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The Modern-Day Sand War:
A New Dimension of the Morocco-Algeria Conflict Explored Through Youth

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Abstract

Since the 1963 Sand War, there has been a constant progression of tension between the countries of Morocco and Algeria. From physical space—the Western Sahara and border denotation—to diplomatic relations, Morocco and Algeria may never be the same after their colonization in the early 19th century. Due to the rise in extremist rhetoric, political accusations, economic instability, and social violence, the Moroccan-Algerian relationship can only get worse from here. Do these signs point to a modern-day Sand War approaching? This paper seeks to examine the existence of a modern-day Sand War and its consequences, specifically through the lens of youth (18-25) in the MENA region.

Key terms: Sand War, Morocco-Algeria tension, Arab Cold War, MENA, Arab Maghreb Union

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Introduction

October 1963 marks the first major outbreak of conflict between North African neighbors Algeria and Morocco, resulting largely from the Moroccan government's claim to portions of Algeria's Tindouf and Bechar provinces. However, over the past several months, Algeria and Morocco have suffered a near breakdown of diplomatic relations. The absence of a precise delineation of the border between the two countries, the discovery of important resources in disputed areas, and Moroccan irredentism—where a country seeks to occupy territory they consider lost or based on history—have all contributed to modern-day tensions between the two nation-states. The Sand War laid the foundations for a lasting and often hostile rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, and it remains in place. While the contention between the two countries is nothing new, stemming as far back as the time of their occupation by French forces, is there a way for both Morocco and Algeria to move on from the past?

At this present moment, it seems as though North Africa has entered a risky geopolitical standoff. Ultimately, this old rivalry can no longer be disregarded, seen as distant, nor ignore the regional instability that might become permanent. In this paper, I argue that the Algeria-Morocco diplomatic crisis is a modern-day “Sand War,” taking escalation from the previous internal conflict of the '60s and modernizing the mechanisms and problem at hand that have continuously stirred conflict in the Northern Africa region. In recent months, antagonisms between Morocco and Algeria have taken on a new dimension and all-time high. Ultimately, this situation can descend into a full-blown conflict and this paper's purpose is to highlight reasons why that could be possible and get perspectives from people who many argue “lack power in politics and society in larger decision-making bodies”—youth. This paper is easily able to be expanded upon and

gives a new dimension of looking at the Algeria-Morocco conflict through a unique and reimagined paradigm—the Sand War.

Originally, I intended on examining the Western Sahara as a heterotopia—what Foucault uses to describe certain cultural, institutional, and discursive spaces that are deemed as “other.” I wanted to analyze how people in the Western Sahara view their situation considering human rights abuses and historical consequences of Moroccan governance. However, my interests took a different turn by my desire to engage with both the present and the past, which Foucault and Krtizman call a genealogy—an analysis from a question posed in the present that intertwines the past.¹ According to David Garland’s examination of Foucault, this paper could “best be understood by positing a powerful underlying structure of thought – a historically specific order of words and things – that [will shape] discourse and experience in a particular era, but which [is] subject to fundamental transformations and historical discontinuities, leading to the emergence of new systems of thought and new ways of experiencing the world.”² Hence, after noticing that not many young people were vocal on the streets of Morocco talking about the conflict between Algeria and Morocco nor the Western Sahara, I wanted to understand why and what next steps could be taken. The question became: how can a historical lens be used to examine Morocco and Algeria’s modern-day relationship?

This paper starts by examining the history of the 1963-94 Sand War and its aftermath. This brief historic overview includes the Sand War’s build-up, effects on political ideology, border demarcation, and competition for regional influence.³ Secondly, I assess the current

¹ David Garland, “What is a ‘history of the present?’ On Foucault’s genealogies and their critical preconditions,” in *Punishment & Society* 4, no. 16 (Sage, 2014): 367.

² Ibid, 370.

³ The purpose of this paper is not to go into detail about the 1963 Sand War but highlight major components that could influence the opinion of young people and their opinion of the new paradigm.

political, economic, and social situation regarding the Morocco-Algerian border tension. Specifically, questions will focus on Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, Algeria's need to reassert itself as a regional power, the Maghreb-Europe Gas (MEG) pipeline, military spending, regional ties, and unity among Northern Africa, just to showcase a few. The focus of this paper is not to go into full detail on each of these topics but rather to give an overview to inform the argued paradigm of a "modern-day Sand War." The last section of the paper will be dedicated to responses from youth in Morocco—exploring their expectations and reflections to see if my paradigm has credibility or predictability. Finally, the conclusion focuses on two things: a) if my proposed hypothesis mentioned in the next section is correct or wrong, and b) why the findings and observations, based on the relevant information, are important and compelling for people to know.

Literature Review & Analysis

History

Until the turn of the 20th century, both Morocco and Algeria had been under French occupation—alongside Spanish influence within a southern region known as the Western Sahara until 1976. However, before French colonization of the region in the 19th century, part of southern and western Algeria was under Moroccan influence and no border was defined. It was not until the Treaty of Lalla Maghnia (March 18, 1845) that a border was designated between French Algeria and Morocco, only delineated by a mere 165km.⁴ However, the Moroccan-

⁴ I. William Zartman, "The Politics of Boundaries in North and West Africa," in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (1965). The Treaty of Lalla Maghnia was created after the Moroccan defeat by France at Isly.

Algerian frontier suffered from numerous readjustments after its first demarcation in 1945.⁵ Soon after, in 1903, France began expanding westwards towards Tindouf and Bechar, with the borders in the region being loosely defined and not being directly annexed into French Algeria. However, by 1952, the French decided to integrate Tindouf and Colomb-Bechar into the French departments of Algeria due to large deposits of oil and minerals (iron, manganese). By 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate, leaving the French set borders between the two territories; but the tracks were often misidentified (Varnier line in 1912, Trinquet line in 1938). Essentially, the owners of these territories were unknown.

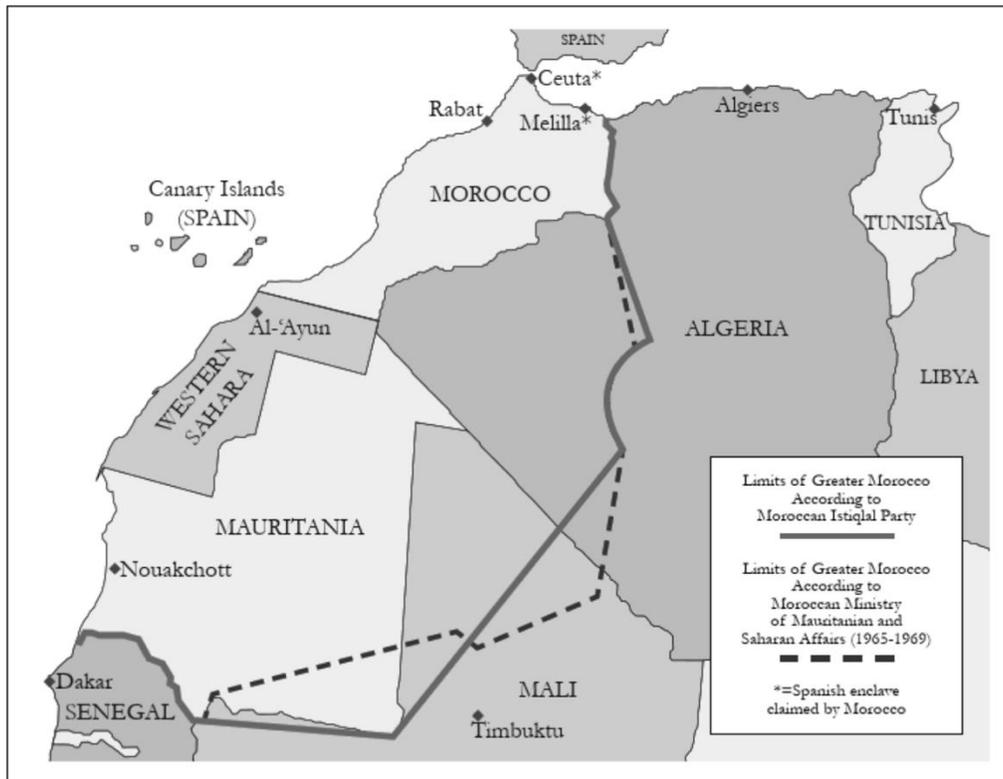
When Morocco gained its independence in 1956 after France relinquished its protectorate, conflict stirred between the two countries in disputed areas, especially Tindouf. This led to Morocco backing the National Liberation Front (FLN), Algeria's leading nationalist movement, in its guerrilla campaign against the French through funding and weaponry.⁶ The civil war between France and Algeria was bloody and long, lasting until July 3, 1962, when Algeria finally achieved its independence. Additionally, Allal al-Fassi, a Moroccan nationalist leader, pushed the "Greater Morocco" expansionist agenda into Moroccan foreign policy as Morocco approached its independence with France (and Spain).⁷ Scholars Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy declared Hassan II continued to champion this mindset, but his actions remained mostly symbolic, pleasing elite domestic constituencies (fig. 1).

⁵ Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010): 32.

⁶ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "National Liberation Front," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (March 22, 2016).

⁷ Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*, 36.

Map of “Greater Morocco”
Fig. 1



Upon this newfound independence, the FLN announced it would apply the principle of “uti possidetis” to pre-existing colonial borders, allowing the disputed “property” to remain with Algeria at the end of the conflict. This led to disagreement. Although meetings between King Hassan II of Morocco and Algeria’s President Ahmed Ben Bella occurred, Hassan was prompted to begin moving troops toward Tindouf after Algerian officials suspected Morocco was going to revolt.⁸ Small encounters along the border heightened into a full-blown confrontation on September 25, 1963, in Tindoug and Figuig. Eventually, the Royal Moroccan Army crossed into Algeria in force and succeeded in taking the two border posts of Hassi-Beida and Tindjoub. The last few years of the FLN’s rebellion had been fought to prevent France from splitting the Sahara

⁸ Nicholas Dawson, “Algeria and Morocco’s Deteriorating Relations: A Brief History and Analysis of Modern Ties,” in Forecast International. (November 2, 2021).

regions with Morocco from the emerging Algerian state, and that pressure has not ceased till this day.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), an intergovernmental organization, mediated a formal peace treaty between Algeria and Morocco in Mali on February 20, 1964, after discussions between Hassan and Ben Bella. Terms of the agreements included: a) reaffirmation of established borders in Algeria's favor; b) restoration of the status quo; and c) OAU maintenance of the demilitarized zone.⁹ However, both governments in Morocco and Algeria continue to use the Sand War and its memory to threaten unpatriotic opposition movements and veil the cultural similarities between the two countries. As Karen Farsoun and Jim Paul argue, political contradictions between two regimes, reinforced by interventionist pressures, will always lead to violent crashes.¹⁰ The Sand War becomes an issue of regimes and neo-colonialism—proving the results of the war are more complex and contradictory than meets the eye.

Aftermath

The Sand War further divided the conservative Moroccan monarchy and the revolutionary, Arab nationalist Algerian military government. By 1969, Algerian President Houari Boumediene and Hassan were prepared to sign a treaty of friendship, demarcate the border, and examine prospects for joint efforts to mine iron ore in the disputed region. In 1972, Morocco abandoned all claims to Algerian territory with the Accord of Ifrane (ratification in 1989). The two heads of state declared that “by the conclusion of the signature of the convention defining the Algerian-Morocco border and the cooperation agreement for the development of the

⁹ Samuel L. O. Oluo, “Conflict Management of the Organization of African Unity in Intra-African Conflicts, 1963-1980,” presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University (August 1982).

¹⁰ Karen Farsoun and Jim Paul, “War in the Sahara: 1963,” *MERIP Reports*, no. 45 (1976): 13.

mine of Gara-Djebilet,” they intend “to establish a permanent peace for centuries to come.”¹¹ For years to come, the governments of both Morocco and Algeria would use this war to describe the opposition movements as unpatriotic and motive for competition. However, Morocco and Algeria were facing numerous problems domestically in the late 70s, such as social inequality, widespread dissatisfaction among the populace, and economic deterioration.¹²

The Moroccan monarchy relied on the war memory against Algeria for numerous interrelated reasons. First, it sought to strike a blow at Algerian socialism, while stirring up class unity and diversion from creating economic hardship and political repression.¹³ Additionally, the monarchy sought to capture new sources of wealth, through minerals and natural resources on the border regions. In contrast, leaders like Ben Bella and Houari Boumédiène used Algeria’s frustration to fuel alliances between the army and civil government, consolidate power in his hands, and thwart Moroccan expansionism. While one country was building infrastructure, one was defending its own and holding onto optimism for a come-back.

This rivalry between Morocco and Algeria also influenced Algeria’s policy regarding the conflict in the Western Sahara. Algeria has backed the Polisario Front, a politico-military organization striving to end Moroccan control of the former Spanish territory. Composed of indigenous nomadic inhabitants of the Western Sahara region, the Sahrawis, Algeria intended to curb Moroccan expansionism in the wake of attempting to annex Tindouf.¹⁴ Today, the Polisario Front is outlawed in the parts of the Western Sahara under Moroccan control, and it is illegal to raise its party flag there. Recently in late 2020, the Polisario Front began obstructing key trade

¹¹ Louis Gravier, “Le roi Hassan II et le président Boumediène ont consacré par un accord de coopération le règlement de leur litige frontalier,” Archives in *Le Monde*, (June 17, 1972).

¹² By 1978, four Moroccan families controlled more than one-third of the private domestic capital invested in the Moroccan industry.

¹³ Karen Farsoun and Jim Paul, “War in the Sahara: 1963,” 14.

¹⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Polisario Front.” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (November 20, 2020).

routes between Morocco and Mauritania, causing Morocco to launch military operations that led to the organization no longer abiding by the 1991 peace plan. Today, Morocco controls 80% of the Western Sahara, and Algeria supports the independence movement of the Polisario Front.¹⁵ With Morocco's access to rich Atlantic fisheries, strategic trade routes with West African markets, and mineral reserves, nobody knows how long it will take before Algeria's steam turns into fire.

Human rights groups often bring up concern for the civil and political rights of Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule—with poor treatment as Morocco remains an important Western ally. The average American has probably never heard of the Western Sahara before President Donald Trump's infamous election. If an image comes to mind, it is likely to be one of nomads with camels against a background of sunlight, but war—that is something that weighs heavy on the minds of its inhabitants. The most severe accusations of human rights abuses in the Western Sahara by the Kingdom of Morocco in early 1976 were the bombings of improvised refugee camps, where hundreds of Sahrawi civilians were killed or sequestered by police forces. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Moroccans continue to emigrate to the Western Sahara's urban centers under government-sponsored "Moroccanization" policies.¹⁶

Fast forward to 2021, tensions between the two neighboring countries have been growing, and Algeria's rhetoric points towards an armed conflict. Recently, in November, Algeria accused Morocco of being involved in bombings in the Western Sahara near the border with Mauritania. The killing of three drivers on this desert road is just the latest spike in growing tensions, and even events not mentioned in this paper will continue to escalate. Ambassadors

¹⁵ Jennifer Holleis, "Morocco-Algeria relations: What is fueling the current tensions," DW (May 11, 2021).

¹⁶ David Alexander Robinson, "Polisario Proxy War (Algeria/Morocco)," in *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, & Africa: An Encyclopedia 2* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2012): 347.

being recalled, borders closing, accusations for sparking forest fires, air travel blockage, and more are adding fuel to the fire. While Algeria's current President, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, has ramped up the rhetoric against Morocco and explicitly said his country would go to war in Morocco., experts and youth believe there is little reason to fear armed conflict at the current moment. Bilateral relations will continue to stagnate, but war is not inevitable.

Current Tensions Through Political, Economic, and Social Lenses

After months of high tensions between Algeria and Morocco, in August 2021, Algiers announced the cessation of diplomatic relations with Rabat after accusing the Moroccan kingdom of waging war against the Algerian people and its leaders. Years ago, U.S. foreign policy toward the Western Sahara outside of Northern Africa and the El-Maghreb Union swung toward a "globalist" approach, which the U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives deemed was for the safety of the United States' reputation rather than the intrinsic merits of the dispute itself.¹⁷ Today, certain countries like India, Colombia, and the United States recognize Morocco's claim to sovereignty in the Western Sahara. While we have looked at why past relations have aided in Algeria's decision to cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, what are the implications for the future of the MENA region?

In this section, I will examine the political, economic, and social implications for Morocco-Algeria relations, specifically by looking at issues on a case-by-case basis and seeing what research scholars and professional journalists have done on the pertinent problems moving

¹⁷ Stephen J. Solarz, "Arms for Morocco? U.S. Policy Toward the Conflict in the Western Sahara: Report of a Study Mission to Morocco, the Western Sahara, Mauritania, Algeria, Liberia, Spain, and France, August 5-18, 1979, to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives," Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1979.

forward. While I acknowledge above the importance of outside factors, such as other dominant countries, this section will focus on only Morocco and Algeria—not U.S. involvement or consequences for other countries outside of direct interaction (i.e., economic). In the end, I will argue how these three factors contribute to my paradigm of a modern-day Sand War.

Political

Although diplomatic relations between the two countries have been frozen for most of the last 27 years and borders have remained closed since 1994, the high use of derogatory rhetoric and unjustified blaming is the most communication the countries have had in their non-existent relationship since 2012. Both countries remain vulnerable, and regional and local stability should not be taken for granted.

For Moroccans, Algeria severing diplomatic ties with Morocco is just part of the Algerian government's long history of diverting criticism and boosting nationalism. This response came weeks after Throne Day (July 31st), where King Mohammed VI made a speech extending an olive branch to 'twin' Algeria.¹⁸ Clearly, Algeria has declined Morocco's offer, instead requesting financial aid from countries like France and Spain to combat Morocco's alleged crimes on Algerian land. For instance, France sent two Canadair waterbomber planes, along with a command aircraft to Kabylie, to show "unreserved solidarity and full support" with Algerians. However, Morocco also extended an offer to help "if Algerian authorities agreed." In these instances, it seems as if Morocco is not wanting to escalate conflict any further.¹⁹

¹⁸ ""Algeria-Morocco: Olive Branch Amid Diplomatic Tension?" *Political, Social and Cultural Series in Africa Research Bulletin* 7, no. 58 (Continental Alignments, 2021): 23222A.

¹⁹ "France sends waterbomber air-craft to Algeria as wildfires claim more victims," RFI (December 8, 2021).

Morocco is also determined to “turn the page definitively” on the Western Sahara conflict. Since Spain granted the territory to Morocco and Mauritania in 1975, Morocco has attempted to incorporate the region within its borders. Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said Morocco is committed to finding a solution to the “artificial regional conflict that stems from the opposition of a neighboring state to its legitimate rights to the consummation of its territorial integrity.”²⁰ Morocco’s normalization of diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020, which came with a *quid pro quo* of US recognition of Rabat’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara, stirred new tensions with Algeria.²¹

However, Algeria has utilized the Western Sahara conflict to undermine Morocco’s plans for incorporating the territory. According to Michael Jacobs, applying hegemonic stability to Algeria’s methods of challenging Moroccan underscores how Algeria’s political actions have weakened the perception of Morocco within the Maghreb region and internationally.²² Samir Bennis, a Moroccan political analyst, argued that the Algerian press and policy circles have stated Morocco is “colluding with the Zionist entity and the Movement for the Self-determination of Kabylie (MAK) to destabilize Algeria.”²³ Ultimately, it appears Algeria has run out of strategic moves to counter Morocco’s growing diplomatic outreach and is instead resorting to diversionary tactics to mobilize its population against a common foreign enemy.

Nonetheless, this does not excuse Morocco’s exploitation of Algeria’s internal crisis, using diplomacy to achieve important advances in the Western Sahara and strengthen its hand in MENA over the past four years. Hasni Abidi and Aboubakr Jamai see Morocco’s return to the

²⁰ “Morocco keen to ‘turn page’ on Algeria tensions while insisting W. Sahara status ‘not negotiable’,” *France24*, (October 11, 2021).

²¹ “Algeria-Morocco: Olive Branch Amid Diplomatic Tension,” 23222A.

²² Michael Jacobs, “Hegemonic rivalry in the Maghreb: Algeria and Morocco in the Western Sahara conflict,” Thesis at the University of South Florida (July 5, 2012): iv

²³ Samir Bennis, “Algeria-Morocco Relations: For Moroccans, It’s Deja-Vu,” *Policy Analysis* in Fikra Forum (August 31, 2021).

African Union in 2017 and normalization with Israel as “deepening the rift” between Algiers and Rabat, leading to hostile actions between the two neighbors.²⁴ The Algerian supreme security council even closed Algeria’s airspace to all Moroccan aircrafts in September over “continued provocations and hostile practices on the Moroccan side.”²⁵ Algeria found Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid’s remarks, voicing “worries” about Algeria’s regional role and similarity to Iran when visiting Rabat as a betrayal of Morocco and neighboring countries.²⁶ The current diplomatic tensions could very well last for decades, with geopolitical configuration consequences beyond just Northern Africa.

In response, Algeria is growing more anxious to reassert itself as a regional power. Algeria recognizes that its behavior has made its long-standing retrenchment from regional affairs even worse, deciding to undertake any hostile action to drag the Moroccan Kingdom into open confrontation. For example, Algeria started a media campaign of insults against the Moroccan King and urged farmers in Eastern Morocco to evacuate farms as they tried to move inside Moroccan territory.²⁷ Intissar Fakir, Senior Fellow and Director of Program on Northern Africa and the Sahel at the Middle East Institute, puts it best stating, “cutting ties with Morocco is about drawing a line in the sand, a total unwillingness to allow Morocco any leverage, as well as an effort to draw the attention of domestic audiences away from problems at home and rally against an external enemy.”²⁸ Here, their difficult history is only manifesting into a grim future.

²⁴ Hasni Abidi and Aboubakr Jamai, “Western Sahara Figures Prominently in Algeria-Morocco Tensions,” Arab Center Washington D.C. (November 4, 2021).

²⁵ “Algeria bans Morocco from its airspace amid growing tensions,” DW (September 23, 2021).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Figuig: Algeria Urges Farmers in Eastern Morocco to Evacuate Farms Before March 18,” Morocco World News (March 14, 2021).

²⁸ Intissar Fakir, “What’s driving the escalating tensions between Algeria and Morocco,” The Middle East Institute (September 1, 2021): <https://www.mei.edu/publications/whats-driving-escalating-tensions-between-algeria-and-morocco>

Economic

One of the many consequences of the Morocco-Algeria rupture in August is the impact it has had on intra-Maghreb cooperation, Europe-Africa connectivity, and economic cooperation in the Mediterranean. The Maghreb region is already characterized by low levels of economic integration and regional trade. Most of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia's economic partners are "European countries, the United States, and China, rather than each other," highlighting how regional cooperation is under threat.²⁹

Additionally, the closure of the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline on November 1, 2021, has direct implications for Spain and most of Europe since the route has become a major source of supply for over two decades.³⁰ Algeria decided to cut off all gas supplies to Morocco and instead only supply Spain with natural gas via the Medgaz pipeline. Morocco used this gas to produce around 12% of the country's electricity and allowed its territory to be used for international use. Without the pipeline, this can have serious implications for Europe in the long-term and the economic trust between Northern Africa and Europe. Now, Morocco is working with the Israeli company, Ratio Petroleum, to conduct gas exploration on Western Sahara shores.³¹

Looking at military build-up, Morocco increased its military budget by 50 percent during the last ten years, which Stockholm International Peace Research Institute attributes to tensions with Algeria (fig. 2). Morocco is also getting military support from Israel through purchasing knowledge and technology (i.e., kamikaze drones) for use in the Sahara conflict with U.S.

²⁹ Anna L. Jacobs, "Another Morocco-Algeria Rupture Jeopardizes Gulf Outreach, Regional Connectivity," The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (September 14, 2021).

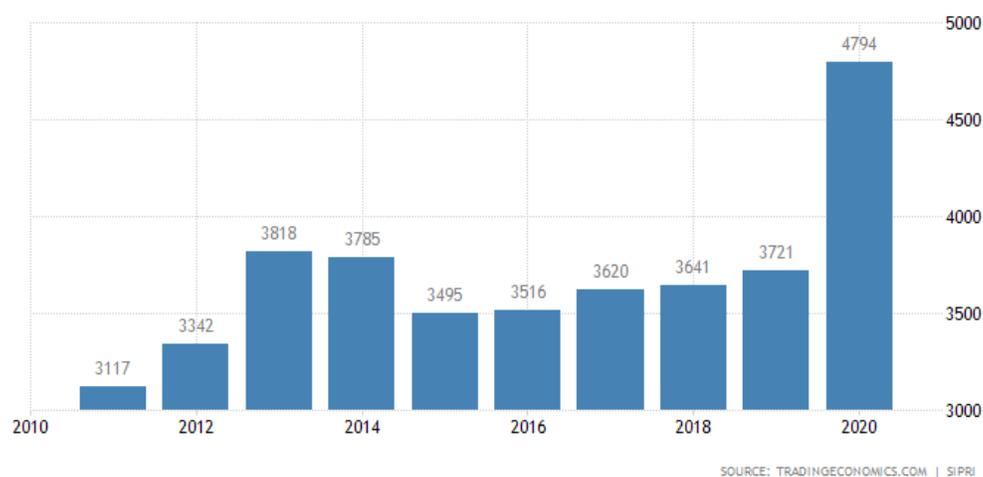
³⁰ Juan Carlos BC, "Algeria and Morocco: The Conflict on Europe's Doorstep," in the Fair Observer (November 02, 2021).

³¹ Margarita Arredondas, "Israeli company obtains exclusive rights to explore for oil and gas in Saharan waters," Atalayar (October 27, 2021): <https://atalayar.com/en/content/israeli-company-obtains-exclusive-rights-explore-oil-and-gas-saharan-waters>

recognition.³² Algeria has always had high military spending but decreased its current spending from 10304 USD million in 2019 to 9958 USD million in 2020 (fig. 3).³³

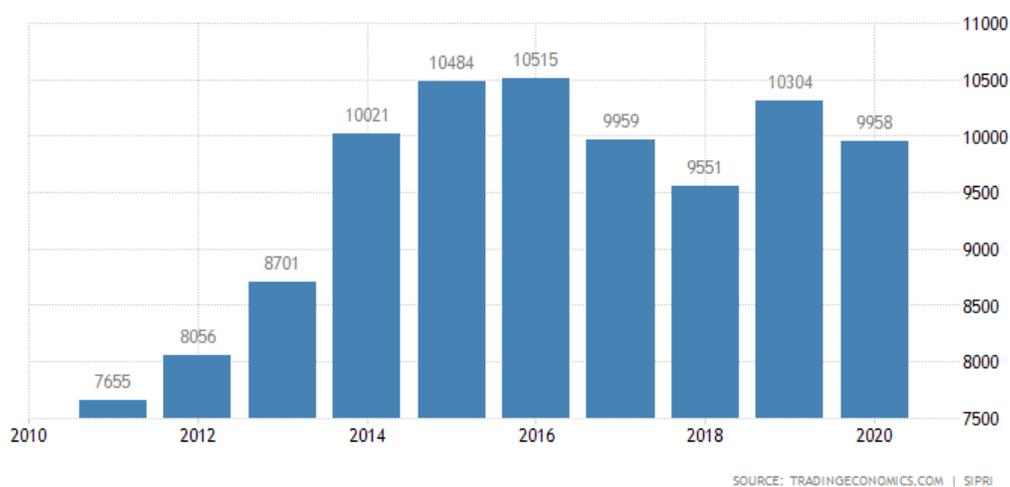
Morocco Military Expenditure

Fig. 2



Algeria Military Expenditure

Fig. 3



³² Agnes Helou, "Morocco and Israel to sign kamikaze drone deal," Defense News (October 1, 2021).

³³ Figures from Trading Economics data collection: <https://tradingeconomics.com/algeria/military-expenditure>.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) recently estimated that an integrated Maghreb union would have boosted its five countries' economies by 5% of their combined GDP.³⁴ The challenge for Algeria and most Maghrebi countries is to diversify their economies in a way that develops their best sectors while overcoming shortcomings of their competing ones. This growing military dissuasion strategy on both sides does not translate into better security prospects or economic growth for neither Algeria and Morocco nor the larger region. A united Maghreb with harmonized trade and investment procedures would be resilient to global trade tensions, hold stronger purchasing powers, have better infrastructure, and create closer communities.³⁵ The economic developments of Algeria and Morocco only move the dream of a united Maghreb further away.

Social

The North African states share one geographic area, close dialects and similar ethnicities and cultures, the majority being Arabized Sunni Muslims. Regional integration is a must when promoting growth and creating inter-dependence among countries that lay the foundation for future stability. In this case of Northern Africa, Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Fouad Abdelmoumni's vision, is the goal. However, political obstacles are high, and the potential for steady commitment seems unlikely, especially in the wake of the European Union's collapse during Brexit. The other hard truth is the hypocrisy of those who preach regional integration yet do nothing to bring it to fruition.

³⁴ Yasmine Akrimi, "Algeria-Morocco Tensions: a Costly Conflict," Brussels International Center (December 2021).

³⁵ Wadia Ait Hamza, "The Maghreb Union is one of the world's worst-performing trading blocs. Here are five ways to change that," World Economic Forum (June 2017).

Still, the biggest issue the AMU faces is that Morocco and Algeria see eye-to-eye on almost nothing, making the idea of the AMU an empty shell. Anouar Boukhars, a nonresident fellow in the Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Program, says promising initiatives "like the ones that led to the construction of the Maghreb–Europe Gas Pipeline, linking the Hassi R'Mel gas field in Algeria to the Strait of Gibraltar and the Iberian Peninsula through Morocco," are a thing of the past.³⁶ The hope that the 2011 Arab revolts during the Arab Spring would bring the region to its senses were compromised through domestic fear tactics.

The region presents immense diversity yet doesn't draw from the common ground each country shares. Tunisian economist, Hachemi Alaya warned against interventions that "inadvertently help maintain the *status quo* or embed institutional behaviors tied to the past," highlighting the urge for social groups to focus on transformative projects that can build infrastructure while simultaneously connecting bridges between similar countries like Algeria and Morocco.³⁷ Youth unemployment, underdeveloped regions and poor public services are only a few issues that could be addressed at a regional level. If the 1990s didn't prove to Algeria and Morocco that civil crises can only get bigger—through deadly terrorist attacks, civil strife, and border closures—I am not sure what else can

Although rebuilding trust could take years, increasing economic growth and harnessing global power requires cooperation and reform. If there is a modern-day Sand War, these social issues will only progress further unless countries like Tunisia or Egypt encourage regional integration, foreign and domestic investment, and urgent action to combat these conditions that

³⁶ Anouar Boukhars, "Maghreb: Dream of Unity, Reality of Divisions," Carnegie (June 03, 2018).

³⁷ Marie Françoise Marie-Nelly, "Think regional, act local: a new approach for Maghreb countries," World Bank Blogs (October 6, 2015).

impact human lives.³⁸ AMU might not be a current reality, but if war is brewing, the prospects it holds might be worth holding onto.

Why a Modern-Day Sand War?

Ultimately, both Algeria and Morocco want unchallenged hegemony in North Africa. Although Morocco's continental strategy has proven more successful than Algeria's, both countries are in serious trouble. Miscommunication and lack of interest in constructive dialogue are making the probability for outright armed conflict more and more likely as severed diplomatic ties and economic regression continues. While I believe hostility is not inevitable, history has shown otherwise. Algeria and Morocco have many shared interests and commonalities, which can be built upon to move towards more positive relations. What is certain now, however, is that the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry will and can intensify. It is time to turn to the youth of Morocco to gather their opinions on the topic.

Assumptions & Methodology

Before beginning my research, I proposed that many students will observe the Algeria-Morocco situation as being similar, but not completely exclusive, to the China-Taiwan situation—where the conflict is mostly surrounded by rhetoric versus legitimate physical retaliation.³⁹ Although not compared explicitly, I assume many young people will not find the Algeria-Morocco conflict to be as distressing until some major action occurs in their lifetime—i.e., war. I do not infer that Algeria or Morocco would instigate straight-up armed conflict. It is not in their

³⁸ Wadia Ait Hamza, "The Maghreb Union is one of the world's worst-performing trading blocs. Here are five ways to change that."

³⁹ Although, the China-Taiwan Strait Crisis has military action components, I am focusing on the overall narrative of the conflict, which mostly surrounds use of rhetoric and propaganda.

best interest and youth would not support such a drastic shift in geopolitical conflict as they will be the ones rolling in as the new generation of government officials within the next few years. Solutions proposed by youth will focus more on diplomacy than the use of force. I do think that youth will see many negative effects on how youth operate and how the government operates at a domestic level in Morocco and Algeria with a lack of involvement in social movements and domestic politics because of the heavy focus on other countries looming presence and traditional culture. However, I am curious to learn about what type of advocacy is at work within younger groups regarding international affairs and if they are concerned with more far-reaching issues abroad or the one's that hit closest to home (i.e., this crisis).

My research sites included scholarly databases, online newspaper articles, written and video interviews conducted by news sources, and in-person and online (i.e., Google Meet) interviews conducted by myself. Additionally, the "Literature Review and Analysis" sections were combined because my project is an analysis of preexisting historical sources. The sources are dispersed throughout the entire paper until the interviews and conclusion. Through qualitative methodology, including quotes, stories, and experiences, I will compare youth views on the modern-day Sand War and compile a consensus based upon their responses. The interview questions will focus on whether the paradigm fits the current day situation, what the biggest shocks of predicted aftermath are, and how it affects the next generation. Prof. Saloua Zarhouni, a political science professor at Mohammed V University of Rabat, connected me with 4 graduate students studying political science who have a background or general knowledge of the Algeria-Morocco conflict. Ahlam, an Arabic instructor at Langzone Center Rabat, connected me with a few students who also answered questions related to the topic. To ensure an ethical

study, the interviewees will be kept anonymous outside of gender and age. The interview questions were left open-ended, with two having pre-written follow-ups.

Interview Subjects Chart

Fig. 4

Name	Level of Study	Gender	Age	Interview Site
A	Graduate	Female	23	Google Meet
B	Graduate	Male	22	Google Meet
C	Graduate	Female	22	Google Meet
D	Graduate	Female	21	Google Meet
E	Undergraduate	Male	20	Google Forms
F	Undergraduate	Female	20	Google Forms
G	Undergraduate	Female	22	Google Forms

*Although some students are political science majors, intended majors have no effect on this study.

Limitations of the Study

Considering the COVID-19 epidemic, travel bans, and diplomatic issues between Morocco and Algeria, I was unable to include the perspectives of Algerian students within this paper. I had planned to conduct interviews on-site or online via social media outlets, but it was difficult to connect with the language barrier and with time constrictions. I am hopeful this research can be expanded upon in the future to include those diverse perspectives and come to further conclusions about this paradigm of the modern-day Sand War. With these limitations in mind, the paper was effective in achieving its stated goal—analyzing the paradigm through a Moroccan youth lens.

Findings: Moroccan Youth Opinion

Under the circumstances outlined above, I was able to interview an array of Moroccan youth, in this case, enrolled college and graduate students whose ages range 18-23, to understand

the current relationship between Algeria and Morocco (fig. 4).⁴⁰ Here, I will split up the section by a general question posed and give a summary and consensus of the interview findings. Please refer to Fig. 4 in the appendix or in the *methodology section* of this paper to see specific student information.

Question 1: *Do you believe the current relations between Algeria and Morocco is a modern-day Sand War?*

Responses:

Yes: 6

No: 1

Out of the 7 students interviewed, 6 agreed with the paradigm of the modern-day Sand War. While none of the students wants an outright war to happen, a majority still see the framework of “war” as a real possibility. Student F was the only student who disagreed, arguing that current relations are not in the same realm of tension as when the two countries started fighting in 1963 and when they continued to fight in 1975. She argues that if Polisario stops its belligerent behavior toward Morocco and partakes in open dialogue, there will be no war.

Student E stated that “it is delusional to continue to be more optimistic, to say that wisdom will always prevail, and that Algeria and Morocco can go a long way in building the [El-Maghreb Union]. The situation at such levels of fragility and deterioration will inevitably remain doomed to failure. It is not to be ruled out that what is happening today covers more fire:

⁴⁰ Each interviewee consented to be interviewed and/or have recorded responses by audio or text. Their identities will remain anonymous as that does not affect the findings.

ecological fires, war, and military confrontation—the outcome of which will not be for the benefit of either of the two friendly countries. It will plague the future of the region into a loss that many prescribed years ago.”

Student G stated that “the regimes have two completely different ideologies and diplomacy policy during the Sand War” that is it not even just about land acquisition anymore but also who’s ideology will stand as superior.

Student B stated that “absolutely, it will lead to something like [the old Sand War.] Without having this clash or rethinking our behavior in both states, something should happen. It is natural to have [war when issues are unresolved.] Diplomacy will not lead to something in the future as it hasn’t in the past. The UN imposed that all actors around the region should discuss the Western Sahara, and the more we have this discussion with multiple actors, it has not led to a solution. Each actor has its own vision of things—Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and even the Saharan people.”

Each of these responses provides a foundation that the modern-day Sand War does exist and not in a vacuum—it is a real possibility that armed-conflict can occur if rhetorical tension is not lessened. Many of the students understand the war to be one of sovereignty and regime disillusionment. Since diplomacy has not worked in the past, most students do not see it as an effective tool in combatting tense relations. The next question will focus on when students believe this armed conflict is bound to happen.

Question 2: *Do you think armed conflict is bound to happen in the next 10 years?*

Responses:

Yes: 1

No: 6

Although students do believe armed conflict is bound to happen, it will not happen within the next 10 years. Morocco wants to avoid armed conflict at all costs. Student G believes that “Algeria would want to go to war to show their military strength.”

Student E stated that “with Algeria recognizing the Western Sahara as the ‘Saharan Arab Democratic Republic,’ which supported the Polisario and unilaterally declared the Sahara as Algerian adjacent land,” underscoring a high likelihood of conflict in the future in response to Morocco’s claims to the Sahara. Rabat proposed granting the Saharans autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, prompting Algeria to retaliate that claim by force.

Student F argued that “if Polisario stops its aggressive behavior towards Morocco and accepts open-dialogue, there will be no war.”

The other four students (A-D) agreed that war was not the answer. Although it will take decades to get diplomacy back, anything is better than human genocide. However, each agrees that war naturally takes its course as tension escalates.

Conclusively, with the modern-day Sand War paradigm in mind, there is a possibility of outright armed conflict in the Northern Africa region between Morocco and Algeria. The main disagreement is *when* this war could occur. This is something I would not have suspected in my original hypothesis of the modern-day Sand War. I would have thought more youth would see the issue as one of rhetoric. While they agree, armed conflict is not out of the question.

Question 2.5: *What policy approach should Algeria and Morocco take to mend the conflict?*

The students focused on closing the divide between society and the state itself—rather than focusing on external conflict first. An effective solution, Student B argues, comes from “waking up society—the emancipation of civilians and restricting state character.” Most problems stem from the ego of hybrid and authoritarian regimes. He continues by saying, “if people seek liberation and change, the regimes must also choose democratic change; then, diplomacy will work.”

Student A mentioned that affirming the Sahara as Moroccan territory is not the right response to the problem. “If the regime is extremely authoritarian or has an opportunity to talk to the other regime, it is a paradox. How can you maintain a solution if the politics are not working toward each other?”

Students C-G had no comments on this question or could not come up with a policy proposal they believed to be plausible.

Question 3: *Are there consequences for yourself, your culture, your country, and your world region (MENA) due to the Algeria-Morocco crisis?*

Reponses:

Yes: 5

No: 2

Student A is concerned about economic integration. She states, “with the current gas pipeline problem, our sponsors might cut off [Morocco] completely. I don’t know if the consequences will be long-lasting or in the short-term.”

Student B is concerned about the cultural impact and issues of future governance. “Cultural impact is huge because the new younger generation, younger than us, are very impacted by the issue, behaving nationalistic and even as extremists. This is very risky and concerning.”

Student E argues that because of the Moroccan-Algerian crisis, the problems between the two countries will adversely “affect our mental health and daily interactions because we are all losers in this situation with no profit from these differences and aggressive behaviors.”

Students F and G found no consequences unless concern of military confrontation occurs.

Question 4: Do you think your generation of youth are concerned about the Morocco-Algeria crisis?

Responses:

Yes: 7

No: 0

Students A-D argue that although Moroccan youth are concerned about Algeria, change with their generation is very early.

Student B argues “change doesn’t happen smoothly, it needs work, consciousness about the environment, ethical values, and human rights.” He continues by talking about the traditional

authority structure in Morocco: new patrimonialism.⁴¹ “Relying on patronage is not how our society should function. This social network hinders the wheel of change.”

Student A continues his argument by stating, “we are talking about monarchy and constructional parliament. If the change was to happen, in a few years, maybe if there were more open electors, etc. But with our generation, I don’t know. It is too early for a change. I don’t think individuals or citizens are ready for this change or even if they want this conflict to end. Growing up we have this social norm that is Algerians hate Moroccans and Moroccans hate Algerians.”

Students E-G disagree that Moroccan youth do not affect change. They believe that youth are getting involved and are interested in political issues, especially involving their home countries. What brings people together is more than what divides them. In this case, the higher the tension in relations between Morocco and Algeria, calls for calm have continued, and people are being drawn to all the old history. Student E argues that “customs, blood ties, common language, and shared borders” bring the people of the two countries together, outside of government intervention. Student G has seen the use of social media for political issues go up since Algeria cut diplomatic ties with Morocco—even using memes to gather attention. Student F says, “if the Polisario continues to attack Morocco, we will lose each other and none of us wants this to happen.” Ultimately, youth are concerned for their country and other people’s lives regardless of political stances.

Holistically, the relationship between Moroccan and Algerian citizens for the older generation is good but the younger generation hates each other (outside of college-educated students). This is where each agrees the problem lies with youth involvement. Student B expands

⁴¹ Patrimonialism: a form of political organization in which authority is based primarily on the personal power exercised by a ruler.

upon this idea stating, “the flow of democratization was new at the time of the Arab Spring, but change does not just happen from one uprising. Individuals do not desire change if it does not affect themselves or their country directly.”

Question 5: Do you believe in the El-Maghreb Union?

Responses:

Yes: 1

No: 6

Students A-D believe this idea has been introduced and tried but never worked in the past. There are no alternative solutions. The elites and state bodies remain the main actors and refuse collaboration. This issue also becomes one of protecting sovereignty. Additionally, harsh rhetoric became a way of legitimization. According to Student B, the three pillars of authoritarian stability are co-optation, legitimation, and repression. The Moroccan state has used all three in its attempts to undermine Algeria.

Additionally, Student B argues, “it is more problematic at the local level than regional level. In Morocco, we have multiple ethnicities: Amazigh, Moroccans, Arabs, and Sahrawis. Amazigh refuse and some Arabs and Moroccans refuse the idea of Pan-Arabism and El-Maghreb Union. We refuse the name because it is Arab. We are not all Arab. We have different dialects and lifestyles. I think if we took this point of liberation from Pan-Arabism, with Algerians in the same boat, both countries would want to get rid of the idea. If we took the issue from this point,

there could be unity in the long term (100 years). Cultural unification will be possible, regardless of the regimes.”

Students E-G hope that the El-Maghreb Union solidifies but understand that it requires cooperation and integration between Morocco, Algeria, and the whole of Maghreb countries. However, each believes different ideologies will never be able to see eye-to-eye.

Question 5.5: *Can “brotherly” interactions and cultural similarities between Morocco and Algeria help solve conflict?*

Student G brings up a famous quote in Darija called “khawa khawa” which means “we are brothers/ brothers, brothers.”⁴² While it is true that there both countries share similar cultures, but both regimes force people to forget their commitment to a common culture.

Student C says, “I think that because we talked about identity, that in the future if states are motivated my interests, the two states can use identity politics to make a union.”

Student B argues that both countries “need pressure from internal and external contexts.” He can see motivation coming from the inside if people act upon the cultural bonding from Algeria and Morocco’s long history. “Culture is history, culture is the result of relationships of this earth. There is a spiritual, out of this world connection, where we make meaning and reconnect again.”

⁴² خاوة خاوة

Results

Moroccan Youth Interview Results: Modern-Day Sand War

Fig. 5

Question	Yes	No
1: Do you believe the current relations between Algeria and Morocco is a modern-day Sand War?	6	1
2: Do you think armed conflict is bound to happen in the next 10 years? *	1	6
3: Are there consequences for yourself, your culture, your country, and your world region (MENA) due to the Algeria-Morocco crisis?	5	2
4 Do you think your generation of youth are concerned about the Morocco-Algeria crisis?	7	0
5: Do you believe in the El-Maghreb Union? *	1	6

*Questions 2 and 5 have a follow-up question that was open-ended with no “yes-or-no” response option

In conclusion, the modern-day Sand War is a reality and reconciliation is hard to attain, but each of these Moroccan youth wants to overcome differences of the past and focus on unity in the future. Playing with rhetoric is a way for both governments to create propaganda to influence their people and create an image that everyone is in danger. Each student understands that the Moroccan government is trying to protect them but at the expense of war and disillusionment across the Northern Africa region.

Conclusion

Historical tensions, border disputes, and regional choices will continue to govern the nature of Moroccan-Algerian relations, as they have for decades.⁴³ Ultimately, both are undermined by a simmering geopolitical tension—a modern-day Sand War. While this might not be a blatant attack by Islamic extremists or border-collapse, it can resemble what Malcolm Kerr calls North Africa’s “Arab Cold War,” which was used to describe the struggle between regional primacy between Saudi Arabia and Egypt post-proxy wars.⁴⁴ Behind the façade of diplomatic exchanges, historical, social, and cultural ties bond the fate of these two countries long before they could even know. From French colonialism to independence, Morocco and Algeria were posed to have a long-standing and bitter struggle for regional leadership.

Moroccan youth have supported the claim of a modern-day Sand War through examples of inefficient diplomatic relations, the failure of the El-Maghreb Union, and the breaking of cultural ties between the younger generation in Morocco and Algeria. I was surprised to see how most Moroccan youths assume armed conflict will be inevitable in the future—within the next 50 years. While the conflict does not always weigh on these students’ minds, it lingers behind-closed-doors and is a part of the cultural war Moroccan citizens has with Algerian citizens. While the two countries are under strong domestic pressure for serious reforms, the regional crisis is at the forefront of these governments’ political agendas. After this research, I would argue that Morocco and Algeria are tangled within a modern-day Sand War, which includes tactics of both the Arab Cold War and the infamous Sand War of 1963.

⁴³ “Algeria’s Decision to Cut Diplomatic Relations with Morocco: Background and Repercussions,” *Situation Assessment Series* in Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies Journal (September 2021): 1.

⁴⁴ Raphaël Lefèvre (2016) Morocco, Algeria and the Maghreb’s cold war, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 21:5, 735.

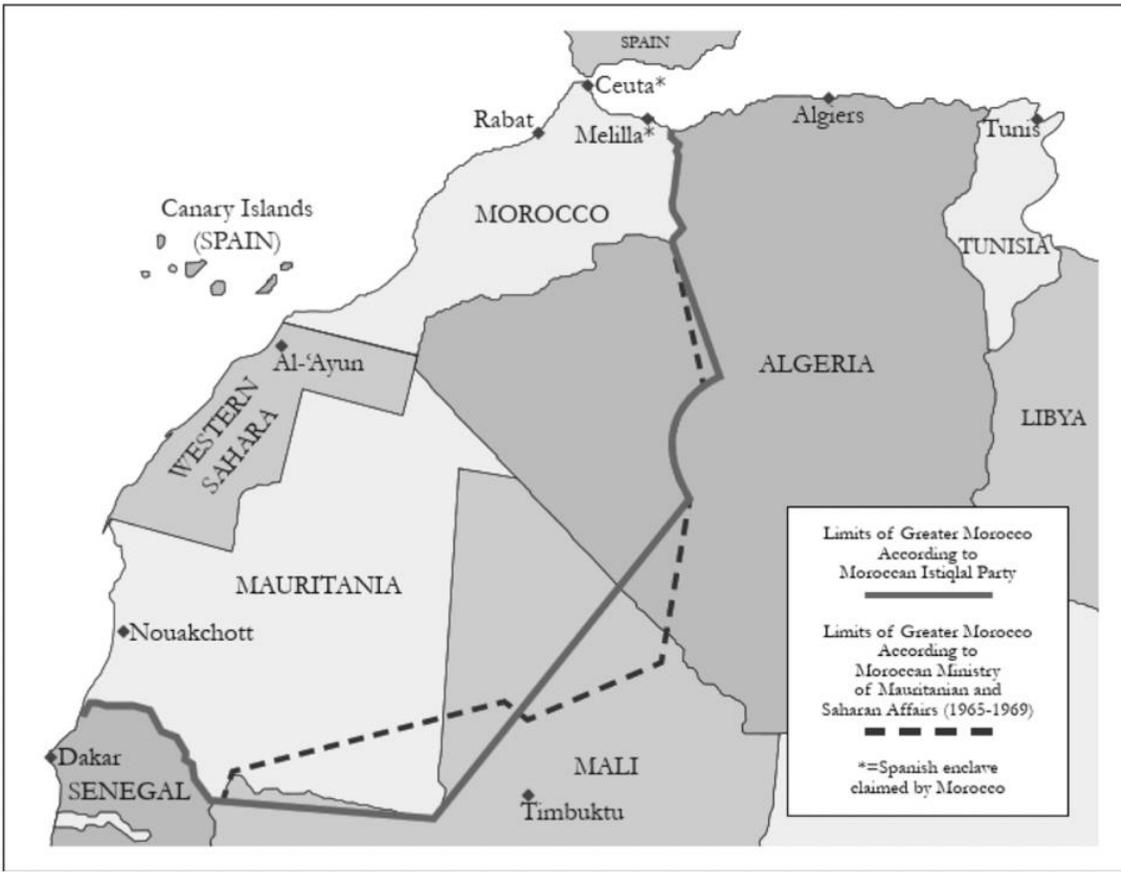
Ultimately, this study is an important steppingstone for Moroccans, Algerians, and global citizens to educate themselves on what is going on in Northern Africa and how they can prepare themselves for change. I feel that while the current tension between Morocco and Algeria has not been outrightly sugar-coated, placing a name onto the problem can help solidify what the relationship truly is between the two countries. Nobody has claimed that this might be a modern-day Sand War and I know that it is adding a unique perspective to the array of scholarship on the topic. I hope that this study can be expanded upon and used as a future framework to not only use Foucault's prescription of history in similar political instances but also to begin a constructive dialogue and relations between Moroccan and Algeria youth.

Recommendations for Further Study

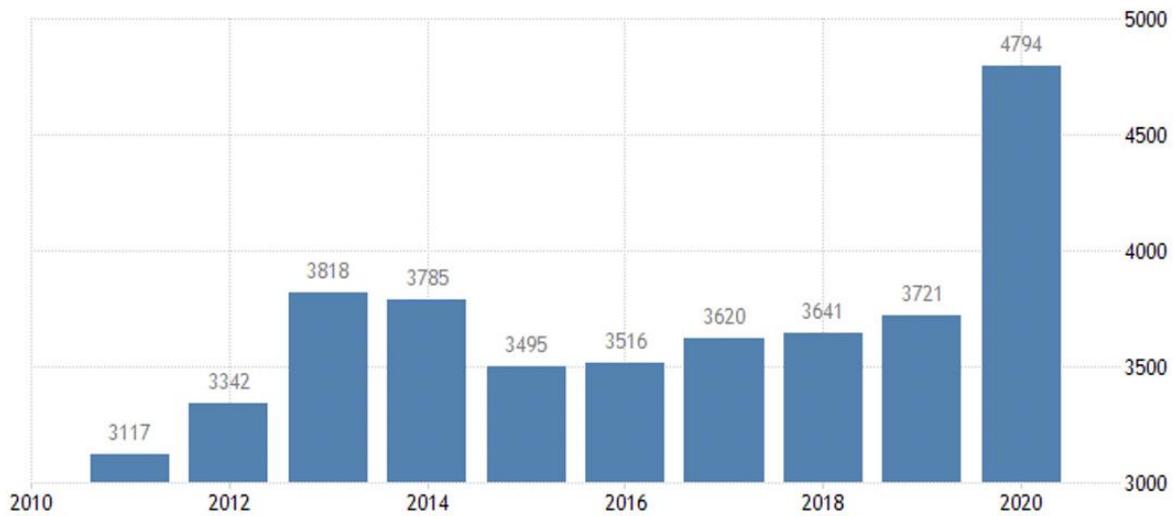
I am hopeful this research can be expanded upon in the future and answer some pertinent questions coming out of the study. For instance, it would be critical to include Algerian youth perspectives and come to further conclusions about this paradigm of the modern-day Sand War with a larger group of students. The result can vary depending on the subject group as well—making a study of older Moroccan and Algeria citizens an interesting foil to youth opinion. Additionally, focusing on a direct comparison with Kerr's "Arab Cold War" could be interesting to see if that paradigm truly fits as well as the Sand War of 1963 does. In the end, because future developments in the MENA region will be affected by many internal, regional, and international factors, it is not easy to predict what will happen to Morocco and Algeria. As time progresses, a new history will be written and there will be a need for someone else to take on the mission of analyzing the current-day situation a few years from now.

Appendix
Charts, Graphs, and Maps

Map of "Greater Morocco"
Fig. 1

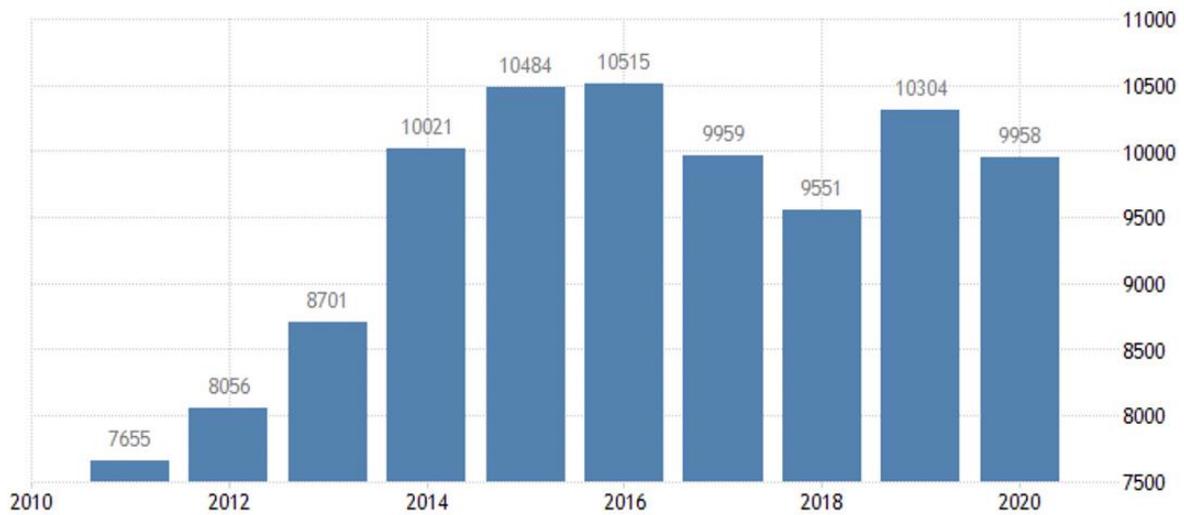


Morocco Military Expenditure
Fig. 2



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | SIPRI

Algeria Military Expenditure
Fig. 3



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | SIPRI

Interview Subjects Chart

Fig. 4

Name	Level of Study	Gender	Age	Interview Site
A	Graduate	Female	23	Google Meet
B	Graduate	Male	22	Google Meet
C	Graduate	Female	22	Google Meet
D	Graduate	Female	21	Google Meet
E	Undergraduate	Male	20	Google Forms
F	Undergraduate	Female	20	Google Forms
G	Undergraduate	Female	22	Google Forms

*Although some students are political science majors, intended majors have no effect on this study.

Moroccan Youth Interview Results: Modern-Day Sand War

Fig. 5

Question	Yes	No
1: Do you believe the current relations between Algeria and Morocco is a modern-day Sand War?	6	1
2: Do you think armed conflict is bound to happen in the next 10 years? *	1	6
3: Are there consequences for yourself, your culture, your country, and your world region (MENA) due to the Algeria-Morocco crisis?	5	2
4 Do you think your generation of youth are concerned about the Morocco-Algeria crisis?	7	0
5: Do you believe in the El-Maghreb Union? *	1	6

*Questions 2 and 5 have a follow-up question that was open-ended with no “yes-or-no” response option

Note: all graphs are cited within the body of the paper

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