carrying out this type of action. Furthermore, the media outlets approach this case as merely territorial pretensions of Morocco over Ceuta and Melilla, which is inaccurate. Choosing this case allows us to research a topic sensitive and relevant to Spanish national security, being able to understand the real motives of Morocco's actions, the contextual factors that allow the Hybrid Warfare strategical employment, what kind of leverage Morocco is achieving over Spain, and how is Morocco employing it.

In this section, I also want to highlight the research process used in Section 5. Section 5 (How is Morocco strategically using Hybrid Warfare) has been one of the most challenging parts, mainly because of the lack of information and data, but also in terms of distinguishing between regular inter-state competition and Hybrid Warfare. Table xx on the different tools and actions employed by Morocco was only made after thoroughly studying the contextual factors and major events. Furthermore, according to the general analytical framework (MCDC, 2019), the tools and actions were stated after carefully considering strategic weaknesses that would provide an opportunity for the hostile

actor to act over them. After this, I was able to choose the different analytical axes and analyse the different actions, as stated in Table xx. All of these aspects must be taken into consideration. As mentioned above, part of the strengths of the case study approach, the ability to be specific, is also part of the weaknesses when being subjective, biased or not having enough information on the case.

Lastly, the specific focus on Ceuta and Melilla has been done in terms of available data and the relevance of the territories for both the hostile and the target actors. These territories merge various interesting factors, such as being high-relevance assets for both parties, the high level of opportunities for the hostile actor to exploit and high levels of effects achieved. However, it must be noted that many of the actions carried out on those territories also have effects at the national level.

#### **4. WHY IS MOROCCO USING HYBRID WARFARE STRATEGICALLY IN THE SPANISH TERRITORIES IN NORTH AFRICA?**

As the Hybrid Warfare CoE report (Giannopoulos, 2021, p.15) states, Hybrid Warfare "*becomes attractive for those lacking the capabilities or opportunities to push their strategic interests otherwise*". Three things are avoided using this strategy: detection, resistance and response. The hostile actor is achieving its strategic goals without having to undertake the costs that would come with the use of traditional force.

This section aims to explain "why Morocco is using Hybrid Warfare as a strategy in the Spanish territories of North Africa". **Morocco needs leverage over Spanish decision-making regarding Western Sahara, and it is using Hybrid Warfare because it cannot use direct coercion or traditional use of force to achieve this goal due to the costs.**

In order to understand why Morocco is employing any strategy towards Spain and related to Western Sahara, it is key to understand how Western Sahara is positioned within Morocco's interests. Morocco wants

effective and internationally recognised sovereignty over Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony in dispute since 1976. For that, I will explain the three main factors that make Western Sahara a vital national interest for Morocco:

1. Source of legitimacy for the Monarchy and part of the nation-building efforts after Morocco's decolonisation in 1956.
2. Source of key economic resources for Morocco and source of exports to key commercial partners.
3. Role in the regional power balance in North Africa.

Secondly, Spain, in this sense, plays an important role. Why does Morocco want to influence Spanish decision-making processes towards Western Sahara by using Hybrid Warfare in its territories in North Africa? Morocco wants to influence Spanish national policy decisions to achieve two main things:

1. Foreign policy approach towards Western Sahara at the European and international levels.
2. At the internal political level, by approaching North African regional dynamics and benefiting one party or the other.

The previous sub-sections will explain the strategic objectives behind Morocco's hybrid warfare strategy towards Spain. However, it needs to explain why using Hybrid Warfare was a strategy over Spanish territories in North Africa. For that, we need to analyse two aspects:

1. International consequences of using direct coercion or force to influence Spanish decisions over Western Sahara
2. The asymmetric relation created by the complex interdependence between Spain and Morocco.

These two aspects will justify Spain's need to avoid detection, resistance and response as the target actor. Furthermore, the international consequences would bring an open attack or coercion.

Once we explain this particular aspect, it will take us to the last part of this section: Why has Morocco chosen Ceuta and Melilla as the main scenarios for Hybrid Warfare? We need to take into consideration the following:

1. Key strategic inherent weaknesses (security aspects, historical aspects, economic aspects).
2. Geographical proximity between the country's target territory and the hostile actor.

All these subquestions will give a comprehensive answer to our main first question. In this sense, we analyse the general strategic goals of the hostile actor, the relevance of the target actor related to those goals, the strategic approach chosen by the hostile actor and the scenario selection where the hostile actor will employ said approach.

#### 4.1. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: WESTERN SAHARA AS A VITAL NATIONAL INTEREST FOR MOROCCO

Within the present case study, the main argument is that Morocco is the hostile actor employing Hybrid Warfare towards the Spanish territories in North Africa. Opposite to what any could instinctively believe, Morocco's main goal in using Hybrid Warfare is not to change the Spanish status of Ceuta and Melilla. It is not that it is not strategically important for the country's aspirations. Still, it has first something more important to achieve and needs leverage over Spain to do it: Western Sahara.

Morocco's final goal is to annex and control the entirety of the territory fully and, even more importantly, to have this sovereignty recognised by the international community. There are three main reasons why Western Sahara is a vital national interest for Morocco. These three main reasons attend to different aspects of the country and help us to understand the

type of actor, how the internal power is distributed, and where Morocco concerns its neighbouring countries.

Morocco needs de full control and recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara because of the direct link between the legitimacy of the monarchy in the country and the territorial aspirations; the economic interests within Western Sahara; and the importance in terms of regional power and superiority over its neighbours, especially Algeria. Within the Hybrid Warfare logic, Morocco fits within the revisionist power category in the sense that, to succeed in its strategic goals, Morocco needs to change the status quo established in the region. The main constraint is in terms of international recognition, so many countries in the region and outside of it support the Polisario Front and the right to self-determination of the Saharawi people, which goes directly against Morocco's interests.

#### 4.1.1 THE ALAOUI MONARCHY AND LE GRAND MAROC: A SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY

The first assumption is that Western Sahara is vital to Morocco's national interests due to its impact on the legitimacy of the Monarchy. Analysing Morocco's internal power distribution and the type of actor necessarily means addressing and understanding the Monarchy's role in the country. The role is rooted in the origins of Morocco as a nation and directly related to the post-colonial building of the state. At that time, the legitimacy of this institution was linked to nationalism and the concept of "Le Grand Maroc". At present, the Monarchy represents a key internal part of Morocco. The institution, the Makhzen and the favourable political elites have made from the idea of "Le Grand Maroc" and Western Sahara a powerful internal policy tool that brings them legitimacy and notable power.

The Makhzen and the Monarchy are entirely intertwined. The Mazhen works as a link to influence the government. The government has

political authority and control over the army and society, and the Sultan or actual Monarchy represents the head of religious power. Even though this institution precedes the French Protectorate of the 20th Century, it has adapted to survive and remain powerful in Moroccan democracy (Daadaoui, 2011).

According to the Freedom House Index (Freedom House, 2023), Morocco is a partial democracy. This means, among other things, that the country regularly holds multiparty elections for Parliament and, since the approval of the new constitution in 2011, the elected government has held more authority over the country. However, the Monarchy continues to play the main role in many key aspects of the country. King Mohammed VI maintains important formal power over key areas and informal lines of influence in society and government. Especially the Monarch and his close circle of advisers and associates - the Makhzen - have enormous political and economic power to influence internal affairs.

Furthermore, the court system is not independent of the Monarch, meaning the King possesses direct control over the Supreme Council of the Judiciary (Freedom House, 2023). Even when the 2011 Constitution was considered a step towards full democracy, many aspects remained subject to the discretion of the Monarch. The King can disband the legislature, rule debris, and dismiss or appoint cabinet members. The King also controls decision-making over security, defence, justice and foreign policy (Cavatorta, 2001). Furthermore, in this sense, the electoral body is not independent; quite the contrary, it is mainly controlled by the Interior Ministry and with the participation of the Justice Ministry.

The fate of Western Sahara and Morocco's Monarchy were linked during the previous years to the independence of Morocco from France when the construction of the nation-state was based on Moroccan irredentism and the idea of "Le Grand Maroc", and the Monarchy (still Sultanate at

that time) became the main defender of this concept. The theory of "Le Grand Maroc" defends that Morocco should be bigger in terms of territory than it was in 1956 and that it is in the present time (Pla Cid, 2023). Representative of Moroccan irredentism, "Le Grand Maroc," has been present in its leadership by King Mohamed V<sup>2</sup> (1927-1961), Hassam II (1961-1999) and Mohamed VI (1999 - Present). Historically, they have claimed three territories: Spanish possessions (including Western Sahara at that time), Mauritania and the area from Algeria to Ballast (Lacouture, 1985).

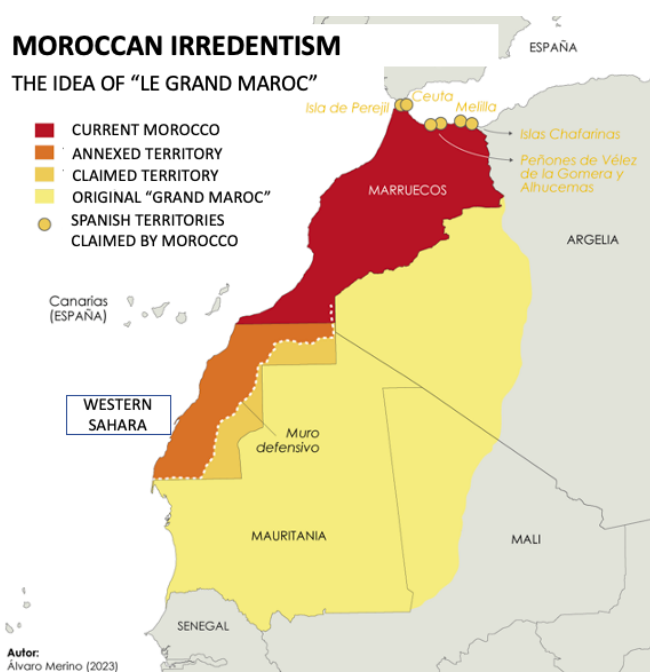


Figure 2: Translated map of Moroccan Irredentism (Merino, 2023, translated by Alicia Valdivia)

It was born as a nationalist doctrine during the 1920s, proposed by Allal El Fasi, founder of the Isqiqal Party and the main defender of Moroccan independence, and it became one of the main symbols of Moroccan nationalism. It was based on rejecting Spanish and French colonialism and intended to build the religious and cultural future of independent

<sup>2</sup> First as Sultan (1927-1953), then as King of Morocco (1957-1961).

Morocco. He argued that Morocco had sovereign rights from Spain to Senegal and Niger (Gilson Miller, 2013).

The links with the Monarchy took place during those first years. The colonial order imposed in Morocco by establishing the Protectorate in 1912 weakened the power of traditional groups like the Sultanate and the Makhzen, and oppressed mechanisms occupied these. The Sultanate had maintained a mild line towards the colonial powers. However, during those years, the Sultanate started to get close to the nationalist sentiment that was starting to shape popular willingness. In 1934, the relationship between Allal Al-Fasi, the symbol of independence, and the Sultanate grew closer when the former was invaded to meet the Sultan. From this point, the nation and Sultan were linked (Gilson Miller, 2013).

The Istiqlal Party became the head of the independent movement, gaining wide support in the 40s and supporting three main points: party discipline, devotion to the Monarchy and fixation on the independence goal. Sultan Mohammed V started to acquire a first-line role and became an adored symbol for the population and within the national symbolism. The Istiqlal installed a constitutional monarchy with the Sultan as head of state to gain international support. The popular support for the Sultan and the direct link between this institution and the independence project was such that in 1953 he was exiled by the French government, unleashing a wave of protests in the region (Daadaoui, 2011).

When Morocco became independent from France in 1956, the King played a key role in the new state. Even though Mohamed V died in 1961, he remained in the popular mind as the father of the nation. The legitimacy of this idea, Morocco's independence, and the necessity to "recover" all the lost territories also remained linked (Gilson Miller, 2013). From this point, the monarchs used the idea of the "recovery" of the territories to build the nation's feelings. They repetitively used it as an



ideological tool to maintain and unite the population towards the Monarchy. His son King Hassan II would be responsible for further linking the Monarchy with the Western Sahara matter. However, this was different from his idea. Initially, Hassan II planned to move from the irredentism pushed by the Istiqlal Party. He focused on building a foreign policy focused on determining its borders with Algeria, especially in the region of Tindouf, where in the 1950s, important oil reserves had been discovered. Believing Algeria would easily cede to these territorial demands, it escalated between both countries, leading directly to a conflict. Hassan II achieved the opposite effect that he had first intended. Instead of separating the Monarchy's legitimacy from the irredentism and the idea of "Le Grand Maroc", it ended up escalating and entering into a conflict with Algeria that would define since then Morocco's foreign policy and most of its problems towards Western Sahara. The internal situation in Morocco became quickly unstable due to internal problems and the costs of the war with Algeria. Part of the population and elites blamed the King, resulting in a failed coup in 1971. After this event, Western Sahara returned to the Monarchy as the solution to make up for the turmoil and loss of legitimacy from the previous years. Hassan II made these territories a vital national objective, creating a threat feeling against Moroccan nationalism and recovering the idea of "Le Grand Maroc" as a necessary solution. All of this would set the stage for the Green March in 1976 and one of the first precedents in using the civilian population to recover territory without violence or traditional force.

The link between the legitimacy of the Monarchy and the "recovery" of Western Sahara explains the role in the Spanish abandonment of Western Sahara in February 1976 and the following occupation of the territory. The initial goal of Spain was to delay as much as possible the self-determination plan proposed by the United Nations in 1965 (Fernández Molina et al., 2013). The main reason was Spain's uncertain

situation due to Dictator Franco's health status and the fact that in this weak position, Spain benefited from the conflict between Morocco and Algeria and from not having a clear regional power in the Maghreb. Without having detailed how Spain intended to carry out the self-determination referendum in Western Sahara, Spain announced in 1971 that it was planning to withdraw from the said territory. Hassan II saw this as an opportunity to annex the territories and regain the lost legitimacy. At that time, an organised actor was already defending Western Sahara's independence, the Polisario Front. Mauritania and Algeria were against Morocco's intentions, and Algeria quickly started supporting the Polisario Front. Morocco and the Monarchy partially succeeded in their plan of annexing Western Sahara. The King organised the Green March, a massive march of 350,000 unarmed Moroccan civilians that crossed the border in November 1975 to support that Western Sahara was Moroccan (Gilson Miller, 2013). The movement was directly linked with Hassan II and achieved internal wide support within Morocco. The "sacred union" were those parties that supported the annexation of Western Sahara as part of Morocco's sovereign "natural right". From this point, several events that shaped Morocco's present would occur. The Polisario Front declared war against Morocco in December 1975, and Algeria directly supported them in this decision.

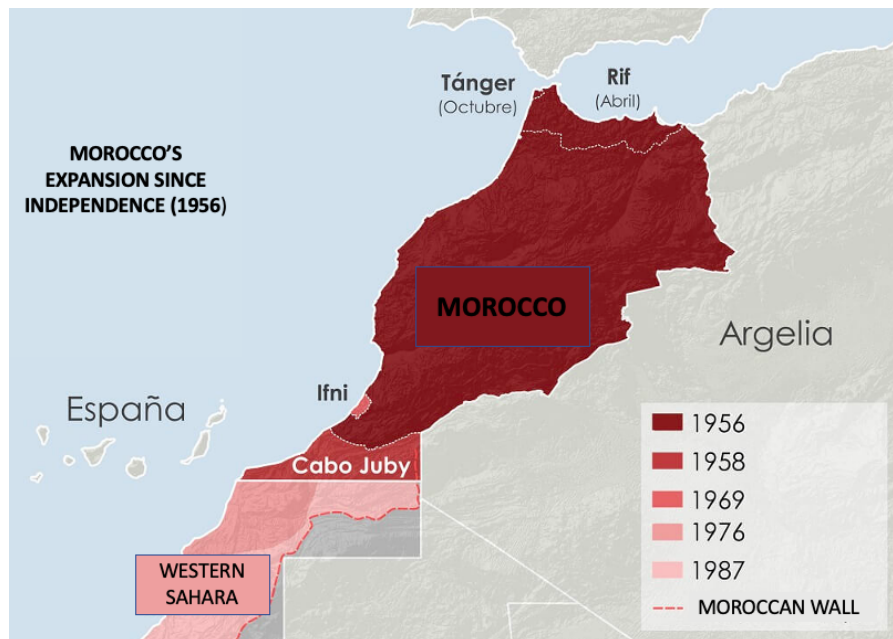


FIGURE 3: Morocco's Expansion since its independence (1956) (Domínguez, 2018, Translated by Alicia Valdivia)

At that point, Morocco had control over 75% of the territory. And the King had positioned Western Sahara as a national vital matter with a larger internal political consensus. Due to the high costs of the conflict, only completing the full integration of Western Sahara in Morocco became the only acceptable solution and the main priority for the Monarchy and its future. Because of this reason, Western Sahara remains a vital national interest internally. However, the main constraint is not full control, so as we can see, Morocco already de facto controls over 75% of the territory. It is more related to the international recognition side of the matter; the fact that not all relevant actors for Morocco support its approach towards Western Sahara brings other important consequences, especially in terms of economic and regional power.

#### 4.1.2 THE OTHER FACE OF THE MATTER: RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC POWER

The second reason Western Sahara is a vital national interest for Morocco is directly related to the strategic resources in said territory, the economic impact of exports to the EU and the EU's legal framework. The extent that Morocco can exploit and take advantage of it relies directly on the international recognition aspect. Western Sahara is a key solution for Morocco's economic weaknesses. It is a territory rich in strategic resources such as phosphates, gold and other mines, and a coast with a rich fishery Exclusive Economic Zone. However, Morocco will only be able to fully exploit and benefit from it once the EU fully recognises it as the sovereign party of Western Sahara. As can be seen in Figure 4, the economic resources located in Western Sahara are many, most of them situated already in the area controlled by Morocco.

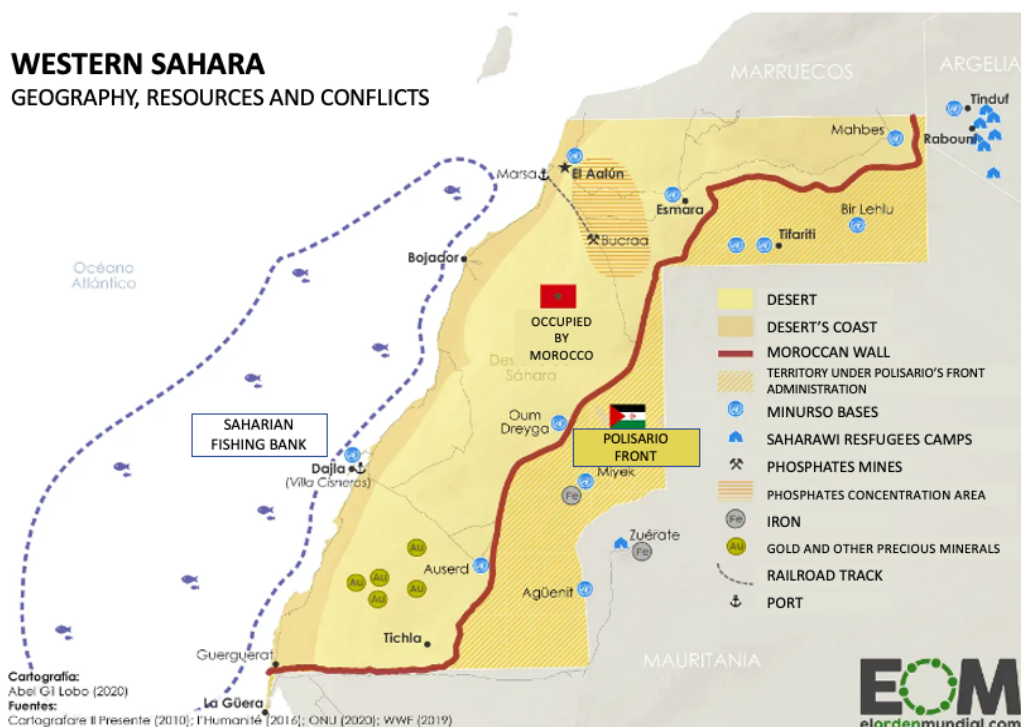


FIGURE 4: Map of Western Sahara's geography, resources and conflicts (Gil Lobo, 2020, translated by Alicia Valdivia)

Morocco's economy is mainly based on a reliance on agriculture (40% of the working force depends on this sector) and the service sector. Both sectors are characterised by low productivity. Tourism represents 11% of the GDP and is also one of the country's main economic activities (Oficina Información Diplomática, 2022). Also, after the COVID19 Pandemic, Morocco benefited from the nearshoring strategy carried out by the European Union, increasing the exports to said continent. The most important sector besides agriculture and services is the export of phosphates (a core resource in global food production), being the first producer and exporter (79% of world reserves).

Two factors explain the economic relevance and the impact on Morocco's search for regional power and control, and both have Western Sahara as the centre of the strategy. The first is related to energy security. Morocco also has an overdependence on energy resources (over 90% of the energy is imported). Morocco is counting on having an important extension of territory to build a solar power plant that would allow the country to increase its energy independence partially. It is also believed to have significant offshore gas and oil reserves. Due to the conflict, the waters are officially off-limits to exploration and exploitation (Martín, 2020). The high level of economic investment in Western Sahara is also important to understand the relevance of fully controlling and exporting these resources (Jacobs, 2020).

The regional balance in North Africa has affected the relations between Spain, Morocco and Algeria. The gas pipeline construction that connected the Maghreb with Europe has been key for Spain's energy security and Morocco's economic revenues. It transports Algerian gas through Morocco. This may not be directed directly towards Spain, but it is another example of how the regional dynamic impacts the relations.

Morocco charges over 200 million per year to pass gas through its territory.

The second economic factor is related to the low diversification of Morocco's exports and the overreliance on the European Union as an economic partner, accounting for 57.3% of total exports and 65.7% of total imports. The European Union is also the biggest foreign investor in Morocco. This relation was specified in the EU-Morocco Association Agreement (1996) and the Agreement on Additional Liberalisation of Trade and Agriculture Products (2012). The Agreements and main content of the exports to the EU are related to strategic resources, such as phosphates, where Western Sahara is one of the main territories to extract it. The Agreement has supported the exports in two of the most strategic sectors in Western Sahara – agriculture and fishery – and the economic growth, investments and employment thus depend on Morocco's ability to exploit these and export them to the EU markets (European Commission, 2021). Being aware of the relevance of this territory under Morocco's de facto control, the country has made important development investments.

Two events took place that made the reconnaissance by the international community, especially the European Union, the full sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara even more necessary. In 2016, Spain declared that Western Sahara was not part of Morocco, and as a result, any commercial agreement should be made with the permission of the Sahara people's representatives. Secondly, and even more relevant, is the European Court of Justice's decision over the EU-Morocco Agreement on extending preferential tariffs to products originating in Western Sahara made in July 2019. This Agreement was intended to normalise and relaunch EU-Morocco relations and to maintain and further develop their cooperation regarding human rights and security

aspects that had been previously affected. The intention of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, besides the economic benefits for both parties, was to contribute to the positive socio-economic development of Western Sahara and the protection of human rights in this area.

However, the EU General Court annulled the Council's decisions concerning the Agreement between the EU and Morocco and the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement. As a result, EU fishermen, mainly Spaniards, could not operate within Western Sahara waters under Moroccan permits. Moroccan agriculture exports in Western Sahara were excluded from the preferential EU tariffs. The decision was based on the EU's recognition of Western Sahara's status as a separate and distinct territory from Morocco. Furthermore, the EU General Court ruled on the necessity to obtain consent from the representatives of Western Sahara when entering into agreements relating to their territory.

In terms of economic matters and Western Sahara, achieving international recognition means exploiting and benefiting from all the resources that this territory possesses. As mentioned, another example would be hosting the Negev Summit and achieving Israel's recognition (Martín, 2020), as it finally happened on July 2023 (Sanz, 2023b). All these reasons related to the economic sphere help to position Western Sahara as a vital national interest and international recognition as a key strategic goal. The last aspect is in terms of regional power and how it is related to this.

#### 4.1.3 REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND WESTERN SAHARA

Morocco intends to become a regional power in North Africa. The internationalisation of the Western Sahara matter reinforced the internal

perception that Western Sahara is key for Moroccan interests. External actors have influenced the conflict since the Green March and the declaration of war from the Polisario Front to Morocco. This explains the necessity of Morocco to secure its control over Western Sahara and achieve as much recognition from key actors as possible to counter the negative power dynamics in its region.

The regional aspirations of the different actors within Northern Africa cannot be only measured in terms of material capacities. In this sense, regional leadership would be the capacity of being able to influence the security dynamics of the said region (Martín, 2020) and the acceptance of said leadership by the rest of the actors. In the Maghreb, Algeria and Morocco intend to fight for regional power, and the Western Sahara matter remains the central key of the conflict. The outcome of this conflict will help determine the region's power balance.

Currently, Western Sahara is listed by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory whose status remains under a negotiation process under the authority of the UN (European Commission, 2023). The goal of the UN was to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that should include providing self-determination to the local population of Western Sahara in the context of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) as per UN Security Council Resolution 2602. The role of the UN as arbitrator in the conflict is even more relevant for Morocco because key actors like the European Union use their resolutions as guidance in their official posture towards the conflict. In the previous section, it is proved with the resolution of the European Court of Justice regarding the commercial status of the recourses originated in Western Sahara.



A second factor regarding the role of Western Sahara in Morocco's aspirations as a regional power is directly related to Algeria. Morocco and Algeria are the two countries that have traditionally, at least since the independence of both countries, fought for regional control. In terms of resource capabilities, Algeria possesses more strategic resources than Morocco. As mentioned before, the ability to control, exploit and benefit from the resources in Western Sahara depends on many occasions on the recognition from third parties of Morocco's full sovereignty over Western Sahara.

These considerations concern not only the European Union but also other regional institutions like the African Union, ECOWAS and the countries in the Sub-Saharan region. Morocco needs to achieve neutrality from the African Union towards the Sahara matter and become a major commercial representative in the region.

Morocco also knows how to use its good relation with the Gulf Monarchies to achieve the recognition of the US of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. In 2020, the Trump Administration completely changed its neutral position towards Western Sahara to support Morocco's claims. In return, Morocco started a strong diplomatic normalisation towards Israel, also supporting the country's intentions in the Middle East. This will be seen in the planned Negev Summit hosted by Morocco, which will bring countries like Bahrain, Egypt, UAE and the US and prove itself as a strong regional diplomatic actor.

Everything related to Western Sahara directly impacts Morocco's internal and external affairs. The fact that Western Sahara matters are in regional and international affairs makes it key for Morocco to control this issue. In this sense, the outcome of the Western Sahara conflict will determine the power balance between Algeria and Morocco, the economic power

of Morocco in terms of resources, where Argelia has a natural advantage, and the recognition by the rest of the regional actors of said power balance. The African Union, ECOWAS and the countries in the Mahgreb and Sahel regions will have an impact, depending on their position, towards neutrality or supporting any of the parties in Morocco's role as a regional power and the future of Western Sahara. That is why achieving international recognition is key to Morocco's strategic goals.

#### 4.2 SPAIN AS THE TARGET ACTOR: ROLE AND IMPACT IN THE WESTERN SAHARA MATTER

The previous section argued that Western Sahara constitutes a key national interest for Morocco and that, related to this, Morocco has two main strategic goals: achieving full control over all the territory and being recognised as the sovereign power of this territory by key international actors. Spain is one of the key actors that Morocco needs support from, becoming this way the target actor for Morocco's Hybrid Warfare strategy. This section aims to answer the following question: Why does Morocco want to influence Spanish decision-making processes towards Western Sahara?

Due to the strategic importance of the goals towards Western Sahara and Spanish influence over this matter, Morocco needed to implement specific measures, this time in the form of Hybrid Warfare, to ensure that Spain would not take decisions that would negatively impact Morocco's goals. Spain has the power to influence the Western Sahara matter and Morocco's goal in two main ways:

1. Foreign policy approach towards Western Sahara at the European and international levels.
2. At the internal political level, by approaching North African regional dynamics and benefiting one party or the other.

Spain's decisions over Western Sahara have impacted the political position of two key actors in Morocco: the UN and the European Union. Furthermore, Spain's internal politics also impact the country's relations and support to other regional actors like Argelia and the Polisario Front. These factors make it necessary for Morocco to gain leverage over the Spanish decision-making processes regarding Western Sahara, to make their postures alienated, or at least Spain has not negatively impacted Morocco's strategic goals.

#### 4.2.1 FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TOWARDS WESTERN SAHARA

The Spanish official position on the Western Sahara matter has been towards neutrality. However, this neutrality brands one condition, and it is that any plan proposed regarding the future of the territory must take into account the opinion of the Saharawi people and the right to self-determination. This posture has been reflected at the European level and also regarding the UN.

The United Nations has been the host of most of the international negotiations over Western Sahara's future since the exit of Spanish authorities in 1976. As a result, the United Nations has been responsible for most of the negotiation trials since the occupation of 75% of the territory by Morocco and the start of the war with the Polisario Front and many of the proposals for the future of the territory. There is a key aspect that increases the role of Spain over the Western Sahara under United Nations considerations. In 1975, Spain hosted the Madrid Accords (Declaration of Principles on Western Sahara), where it was stated that Spain was officially leaving Western Sahara, temporarily transferring its administration to Morocco and Mauritania until a referendum was held. However, these Accords are not recognised by the United Nations. In RES 34/37 (1979) and RES 35/19 (1980), the organisation stated that

Western Sahara was under Morocco's occupation and that de jure controller was still Spain.

As I mentioned previously, the UN has been the host of many negotiation processes to determine the future of Western Sahara. Spain has been clear in the necessity of taking into consideration the self-determination rights of the Sahara people, including the possibility of complete independence from Morocco if that is chosen. The Baker Plan I (2001) was one of the most serious proposals. This Plan offered wide autonomy to Western Sahara, keeping autonomy in all matters except foreign policy and defence and not contemplating an independence referendum. France and the UK endorsed the Plan, but it was never officially presented to the UN Security Council due to the rejection of the Polisario Front and Argelia. On its side, Spain did not reject the Plan by not officially supporting it, which created hostilities with Morocco (Vaquer, 2007). This can be seen as a signal towards Morocco of the possibility of Spain endangering future autonomy plans and the necessity to secure its support in the international sphere.

Secondly, regarding the European Union, a similar situation occurs. The European Union's political position is aligned with the United Nations in the sense that the EU considers that Western Sahara is under occupation, and a solution supported by all parties is the only option. Since the entrance of Spain to the European Economic Community in 1986, the possible support of Spain in the European sphere became important for Morocco (Norman, 2020). France, an ally of Morocco, tried to make the European Union support the 2007 Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara. Similarly to the situation with Plan Baker I, Spain didn't support this decision and stated again that only a solution acceptable to all parties involved in the conflict would be acceptable.

The impact of Spanish politics and considerations in these two spheres, the European and the international, prove the importance of making sure

that Spain and Morocco's visions are aligned regarding the different Moroccan proposals for the future of the territory and explain Morocco's necessity of holding leverage over Spain to ensure this. A last factor remains to be explained, and this is the internal Spanish political dynamics and how this has impacted not only the European and international sphere but also the regional power dynamics in North Africa.

#### 4.2.2 SPANISH INTERNAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Internally, different political parties in Spain have had different positions towards Western Sahara and Polisario Front. This approach has made Spain take important decisions towards Western Sahara that sometimes were against Morocco's interests. Historically, the left parties in Spain supported the Polisario Front and advocated for a self-determination referendum, openly rejecting the Madrid Accords (Vaquer, 2007). In order to favour its international projection and status, Spain changed this approach. The political willingness to definitely end the isolationism period that characterised Franco's dictatorship made Spain move politically towards neutrality in the Maghreb based on arguing that Spanish responsibility towards the Sahara ended in February 1976.

However, the reality was different. Ceuta, Melilla and the rest of the positions in North Africa were already an opportunity to exert influence and pressure from Algeria and Morocco. Spain found itself in a position where any Spanish action related to this in the region was perceived as a threat of treason by one party or the other. Instead of pursuing neutrality, Spain took a more pragmatic political approach where economy and security were more important than the traditional support the left gave to the Polisario Front (Vaquer, 2007). In 1981, Primer Minister of Spain, Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo, partially supported the UN, indirectly supporting Morocco. This was not fully endorsing Morocco's

aspirations, Spain still supported a self-determination referendum, but it left the confrontation approach towards Morocco. This matter affects direct key questions for Spain. In this sense, the different positions over the conflict proposals made by both parties received careful consideration testing the balance in relations between Spain, Morocco and the Polisario Front. In this sense, some of the key aspects for Spain were: fishery in Moroccan territorial waters, the territorial integrity of Ceuta and Melilla, the impact on the agricultural imports of Moroccan products, and the possibility of Algeria becoming a haven for ETA (Vaquer, 2007). Furthermore, the interdependence regarding Algeria is also strong in other key matters like gas security and Medgaz or the exploitation of Gassi Touil.

The endorsement or rejection of different autonomy plans at the international level and the internal indirect or direct support to the Polisario Front have shaped the relations between Spain, Morocco, Polisario Front and Algeria. This has been sustained and aggravated by the interests that characterised these countries' relations. Morocco would have liked direct support internationally and internally from Spain. However, Spain benefits from not having a clear regional power and relative power over Morocco through the UN and European Union. This all justifies that Morocco needs influence tools to make sure that Spain will take a favourable posture in this regard, which leads to the use of Hybrid Warfare as a strategic approach to achieve this.

#### 4.3 STRATEGIC APPROACH: HYBRID WARFARE TO INFLUENCE SPAIN

Until now, I have explained that Morocco considers Western Sahara as a vital national interest, and in this sense, the country has two main strategic goals: achieving full control over the entire territory and international recognition of its sovereignty. Furthermore, I have

explained the reason why Morocco needs leverage over Spain. Another important question remains: Why has Morocco chosen Hybrid Warfare as the strategic approach to achieve its goal towards Spain? To answer this, we need to attend to the characteristics of Hybrid Warfare and the dynamics we encounter between hostile and target actors.

As mentioned previously, Hybrid Warfare is an appealing strategy to *"those lacking the capabilities or opportunities to push their strategic interests otherwise"* (Giannopoulos et al., 2021, p.15). Regarding Morocco, the chapter highlighted the importance of international recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. For that, making sure Spain is aligned with their position due to the possible international impact that the country has, is important. By strategically using Hybrid Warfare, Morocco retains implausible deniability, in the sense that the ambiguity in the actions avoids a legitimate response (Mumford, 2020) and keeps the situation below the threshold of war, avoiding any retaliation again (Hoffman, 2007).

In terms of avoiding consequences, we have spoken briefly about the strong dependence of Morocco towards the European Union regarding commerce and key economic aspects. However, this dependence is also towards Spain as an individual actor. Spain's stronger role in the commercial balance also deters Morocco from taking the relations between both countries to a non-return point (Sánchez Tapia, 2022).

However, Morocco cannot employ direct coercion or traditional force towards Spain. Conversely, Morocco cannot reach its strategic goals using transparent traditional influence such as foreign policy or diplomacy tools, trade deals or legal agreements (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Because of that, Hybrid Warfare became an advantageous alternative that could make Spain take or avoid decisions that would negatively affect Morocco's strategic goals and that Spain would not take voluntarily otherwise.

Employing Hybrid Warfare, Morocco achieved three main things: shaping the existing interdependence between both countries in its favour, using the opportunities given by the inherent vulnerabilities of Spain, and finally, avoiding international consequences that would endanger international recognition. In this sense, we situated the interdependence between Spain and Morocco as "complex interdependence", which brings, according to Gillespie (2006), certain conditions to the bilateral relation between both countries.

1. Non-resort to military force in the case of conflicts due to the costs that would bring in each of the parties.
2. Existence of channels of financial, social and intergovernmental communication.
3. Absence of hierarchy between issues: This will be considered as a factor allowing the escalation and transition from the priming phase into the destabilisation phase.

By choosing Hybrid Warfare, Morocco chooses a long-term strategy with lower risk assumptions that can bring the country's desired results. Also, Hybrid Warfare allows Morocco to escalate or de-escalate according to the means available, expected outcomes, and the stage in the relations between countries.

#### 4.4 BUILDING THE GREY ZONE: SPANISH TERRITORIES IN NORTH AFRICA

This takes us to the last part of the main question. Why has Morocco chosen the Spanish territories in North Africa as the scenario to implement Hybrid Warfare Strategy?

All critical functions from a state have vulnerabilities that present a Hybrid Warfare opponent/actor with the possible conditions for exploitation (MCDC, 2019). The scenario that will be presented at the moment constitutes one part of the overall Hybrid Warfare strategy employed by



Morocco against Spain. This does not mean that Morocco's actions are limited exclusively to these territories and the areas that will be mentioned in Section 5. However, it is relevant due to its high impact on Spain. Same as Western Sahara is a vital national interest for Morocco, Ceuta, Melilla and other North African Spanish territories constitute the same for Spain.

The interesting part of these territories is the interaction between high-relevance assets for the target state, the high level of opportunity for the hostile country to act and the high level of effects produced for the target state. These three factors make Ceuta, Melilla and the rest of Spanish North African territories an interesting scenario to analyse.

Section 5 will focus on identifying critical functions in the form of vulnerabilities and opportunities in Ceuta and Melilla. Critical functions are those activities that, if discontinued, could disrupt services and produce different effects. Given the correct conditions and available means, all critical functions have vulnerabilities that a hostile actor can exploit. Within critical functions, we can also identify vulnerabilities inherent to the target state and intentionally created by the hostile actor (MCDC, 2019).

Ceuta and Melilla are key enclaves for Spain, officially recognised and fully integrated into the state. They also present unique characteristics, sometimes vulnerabilities, others simply inherent factors that constitute opportunities for Morocco to employ Hybrid Warfare against them. The following three are key to understanding why Morocco has chosen these scenarios: geography disposition, historical aspect and regional dynamics. This section aims to explain the characteristic and relevance of each factor. Section 5 will aim to explain how this strategy is

articulated and how these factors create opportunities for Morocco to exploit.

#### 4.4.1 GEOGRAPHICAL FACTOR

Ceuta and Melilla are located in the North of Africa. They constitute the only terrestrial border between Europe and Africa. Due to the territories' small size, strategic location, and the fact that Spain claims legal marine zones around them, their geographic features are very significant. The Spanish contested territories by Morocco in North Africa are five: Ceuta, Melilla, Penon de Velez de la Gomera, Peñón de Alhucemas and the Chafarinas Islands. However, Ceuta and Melilla are the most relevant territories (O'Reilly, 1994).



FIGURE 5: Map of Spain's North Africa enclaves (BBC News, 2002)

To analyse the importance, we briefly address the geographical characteristics of these two cities. Ceuta, located closer to Spain, is a small peninsula with a 20 km sea coast and 8 km land boundaries. Melilla lies to the south of the strategic Spanish island of Alboran. The city has a 3.9 km coastline and 10 km land boundaries (O'Reilly, 1994). Melilla and Morocco share three main open borders: Beni Enzar, Barrio Chino, Farhana and Mariguari (Bermejo García et al., 2020). These two territories are considered within the Spanish Constitution as full

sovereign territories integrated into the state in all senses. Ceuta and Melilla offer the best geographical advantages as ports on Morocco's Mediterranean coastline. The waters surrounding the Plazas are within fish stocks. Both Plazas have well-developed infrastructures and economies in contrast to Tangier. Geographically, the Strait of Gibraltar is the only natural entrance to the Mediterranean Sea.

The others are minor "plazas" with some strategic importance. The Penon de Velez de la Gomera is a barren rock, and with the adjoining "Isleta" (Islet) is about 20 km. The Penon de Alhucemas is located west of Melilla in the Bay of Ajdir and is 4 Km from the Moroccan coast. The Chafarinas consist of four archipelagic islands located 3.5 km from the Moroccan coast, 26 km east of Melilla and 35 km from the Moroccan-Algerian boundary line. Fish-rich waters surround the islands.

In this sense, all territories are separated by the peninsula, especially Ceuta and Melilla, which have a direct border with Morocco. As mentioned before, Morocco attempts to shape the complex interdependence especially high in these territories, in its favour. In this sense, Ceuta and Melilla rely heavily on commerce with the Moroccan bordering cities, both to export to Morocco but also to import to the cities. Similarly, the high transit of people favours economic development in both cities. Lastly, it is important to highlight again that since 1986 with the entrance of Spain into the European Union, these territories became the only terrestrial border of Africa with the European Union. The geographical factor will have a key impact on the economic and security aspect of the Hybrid strategy.

#### 4.4.2 HISTORICAL FACTOR

On the other side, the historical factor is also relevant to Morocco's hybrid strategy, using the reclamation of these territories as a way to employ "lawfare" and cultural statecraft.

Since the independence of Morocco in 1956, the country has reclaimed the sovereignty of both territories from Spain, arguing that they are occupied territories. It is important to highlight the origin of each city to understand why Morocco disputes its sovereignty and how they present an opportunity. During the fifteenth century, specifically in the year 1497, the Spanish Crown occupied Melilla intending to safeguard itself from the piracy that was taking place in the Mediterranean. This territory has remained under the Spanish Government since then and has been a disputed region with Morocco on numerous occasions (López Bueno, 2011). On the other hand, Ceuta had already been conquered by the Portuguese in 1415; Ceuta started to belong to Spain in 1668 after the Peace Treaty between Portugal and Spain in Lisbon. At that time, the Great Powers intended to control territories on both sides of the Mediterranean due to their strategic and commercial relevance. At the moment of the Spanish conquest of Ceuta and Melilla, Morocco did not exist as a nation-state. It was formed by different tribes all over the territory. Before the consolidation of the Alauí Monarchy in Morocco, Great Britain pressured Sultan Mulay Faid to sign with France the establishment of a Protectorate that would also recognise the presence of Spain in the North of Africa (Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2012). In 1799, Morocco and Spain established that Ceuta was under Spanish sovereignty and would have the right to self-defence in case of any attack (Ortiz de la Torre, 2017).

There were recent historical reclamations of Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco. In 1975, Morocco requested the UN Decolonization Committee to evaluate those territories under the RES 1514. As an important note, Ceuta and Meilla were never considered territories pending decolonisation (Ortiz de la Torre, 2017). However, as was exemplified at the beginning of this dissertation, that has not prevented members of the

Moroccan authorities from making declarations stating the opposite (Pina, 2023).

#### 4.4.3 REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Finally, the last factor is related to the security aspect. These two cities are one of Spain's highest migrational pressure points (Sierra Sanchez, 2020), constituting one of the main routes of entrance to Europe from Africa. In this sense, Morocco's condition of transit state is key to understanding how the country shapes these inherent conditions into key opportunities to exploit in terms of coercive migration.

The routes toward Morocco can be various. The most usuals start in Nigeria, crossing towards the South of Algeria and then to Morocco through the border near Oujda. A second important one is through Mauritania (Kimball, 2017). The journey for both routes is long and dangerous. Depending on the migrational policies of each state at each moment, some routes may vary, instead of leading to Ceuta and Melilla, taking the migrants towards the Canary Islands. Many migrants failed to reach Europe, so they resided in many cities in North Africa. The pressure in Morocco in this regard is very high. Due to the high cost and risk of entering Spain through the Canary Islands using "pateras", many migrants choose to cross via Ceuta and Melilla, becoming two points with high pressure. Due to the migration laws and agreements between countries, sometimes repatriation is not an option once the migrant enters Spanish soil (Norman, 2020).

All these conditions present an opportunity for Morocco to turn into a coercive negotiation tool. It is also necessary to highlight that other inherent regional dynamics like territories or criminal networks make the security interdependence between both countries even larger. However, regarding this aspect, the cooperation between both countries has been

more steady and not subjected to political instability periods, opposite to the migrational aspect.

## **5. HOW IS MOROCCO USING HYBRID WARFARE IN SPANISH TERRITORIES?**

According to the Hybrid Warfare CoE report (Giannopoulos et al., 2021), Hybrid Warfare uses different tools to “*create or exploit a vulnerability or take advantage of an opportunity*”. The hostile actor will take advantage of existing dynamics or create new ones based on the opportunities to achieve different effects that will affect one or more strategic domains from the target.

This section aims to explain “how Morocco is using Hybrid Warfare over the Spanish territories in North Africa”. **Morocco is taking advantage of different weaknesses at the Spanish national level, specifically using Ceuta and Melilla as scenarios, to create effects that will influence Spanish decision-making processes regarding Western Sahara.**

I identified three main **tools**: economic coercion, coercive migration and diplomatic coercion. Each of these tools has effects in one or more **domains**. As mentioned previously, there has to be an opportunity, in this case: **interdependence, geographical proximity, historical disputes and inherent regional dynamics.**

According to the MDCD, the vulnerabilities can be inherent or created by the hostile actor. In both cases, the opportunity to exploit them must exist. In this case, Morocco has been presented with a mix of both. Interdependence is a key and interesting aspect that must be explained to understand how inherent and created vulnerabilities allow Morocco to use them against Spain. Complex interdependence would create new vulnerabilities and allow Morocco to exploit inherent ones.

## 5.1 OPPORTUNITY: THE EXPLOITATION OF WEAKNESSES

The Spanish strategic thinking previous to the entrance into the European Union was to manage in a way Morocco that Spain could ensure that the tensions, instability and negative effects on both countries would be minimal, as well as the possibility of a conflict. For that, Spain built a "common interest mattress" to project stability between both parties (Fernández Molina et al., 2013), which authors like Gillespie (2006) defined as "complex interdependence". As a short-term solution, it successfully deterred both parties from taking actions that could increase the risk of conflict or the worsening of relations. However, in the long-term vision, complex interdependence has allowed Morocco to use tools, especially in the economic domain, to put pressure on Ceuta and Melilla, as well as coercive migration (Gillespie, 2006).

Geographical proximity and regional dynamics can be considered inherent vulnerabilities that make it necessary for both countries to cooperate. This aspect has not been affected, especially in terms of counter-terrorism, even in the worst moments of political relations between both countries. It can not be said the same in terms of migration. As was mentioned in the previous section, Ceuta and Melilla, as the southern border of Europe, are the points with high migrational pressure. As the border country, Morocco is key in controlling these migration flows.

This section will explain how each factor creates an opportunity in different domains that Morocco has historically and strategically used to create different effects using tools like economic, diplomatic or migration pressure. These actions, even though they will be presented and analysed in terms of individual different tools, are not put in place individually. A synchronisation of means helps to shape the Hybrid Warfare strategy (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Further considerations on this site will be made during Section 7. It is also worth noting that,

especially in the economic domain, Spain has historically taken advantage of it to control Morocco's approximation towards Ceuta and Melilla and other strategic interests for Spain. As explained in Section 4, this factor became even more important since Spain joined the European Union.

**TOOLS, ACTIONS AND DOMAINS - MOROCCO HYBRID WARFARE STRATEGY**

ACTION	TOOL	AFFECTED DOMAINS	OPPORTUNITIES/ VULNERABILITIES
Border Pressure	Coercive Migration	Infrastructure, Security, Political	INHERENT - Migration Regional Flows // Regional Dynamics
Withdrawal of Ambassadors	Diplomatic Coercion	Diplomatics, Political	CREATED - Internal Political Grievances
Institutional Declarations contesting sovereignty	Diplomatic Coercion// Lawfare	Security, Political, Societal, and Cultural	CREATED - Internal Political/Social Grievances // Historical factor
Close of Economic Borders	Economic Coercion	Economic, Infrastructure	CREATED - Economic Interdependence // Geographical
Obstaculizing key Economic Agreements	Economic Coercion	Economic, Political	CREATED - Economic Interdependence // Geographical

The table “Tools, actions and domains - Morocco Hybrid Warfare Strategy” has been elaborated after analysing the specific scenario chosen, Ceuta and Melilla. Section 4 identified key characteristics that constituted potential vulnerabilities. As the MCDC (2019) analytical framework states, these potential vulnerabilities can be used by a hostile actor as opportunities to employ Hybrid Threats. The table summarises



the actions analysed that Morocco has employed as part of the Hybrid Warfare strategy, the tools employed according to the action and vulnerability and the affected domain/s. Further details will be provided on the exploitation of vulnerabilities and specific tools during the analysis.

## 5.2 COERCIVE MIGRATION

The purpose of coercive migration is to use migrants as a weapon in order to gain leverage in foreign policy negotiations. In some cases as the Belarus-Polish border, the migrant crisis is created by a hostile actor. However, the case of Ceuta and Melilla's border differs; the migration dynamic is inherent. The existing migration flows make Ceuta and Melilla key points of migrational routes from Africa to Europe. As a result, border control plays a key role in ensuring the control and security of these borders, and Morocco has a key role in ensuring the correct management.

Morocco is pressuring the border between Ceuta and Melilla in a recurring way as a response to the actions of Spain and the European Union to prove the importance of the management of said border by Moroccan authorities. The main domain affected is infrastructure. The physical border can be framed as "critical infrastructure" according to the definition of the Council of the European Union (2008): *"An asset, system or part thereof located in Member State which is essential for the maintenance of vital societal functions, health, safety, security, economic or social well-being of people, and the disruption or destruction of which would have a significant impact in a Member State as a result of the failure to maintain those functions"*. In this sense, a border assault would mean "putting said infrastructure under pressure" (Giannopoulos et al., 2021), being framed as potential domain/asset to be used within Hybrid Warfare.

In this case, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, authors, like Greenhill (2010), state that coercive migration is allowed by several factors: externalisation of borders, transit states, and geographical proximity. As previously stated in Chapter 4, Morocco is a transit state in the sense that many routes towards Europe must go through the country. In Morocco, lives around 40.000 migrants with irregular status. The role of Morocco as a transit state has allowed it to work as the interceptor and controller of migrants in their route north, in this case, towards Europe (Norman, 2020).

Regarding the externalisation of borders, the European Union and Spain gave Morocco a key role in managing the border. In 1992, King Hassan II declared Morocco's support to Spain in preventing irregular migration and other illicit activities at the border. The normal relation between both countries in this field contemplates that Spain allows a certain amount of legal migration of Moroccan nationals to work legally in Spain. Morocco accepts the return of Moroccan migrants that enter Spain irregularly. The European Union already contemplated the relevance of these key states in the Mediterranean, and in 2005, the European Commission declared that the EU and third key countries needed to cooperate to manage migration (Norman, 2020).

This has shaped the relation between Spain and Morocco. Without Morocco's assistance in managing those borders, the number of migrants irregularly crossing to Spanish soil increased. Morocco proves its role in managing the security of the borders and shows the consequences of the country relaxing such control (European Parliament, 2021). Historically, Morocco has used it to gain political leverage and gain political and economic concessions over Spain and the European Union. We can observe this in the state of the political relations between Spain and Morocco in different periods when the border pressure increased or decreased depending on the political

context. Between 1996 and 2001 can be noticed in the high number of irregular migrants crossing Ceuta and Melilla's borders (See Annex 1). During this period, the political agenda was marked by the Spanish reluctance to officially support the Baker Plan I (2001) at the United Nations and the Spanish attempts to block the French efforts to change the political European view towards Western Sahara. Also, in 1994, Morocco already announced that it wouldn't renovate the fishery agreements with the European Union. The result was the relaxation of the border control from the Moroccan side to pressure the European Union and Spain.

After the Parsley Islet crisis in 2002 (See Chapter 6), the relations slightly improved, especially during the 2003 and 2004 periods. Morocco signed a treaty with Spain to send non-national migrants from third sub-Saharan countries from Spain to Morocco after they crossed the border illegally (Norman, 2020).

However, in 2005, for similar political reasons, the migrational pressure increased again, leading to the militarisation of border control on the Spanish side (Torreblanca, 2021), also increasing the size of the border fence to 6 metres in height (Bermejo García et al., 2020). A major event occurred in September 2005 when Spain deployed troops to Ceuta and Melilla after around 600 migrants tried to cross the border illegally, resulting in at least 11 migrants being killed (Dowsett, 2015). The effects of these kinds of dramatic episodes put Spain in the international spotlight and increased the internal polarisation towards migration.

This type of episode results in the increase of cooperation with Morocco, increasing the economic assistance to the country. The improvement in cooperation with Morocco and militarisation of the border were noticeable in the decrease in migrants from 2006 to 2010. However, since 2011, irregular migration and migrational pressure have increased due to regional dynamics to unprecedented levels. During the Syrian

refugee crisis, many refugees decided to try this route to cross to Europe, leading to peaks in 2014 and 2015 (See Annex 1). In 2015, fifteen migrants drowned, and more were injured as 400 people attempted to reach Ceuta by swimming around a seawall from Morocco.

In this sense, the economic factor is key to understanding coercive migration and economic coercion towards Spain and the European Union. Since the entrance of Spain into the European Union and the European border externalisation, especially since 2005, many third countries have become key strategic partners of the EU. Like Turkey, Morocco was one of those transit countries that saw their strategic importance improve. This has benefited the country from economic subsidies from the European Union and Spain. It is estimated that Morocco has received about 13.000 Million euros since 2007. In 2018, the EU approved 140 million euros in support of the country for border control. In 2020, the pressure over the Canary Islands (Spain), another route used by many migrants from the coasts of Morocco, grew exponentially until the EU approved an economic package valued at 343 million euros for Morocco.

In conclusion, the externalisation of the European borders, along with the status of Morocco as a transit state for migration flows and regional dynamics and the geographical proximity of the borders, have made Morocco a key actor in controlling and securing the European and Spanish borders. Morocco has taken political and economic advantage of this situation, "relaxing" the border control in specific moments to achieve specific outcomes. In this sense, according to Greenhill's (2010) typology on actors, Morocco is a generator on the basis that the country directly created or threatened to create cross-border migrant movements, unless the actor, in this case mainly Spain, but also the European Union, concedes in their demands. In this case, coercive migration has materialised in the form of border assaults when the

Moroccan authorities responsible for controlling their side of the border have "relaxed" that vigilance. The direct threat has been against critical infrastructure. However, the cultural and political domain has also been affected in the form of internal polarisation.

However, as mentioned previously, Hybrid Warfare strategies cannot be understood only by paying attention to one specific domain affected or tool employed. During the same periods that coercive migration increased, Morocco also used diplomatic pressure to increase the effects in other domains and gain political leverage over Spain and the European Union.

### 5. 3 DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE

Morocco's actions at the diplomatic level are more intended to affect the Spanish political domain rather than the Spanish international status. These are more intended to make Spain take political decisions at national and international levels that will favour Morocco's strategic goals. The articulation of diplomatic pressure has been made in the form of institutional declarations questioning the Spanish sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla, the unilateral withdrawal of Ambassadors from Spain, and the postponement of a bilateral meeting called RAN ("Reunión Alto Nivel" or High-Level Meeting). These actions occurred during specific moments when the relations between both countries were worse, joining other actions like border pressure.

The declaration of different figures within the Moroccan Government can be identified as part of "cultural statecraft". This means using culture and civilisation means, in this case, the extension of Morocco's bodies as natural sovereign rights to "define fundamental elements of a national identity" (Giannopoulos et al., 2021), in this case, territorial extension. As mentioned in Section 4, this was part of the internal national-building efforts. A very controversial aspect of the Moroccan "cultural statecraft"

were the institutional declarations by various government members related to the status of Ceuta and Melilla (Gillespie, 2006). In December 2020, after Trump recognised the sovereignty of Morocco over the Western Sahara, Prime Minister Saadeddine El Othmani, affirmed that Ceuta and Melilla were also Moroccan territories (Baques et al., 2021). Morocco Senate's President, fourth authority in the country, Enaam Mayara, said in April 2023 that Ceuta and Melilla were occupied cities by Spain also mentioning that Morocco would recover them without using weapons (Sanz, 2023a). However, Enaam Mayara withdrew said declarations after pressures from the Spanish authorities. To support its claims, Morocco argues that the United Nations' principle of decolonisation must be applied to the Spanish territories in North Africa. The country argues that the Spanish bases threaten Morocco's national security, so the territorial integrity principle applies in this case.

The declarations have affected the political and social domain, reflecting Spanish society's perception of aspects related to Ceuta and Melilla. According to the Spanish Sociological Investigation Center (Centro Investigaciones Sociológicas - CIS) (EuropaPress, 2021), most Spanish society (75,2%) considers Ceuta and Melilla fully part of Spain. However, the actions and public declarations of Morocco have also made that 20,3% consider that in 20 years, the status of these cities can change in favour of Morocco.

The worsening of relations between both countries has also translated historically into a game of Ambassadors and exploiting internal grievances. For example, the support from the Spanish Government to the Polisario Front at the beginning of the 2000s made the Interior Ministry of the Istiqlal Party insinuate in a national newspaper that Morocco may have to start supporting Vasque Nationalists. During the same years, due to the failure of the negotiation of Fishery Agreements between the EU and Morocco and the Spanish position on Plan Baker I,

Morocco withdraws the Ambassador from Spain without previous warnings. In 2007 Morocco's Government called on consults to his Ambassador in Madrid as part of a rejection of the visit of the Spanish Monarchs to Ceuta and Melilla (Baques et al., 2021). In 2019 Prohibition of crossing the border for citizens and Moroccan diplomats.

Finally, at the diplomatic level, we must also highlight postponing agreed bilateral meetings as a way to indicate displeasure to the other side. In 1991, Morocco and Spain signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation where it was stated that as a way of preserving good relations, both parties agreed to hold an annual summit to resolve their differences and increase institutional communications and cooperation (Gillespie, 2006). These meetings are called "High-Level Meetings" due to the level of institutional representations of both countries and the relevance of the topics touched on in those meetings and decisions taken on bilateral matters. However, since the beginning, these predetermined summits were used to pressure the other party indirectly over disputes or misunderstandings and obtain different concessions. There were held infrequently, being cancelled in the worst diplomatic periods. As mentioned regarding migration coercion, the worsening in the relations in 2001 was also reflected in the cancellation of those meetings from 1999 to 2003 due to the same factors. However, the worst period was between 2016 and 2022, when no meetings were held (Montoto et al., 2023). As it will be further developed in Chapter 6, the key factor here was the Spanish actions towards Western Sahara and the Polisario Front.

In conclusion, diplomatic pressure has been another tool used by Morocco to pressure Spain and gain political leverage that accompanied other actions like Migration Coercion. The institutional declarations have been the most aggressive measures by questioning the established status quo regarding the Spanish territories in North Africa. On the other

side, both the withdrawal of Ambassadors and the cancellation of High-Level Meetings have been used by Morocco to communicate the status of relations between both countries and support other actions like migration coercion.

#### 5. 4 ECONOMIC PRESSURE

The objective of the economic pressure is to weaken the target state (Giannopoulo, 2021); in this case, the scenarios analysed are Ceuta and Melilla. As a result, it puts pressure on the economic activities of both cities, undermining public confidence and instability.

As mentioned before in this section, the geographical factor and the regional dynamics allow Morocco to receive important economic revenues from the European Union and Spain to ensure the correct functioning of the borders and avoid irregular migration. However, Morocco also employs economic coercion in other ways that target more directly Ceuta and Melilla. Due to the geographical disposition of both Spanish territories, the Moroccan cities close to the border have represented important commercial partners. This has allowed Morocco to create economic asphyxiation by closing the regular person transit in Ceuta and Melilla and the economic border in Melilla. Between July 31 and August 1 2018, Moroccan's authorities unilaterally closed the commercial borders agreed upon in the Hispano-Marroquí Treaty of Fez in 1956 to favour the Port of Nador and due to the worsening relations between both countries (Cembrero, 2018; Baques et al., 2021). During 2018 and 2019, Morocco also blocked merchant imports from Ceuta and Melilla into Morocco. In February 2020, the Moroccan authorities prohibited the entrance of fresh Moroccan fish to Ceuta without previous warning (Baques et al., 2021).

It is also important to note that the control of the borders is related to not only the migrant entrance into Spain but also the control of smuggling



networks, with an important impact on the Spanish and Moroccan economies. In 2018 the Moroccan director of the North Agency (responsible for developing this part of the country) situated the economic impact of smuggling between Melilla and Nador at 450 million euros per year. Ceuta, in this case, the impact is even higher, with about 700 million euros per year, according to the former Hacienda Spanish Minister (Cembrerol, 2018). The Moroccan cooperation, in this sense, is highly relevant.

Lastly, the difficulties of renewing different economic agreements must be addressed at the national level. Historically, Morocco has also used economic agreements in key matters to pressure Spain and the European Union (Gillespie, 2006; Baques et al., 2021). Especially the economic clash over fishery-exclusive zones has been a difficult topic since the end of the 90s. In 1995, Morocco warned that it would not renew the Fishery Agreement planned for the next four years. The European Union-level negotiations failed in 2001 due to the discrepancies between Spain and Morocco. The failure of the fishery Agreements between the European Union and Morocco in April 2001, which heavily affected the territories of Andalusia and Galicia in Spain, was a step towards worsening the relation between both countries.

Economic coercion is the last tool analysed. Similarly to coercive migration and diplomatic coercion, it has been intended to take advantage of strategic weaknesses and gain political leverage. The actions have targeted Ceuta and Melilla directly by closing commerce borders, but also at the national level with the fishery agreements.

## 5. 5 LIMITATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the lack of information, only these three tools have been employed in the analysis of the Hybrid Warfare strategy of Morocco. However, there are many other domains where Hybrid Warfare is

employed, having important effects on the target actor. In this sense, the weaponisation of the information is a great example of how a hostile actor can undermine the perception of security and exploit or create social grievances. With the actions at the border and institutional declarations on the sovereignty status of Ceuta and Melilla, we can see examples of how this works. However, information campaigns and their effects on the target state are difficult to measure, and the analysis would be only subjected to secondary sources, mostly belonging to opinion articles from various Spanish media outlets.

Similarly, it is also important to mention possible espionage on the political authorities of the target actor to create political and social instability. The Pegasus Case would constitute an important example of this. However, access to information is limited and secondary sources do not allow to extract of objective conclusions. Nevertheless, it is also important to mention it.

## **6. FROM PRIMING TO DESTABILISATION**

There are historical precedents of vertical escalation by Morocco that fit within the Hybrid Warfare strategy. It is called a change in phases within the Hybrid CoE framework (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Most of the actions previously stated are located within the priming phase, characterised by the synchronisation of means, also known as horizontal escalation. However, two important episodes are consistent with what the Hybrid CoE framework defines as vertical escalation. The ones that will be analysed are the Moroccan occupation of Parsley Island in 2002, constituting an open challenge to the established status quo, and the Ceuta Migration Crisis in 2021, constituting an artificial migration crisis with important implications for the territorial security of Ceuta.

## 6.1 THE OCCUPATION OF “PARSLEY ISLAND”

One of the most important precedents was the crisis in Parsley Island that started due to the lack of Spanish support for the Baker Plan I in 2001, which worsened relations between both countries. It is relevant to mention that the Island lacked strategic importance for any parties. However, the incursion by the Moroccan Gendarmes in July 2002 almost triggered a conflict between both countries.

As it was mentioned in Section 5, the actions carried out by Morocco in the Grey Zone are not meant to be analysed only individually. Many of those actions are part of the synchronisation of tools led by increasing tensions. We can understand this period as the transition from the “priming phase”, where the actor’s main goal is to make the target actor take actions that negatively affect them but benefit the hostile country, to the “destabilisation phase”. During the destabilisation phase, the hostile actor will intensify the activity more strategically to achieve the designated goal (Giannopoulos, 2021). There is a pre-planned aim. We also see a necessary response and defence.



FIGURE 6: Map showing Morocco, Ceuta and Parsley Island (Red circle) (Source: Wikipedia)

The brief Moroccan occupation of the Island located near Ceuta is an important example. 2001-2003 was one of the worst periods in terms of political and diplomatic relations between Spain and Morocco. The main factors

were the failure of fishery negotiations between Morocco and the European Union, which Morocco in 1995 had already warned would be the last (Gillespie, 2006). The Spanish approach towards Western Sahara and the Baker Plan I (2001) or the migration issue (See Annex 1) was also among the factors that added tension to the relation. In the same period, Spain blocked the French attempts at the European Union level to support the Moroccan approach towards Saharan “autonomy” instead of independence. The Moroccan answer was to withdraw the Moroccan Ambassador in October 2001 (Jordan, 2018a). Spain did the same, tensioning diplomatic communication and signalling a strong decrease in the state of the relations.

On June 11 2002, several members of the Moroccan Gendarmes occupied Parsley Island. This Island is located close to the Moroccan coast and about 10 kilometres from Ceuta. The Island did not have any major strategic significance; however, the symbolism in terms of unilaterally changing the status quo pre-established by Spain and Morocco over the territories in North Africa was the important factor. The Moroccan government did not communicate with the Spanish one during the four days after the occupation (Gillespie, 2006). The Parsley Island crisis was over after the Spanish army deployed and expelled the Moroccan Gendarmes, and three days after the beginning of the crisis, both parties signed a treaty to return to the previous status quo situation (Jordan, 2018a; Gillispie, 2006). Moroccan presence on the Island was few and ill-prepared (Jordan, 2018a), which can be seen as the initial intention of Morocco not to take the escalation very far; however, it was a sign of the status of the relations between both parties. These actions can be framed within the destabilisation phase because it results from an intensification of actions carried out by Morocco. The existing pre-aim for Morocco would be to signal discontent with the state of the relations between both countries in the economic and political domain, especially

regarding the Spanish actions at the European level. At the same time, according to authors like Jordan (2018a), this may have also been a test of the Spanish willingness to defend the pre-established status quo. The situation would soon deescalate, leading to an improvement in the relations in the next few years.

## 6.2 TOWARDS THE 2021 CEUTA MIGRATION CRISIS

After 2003, the relations between both parties improved. This does not mean the economic, diplomatic or migrational tensions ceased, as seen in Chapter 5. However, the employment of hybrid means was more on the horizontal scale rather than the vertical and could be situated in the "priming phase" again. This situation completely changed on 16 and 17 May 2021 when Ceuta's border suffered an unprecedented mass assault of migrants from Morocco that tried to cross illegally to Spain. The estimated number was 9000 people. The Spanish Army had to act in Tarajal Beach and Benu to control the high number of people trying to access the Spanish coast (Peña, 2020). A total of 570 military personnel, 165 National Police and 60 Civil Guard agents were deployed in a city of 84000 citizens.

As it happened during the 2002 Parseil Island Crisis, some precedents led to the escalation of means and the transition into the "destabilisation phase". This risk assumption by Morocco to intensify its actions was provoked by two main reasons: recent international recognition regarding Western Sahara and Spain's controversial approach to the Polisario Front. The previous month to the crisis, Morocco had seen its plans towards Western Sahara backed up by the United States. This was a significant step toward the international recognition that Morocco had been historically pursuing. Along with this, geopolitics allowed a historic change in the diplomatic relations between Israel and Morocco, which also signalled a possible future recognition by the former over the

sovereignty status of the Western Sahara. These two changes in the international sphere have put Morocco in a strong position to increase its actions in the desired direction. In this context, Spain did one of its most controversial operations concerning Western Sahara and the Polisario Front, which led to the migrant crisis in Ceuta.

On April 17 2021, the leader of the Polisario Front, Brahim Ghali, was internalised in a hospital in Logroño (La Rioja, Spain) due to critical health issues related to COVID-19. The entrance of Ghali in Spain was intentionally made secretly. However, both Moroccan secret services and the Spanish media outlets filtered the news to the public. It was also filtered that everything related to Ghali's visit to Spain had been made without informing the Moroccan government. After the news, the Moroccan Ambassador in Spain abandoned the country. This triggered a diplomatic and political crisis between both countries.

One month later, on the 17 and 18 May 2021, over 9000 migrants tried to cross the maritime and land border to Ceuta irregularly. According to the European Parliament report (2021), this group of people entered, swimming or walking into the Spanish autonomous city of Ceuta after the Moroccan police "*temporarily eased border controls, opened the gates of their border fence and did not take action to stop illegal entrance*" (European Parliament Report, 2021). Most migrants illegally crossing were Moroccan nationals, and around 1200 were children entering unaccompanied. According to their declarations, they were told that star footballers were playing a free match in Ceuta (European Parliament Report, 2021).

The official statements issued by Morocco on May 31 2021, stated that the bilateral crisis was unrelated to the migration issue. However, according to the European Parliament report findings (2021), the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs had initially acknowledged the reasons for the crisis of the mass entry of thousands of people residing

in Spain, welcoming the leader of the Polisario Front. In another official statement issued later, the Moroccan authorities acknowledged that Spain's supposedly ambiguous position on Western Sahara was also part of the reason. Besides the endangering of thousands of human lives, the consequences of this escalation were the closure of schools, the vaccination campaign suspended, and the army deployed (Torreblanca, 2021).

At the diplomatic and economic level, many minor and major concessions by Spain were made to normalise and improve relations with Morocco. A few hours after the assault, Spain passed an economic bill of 30 million euros to help Morocco control the border (Martín, 2021). One day after the crisis, on April 18 2021, Prime Minister Sánchez ceased the External Affairs Ministry, Arancha Gonzalez Laya, accused of allowing Brahim Ghali into Spanish territory to receive health care (Bautista, 2023). A few months later, on September 2021, the Ministry of Transport, Jose Luis Abalos, also ceased after declarations on Spain's responsibility given by UN resolution, as former metropolis, over Sahara's air and maritime space, stating that was Spanish right to control and monitor those spaces at international level during an interview on National TV.

However, the relations only improved once Spain made a decisive movement on the Western Sahara matter. On March 19 2022, Spain took the step of backing Morocco's plan regarding Western Sahara. King Mohammed VI unilaterally published part of the letter addressed by Prime Minister Sanchez endorsing Morocco's position on Western Sahara, especially regarding the autonomy plan the country proposed in 2007; the Moroccan Royal Office published that "Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for the resolution of the dispute about the Moroccan Sahara" (Kingdom of Morocco, 2022). Prime Minister

Sánchez took a decision that angered many of his political allies. The implications of this political decision were more of a symbolic character, but it was supposed to be a radical change in the historical Spanish position regarding the Sahara.

Morocco, in turn, sent back its ambassador to Spain 10 months after she was recalled. The improvement of the relations was symbolised by holding the high-level annual summit in April 2022 after 7 years. After the meeting, King Mohammed's Royal Office said that Sánchez reaffirmed the new position of Spain on the Sahara issue. The Royal Office added that the leaders "agreed, in particular, to implement concrete actions in the framework of a roadmap covering all areas of the partnership, integrating all issues of common interest." (Wilson et al., 2022) The highlight of this visit was the joint declaration on the new stage in the relation, where it officially addressed the new posture towards the sovereignty of Western Sahara, where Spain would support the 2007 Moroccan Initiative and also the normalisation in the circulation of people between the two countries.

This episode can be framed again as the transition from the priming phase to the destabilisation phase in the sense that there is a clear intensification of border pressure by not only relaxing the control of the infrastructure but also, according to the European Commission report, creating by false pretensions the movement of population. The existing pre-aim was to send a direct message to the Spanish Government on their actions towards the Polisario Front. The political and diplomatic situation only improved once a clear signal regarding a step towards Morocco's plan was made by agreeing to support Morocco's 2007 Autonomy Plan.



## **7. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CASE: A MATTER OF GREY GEOPOLITICS**

### **7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

This section provides a general assessment of the case and some conclusions that can be drawn from it. Morocco aims to achieve traditional strategic goals by using non-traditional strategic means. For that, the country is employing Hybrid Warfare against the Spanish territories in North Africa, and the main aim of this dissertation was to answer why and how. This was done by analysing the case in terms of actors, strategic goals, tools, domains and phases (MCDC, 2019). These are some of the main conclusions drawn after the analysis.

Morocco's traditional strategic goal is to achieve de facto control and international recognition of its sovereignty over this territory due to factors such as the legitimacy of the Monarchy, economic resources located in this territory and the impact on the regional power balance.

The Spanish position over this matter opposes Morocco's, positioning them as the target and hostile actor within the Hybrid Warfare strategy. In this sense, Spanish goals regarding Western Sahara are to maintain neutrality to preserve the relations with Algeria and Morocco. Not having a clear regional power in North Africa has benefited Spain in achieving this. On the other side, Spain's traditional foreign policy position is to support the self-determination of the Saharawi people implying that any plan must be approved with all the parties' involved consents. This gives a reason for Morocco to want to influence Spanish decision-making processes in this regard. However, it did not explain why Hybrid Warfare is the strategic approach chosen by Morocco.

For that, it was necessary to attend to the characteristics of Hybrid Warfare and the benefits this could bring to Morocco as a non-traditional approach that would still allow it to achieve its goals. For Morocco, it was important to preserve "implausible deniability" and avoid any direct

response by Spain or the international community due to factors like complex interdependence and the necessity of international recognition. Hybrid Warfare and inherent characteristics like geographical proximity to the target actor, complex interdependence and regional dynamics provide Morocco with opportunities to exploit in the form of Hybrid Threats. The specific scenario to analyse was Ceuta and Melilla due to the high level of assets for the target actor and strategic weaknesses.

By analysing them, the analysis focused on employing three specific tools: coercive migration, economic coercion and diplomatic coercion. The three of them provide Morocco with political leverage, also having effects on the political level by tensioning the internal politics and polarising the discourses towards migration, the sovereign status of Ceuta and Melilla or creating economic insecurity in those territories. Lastly, the case was analysed in terms of phases by identifying the transition from the priming phase to destabilisation and using two paradigmatic events to do so.

However, there are other key aspects that we need to highlight, like the fact that the bilateral relations between actors are a two-way road that helps to understand the roots of the conflict. Most frameworks that analyse the dynamics between actors employing Hybrid Warfare focus on the motivations behind the hostile actor. It was important for this case to highlight why Spain opposed Morocco's approach towards Western Sahara and the actions that negatively affected Morocco's goals. Furthermore, in this case, it is also important to highlight that Spain has also used similar strategies at the diplomatic level to signal Morocco on the status of their relations.

Opposite to what many analytical frameworks on Hybrid Warfare state, Morocco hasn't employed direct traditional use of force or direct threat against Spain. In this case, ambiguity is the strongest character, perfectly situated in the Grey Area, part of a Hybrid Warfare strategy and

employing deniable hybrid threats. The position of Morocco implies the intention to erode the credibility of the target actor but without exhausting all the potential of the zone or looking for a short-term outcome (Baqués et al., 2022). Morocco can be considered moderately revisionist. This means that Morocco does not interpret the current situation as a vital problem endangering their survival but rather an uncomfortable subject to be resolved using the grey zone.

Once again, I want to highlight the limitations in terms of information access and data available. To study the different actions carried out and events, I have had to work with secondary sources, most of them from media outlets. Furthermore, some domains typically affected by Hybrid Warfare, such as the information domain, cyber domain or social domain, have only been mentioned due to this factor. I was expecting to find more official data on economic impact, migration data in Ceuta and Melilla, and information in terms of counter-terrorism and drug trafficking. There is no quantitative or qualitative data on the social impact of the disinformation campaigns that Morocco may carry out at the national level.

## 7.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE HYBRID WARFARE STRATEGY

Has Morocco been successful? After stating why and how Morocco has been employing Hybrid Warfare against the Spanish territories in North Africa, it is possible to add one last question to argue whether the actor has succeeded or not.

Morocco has achieved one main thing: to break the Spanish posture towards neutrality in Western Sahara by officially recognising the Moroccan 2007 Autonomy Plan as the most realistic option. In this sense, the Spanish statement means that the proposals for the future of the territory do not have to necessarily involve the possibility of full independence from Morocco. On the other, this also means that Spain

will support this view within the European Union. This has been achieved after the escalation in terms of coercive migration with the crisis in Ceuta's border in 2021. However, the success has been partial. The final goal is to achieve full recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. This aspect has some implications for the future of the relations between Spain and Morocco. This entails that Morocco will continue employing Hybrid Threats strategically against Ceuta and Melilla. The result is that even after the bilateral agreement, the pressure at the borders has continued with the same levels previous to 2021, as we could see in Melilla in 2022. Morocco still needs to ensure the support of Spain in key areas, It is likely that Morocco will continue to push Spain using coercive migration to achieve leverage at the European level and questioning the sovereignty of the Spanish territories in North Africa to ensure the political support of Spain in the international sphere. However, as stated at the beginning of the dissertation, the goal of reverting the status of Ceuta and Melilla is not a realistic one, at least in the short and medium term. The elevated costs due to the clear Spanish willingness to defend its territorial sovereignty, the possible political and economic consequences from the European Union and the risk of endangering the relations with the United States make the possibility of reverting the status of those territories unlikely.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This dissertation has explored the complexities of Morocco's employment of Hybrid Warfare against the Spanish territories in North Africa, particularly emphasizing Ceuta and Melilla. Regarding the theoretical and analytical approach, it was to prove the utility of the Hybrid Warfare analytical framework outside the most paradigmatic cases, highlighting the flexibility of the concept in adapting to the particularities of this case but maintaining the conceptual rigour. On the

other hand, the aim was to answer why and how Morocco employs this non-traditional strategic approach to achieve traditional goals. A deeper understanding of this hybrid strategy's particularities has been achieved through the comprehensive analysis of the actors, strategic goals, tools, domains, and phases.

Morocco's traditional strategic goal revolves around obtaining full control and international recognition of its sovereignty over the territory. Key factors like the link between "Le Grand Maroc" and the Monarchy's legitimacy, the access to valuable economic resources or the impact on the regional balance motivate Morocco's pursuit of this objective. The conflict comes with the Spanish position towards Western Sahara. The traditional foreign policy position advocating for the self-determination of the Sahrawi people, including a possible independence, directly opposes Morocco's goals, providing a motive for using Hybrid Warfare to interfere in the Spanish decision-making processes. Morocco has maintained "implausible deniability" by operating in the Grey Area, enabling the country to exploit interdependence and other strategic vulnerabilities.

Three different tools have been analysed to understand how Morocco employs Hybrid Warfare: coercive migration, economic coercion and diplomatic coercion. Morocco has obtained political leverage over Spain by strategically employing them, polarising internal politics and creating economic tensions in Ceuta and Melilla. Furthermore, by vertically escalating its actions, Morocco has achieved more direct results like economic concessions or the Prime Minister's letter recognising the 2007 Moroccan Autonomy Plan as a serious and realistic proposal, even though it does not contemplate possible independence.

Understanding the Hybrid Warfare employed by Morocco against Ceuta and Melilla provides valuable insights into this particular security threat outside the most paradigmatic cases. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the complex nature of Hybrid Warfare, where traditional strategic goals

are pursued through non-traditional means, proving this concept's analytic and theoretical value. As the landscape of geopolitics continues to evolve, comprehending these types of strategies will be essential to understand the threats faced in the international arena.

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## ANNEX 1

The number of Irregular Migrants crossing from Morocco by Maritime or Land border to Ceuta and Melilla.

YEAR	2001	2005	2006	2008	2011	2013	2014	2015	2017	2020	2021
Nº	4969	5566	2000	1210	3345	4235	7485	11624	7174	2228	2288

Source: Own elaboration from data from Spanish Minister of Interior reports, available at: <https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/es/prensa/balances-e-informes/>

NOTE: the increase in the number of irregular migrants from 2008-2013, is due to the decrease in maritime irregular arrivals to the Canary Islands. The peak from 2014-2015 is due to the refugee crisis in Syria. Many refugees decided to cross to Europe from the Southern border with Morocco. Lastly, the numbers for **2021** are without counting the crisis in Ceuta in May 2021. If we counted them, it would be the highest number of irregular migrants in history to Ceuta and Melilla.