

The US-backed Moroccan- Israeli Normalization Agreement: Implications on the Future of the Maghreb Union*

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Abstract

After the signing of the *Abraham Accords* between the Zionist entity and the countries of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain under the auspices of US President Trump, Morocco joined the normalization process and became the latest country in the Arab League which agreed to normalize its relations with Israel through US mediation. As part of the agreement, the US agreed to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region, and to release \$ 1 billion in military aid to Morocco. This Moroccan step added fuel to the flame and worsened its relations with the Palestinian Authority, on the one hand, and the countries of the Maghreb union, on the other hand. Morocco's normalization of its relations with the Zionist entity does not only deteriorate its relations with Algeria, which supports the *POLISARIO*, but also affects the future of the Maghreb union. This paper discusses the implications of Morocco's normalization of its relations with the Zionist entity on the Arab Maghreb integration project. It takes into account the Moroccan normalization process as a part of the overall Arab approach. In addition, it highlights the Israeli relations with the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia, and how Moroccan normalization will affect the future of integration of Maghreb union.

Key words: Morocco; Israel; Normalization; Maghreb Union; Algeria.

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Introduction

The Palestinian crisis remains one of the unresolved issues by the United Nations Organization (UNO) and the world community. In its greatest extent, it has been also part of the Arab- Israeli conflict which dates back to the nineteenth century. It started in 1947 when the UNO adopted the Partition Plan; namely, Resolution 181, which divided the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and Jewish state. The UNO's resolution sparked off the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 shortly after the creation of the Israeli state. Later on, the conflict aggravated with the wars of 1967 and 1973 in which the Arabs fought the Israelis. Israel has been successful in dominating the conflict's scene and in controlling most the lands in Palestine.

As a matter of fact, the Arab-Israeli conflict is driven by several factors: ethnic, national, historical, and religious. However, the religious factor has always been the core of the conflict. The religious conflict between Islam and Judaism in the Middle East, for several decades, dictates the role of religion as the main factor in the conflict, including notably the sanctity of holy sites and the apocalyptic narratives of both religions, which are detrimental to any potential for lasting peace between the Arabs and the Jews. On one hand, extreme religious Israeli Zionists see themselves as guardians and definers of the how the Jewish state should be, and are very stringent when it comes to any concessions to the Arabs. On the other hand, activists and Islamic groups in Palestine and elsewhere in the Islamic world discourage and cooperation with Israel as a means to fight occupation. They advocate the necessity of restoring back Palestine and liberating holy sites from the Zionists, which forms the basic ground for their resistance.

Media propaganda used by extremists intensifies tensions between both parts of the conflict. Rumors about the “Jewish Plan” to destroy Al Aqsa Mosque and build the Jewish third temple on its remnants and, on the other side rumors that Muslims hold the annihilation of Jews at the core of their belief exacerbate these tensions. In addition, worsening socio-economic conditions in the Arab and Islamic world contribute to the growth of religious radicalism, pushing a larger percentage of youth towards religion-inspired politics.

What makes matters worse in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian crisis is the US pro-Israeli policy. Since, the end of the Cold War, Israel has been the central axis of the US strategy in the Middle East. The US constant approach in the Middle East relies on its full support to Israel at the expense of the Arab countries in both the Middle East and the Gulf region. Therefore, the US pro-Israeli support did not help bring peace and stability in the region; however, it made Israel the strongest country in the region on which the US relies to build its cohesive strategy and security in the region.

Included in the Arab-Israeli conflict are wars waged by the Arabs against Israel to restore the occupied lands which belonged originally to the Palestinians. The Arabs fought the Israelis in the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973. Unfortunately, the Arabs lost in these wars, and failed to restore back the occupied lands. Although the Arab leaders who met in Al Khartoum, the Sudan, in the Arab League Summit of 1967 adopted the *Khartoum Resolutions* which contained the famous ‘Three No’s’. i. e. ‘No Peace with Israel, No Recognition of Israel, and No Negotiations with Israel’, Egypt was the first Arab country to break the *Khartoum Resolutions* and to start official communication channels with Israel which resulted in the signing of *Camp David Accords* in 1979. Thus, it became the first Arab country to normalize its relationships with Israel. Following Egypt, Jordan became the second Arab country to officially normalize its ties with Israel in 1994. On September 15, 2020, UAE and

Bahrain, during a White House ceremony, signed the *Abraham Accords* which established official diplomatic relations with Israel. A month after the Abraham Accords, the Sudan and Morocco joined the Arab countries and established normal, official diplomatic relations with Israel on October 23 and December 10, 2020.

Throughout history, Morocco has had distinguished relations with the Jews. After the fall of Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Spain in 1492, waves of forced displacement of both the Moors and Andalusian Jews (Sephardic Jews) alike began. Some chose Christianization, while most chose exile, and others were forced into exile. So, they chose to install in Morocco. Since then, Jews in Morocco established themselves in the Moroccan society. Before the creation of Israel in 1948, there were between 250,000 and 350,000 Jews living in Morocco, which made Morocco the largest Jewish community in the Islamic world. However, by 2017, there were only 2,000 Jews in Morocco. In fact, the Jews played an important role in establishing ties between both authorities in Morocco and Israel. Although relationships remained secret and unofficial between both Morocco and Israel, it was on December 10, 2020 that Moroccan relationships with Israel were officially announced. Regardless of the reasons that led Morocco to normalize its relationships with Israel, this act will have several impacts and implications on the integration project of the Maghreb union, which its countries have sought to achieve. Also, it threatens the future relationships between Morocco and the countries of the Maghreb union.

The present paper highlights the issue of Moroccan- Israeli normalization agreement. It analyzes its implications on the future of the Maghreb union. It addresses to the following questions: What were the reasons of Moroccan normalization of ties with Israel? Did the US administration play an important role in the normalization process? What implications will the normalization process have on the future of integration of Maghreb union?

The Arab- Israeli conflict represents the core interest of interdisciplinary studies, researches, and scholarly debates. Moreover, the issue has; also, taken much interest of media news and TV documentaries. The Arab- Israeli conflict evolved in two major phases. The Arab- Israeli wars constituted the first phase of the conflict, which characterized the absence of cooperation between the Arabs and the Israelis. However, the normalization agreements signed between both sides of the conflict opened a new era of cooperation and negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis. The literature review and scholarly researches provide a context of issues related to the normalization process and the several questions raised by researchers and scholars.

Hitman and Kretcher has analyzed the normalization procedures which have been practiced between the Arabs and the Israelis since the 1990's, and what role it played in the resolution of the conflict. They argue that total normalization is not a necessary condition for peace settlement. Although several channels of normalization have been promoted between Israel and the Arab countries on different diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military levels, an existing, formal peace settlement was not achieved. According to them, normalization is a tool which is used to build trust and mutual interests, and lead to signing peace agreements.

In their research, Kobi and Dekel argue that the Emirati- Israeli normalization agreement is not at the expense of the Palestinian issue; however, it is an asset for the Palestinian Authority (PA). The normalization agreement will make Israel in a forceful position and adopt a strengthened approach towards the PA. Israel will; also, take several measures to control the Palestinian territory effectively. On the other hand, the PA will benefit from economic and technological developments and agreements concluded by UAE and Israel.

Amira Elsayed Hassan Seddik states that the Middle East and North Africa has witnessed major changes since Egypt and Jordan established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1979 and 1994. In her research,

she analyzes the Arab- Israeli process of normalization by focusing on the geopolitical driving forces of normalization of relations between UAE, Bahrain, and Israel. She argues that the normalization process is basically part of the ongoing geopolitical rivalries between the Middle East and North African countries for power, prestige, and hegemony to recreate the regional system.

1 – The Jewish Presence in the Maghreb Region: A Brief Historical Overview

Throughout history, Jews were best known as the *people of Diaspora*. This term was used to refer to the groups of Jews who lived apart from the rest of peoples of the world. The term diaspora explains that the various Jewish minorities in the world are bound by a bond, which is basically centered around the *Promised Land*, and that they are dispersed because of the fact they are outside it, or far from it. It is worth mentioning that the *Diaspora* term has been exploited by the Zionist Movement to explain the creation of the Jewish people and to establish their *Promised Land* of Palestine so that they can return to.

Historically, the Jews lived in Egypt. During the Pharaohs' rules, they were enslaved and highly exploited by the Egyptians. Fortunately, it was Prophet Moses, God's messenger, who rescued them and arrived with them to the land of Canaan; namely Palestine. However, the Jews were subjected to Babylonian Exile, a period in Jewish history, during which the Jews of the ancient Kingdom of Judah were taken as captives by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia who evacuated the Jews from Palestine twice, in 597 B.C.E. (The Destruction of the First Temple) and 586 B.C.E., i. e. The Destruction of the Second Temple (Hanukoglu 55).

When the Levant (Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan) was subjected to Roman rule and after the death of Jesus Christ, the Jews lived hard times under the Romans and were driven to revolt. In 70 B. C. E.,

the Romans, headed by leader Titus, reacted harshly to their revolts, destroyed the Second Temple, and forced them to leave the Holy Land and live in diaspora (Tropper 92).

After the rise of the Islamic Caliphate, the Muslims defeated the Romans in and took control of the Levant in August 636 B. C. E. Still living in diaspora, the Jews were prevented from inhabiting Jerusalem, as stated in the treaty made between Christians of Jerusalem and the Omar Ibn Al Khattab, Islamic Caliph (Acosta 33- 4).

1.1 – The Jews in Morocco

The early Jews' presence in Morocco and North Africa dates back to the year 586 B.C.E. At the time when they started to disperse, many Jews settled in Mauretania, present-day Morocco. They relied on agriculture, cattle-raising, and trade for their living. As they lived there, they increased in numbers and prospered. It is worth mentioning that the Jews, in addition to Arabs, Berbers, and Arabized Berbers comprise Morocco's ethnic group. They claimed to live in Morocco after the Destruction of the First and the Second Temple, and by the arrival of the expelled Jews, Sephardim, from Spain after 1492 (Reeva et al. 471).

In Spain, the Jews lived ~~in~~ under cover and practiced Christian rituals ostensibly because of Christian persecution and forced conversion into Christianity. When the Muslim army reached Spain under the leadership of Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the Jews helped the Muslims by serving in the front outpost forces and financed the military invasion, hoping to benefit from the tolerance of Islam. Accordingly, many of the Jewish refugees in North Africa returned to Spain. After the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in Spain, the Jews were allowed to practice several professions, and the tolerance policy adopted by the Islamic rulers of Andalusia attracted many Jews from other countries. The Islamic Caliphate in Andalusia and the Abbasid Caliphate are considered the golden age of the Jews due to

the policy of peaceful coexistence that allowed them to integrate into the Islamic community (Darío 119).

After the success of the Reconquista in 1492, Spain became Christendom. Most of the expelled Jews settled in North Africa, especially Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and the Levant. As they were also expelled from the Kingdoms of Portugal in 1497 and 1498 respectively, they had to emigrate again. Those who fared the best were those who settled in the territories of the Ottoman Empire (Pérez 116- 7).

Before the twentieth century, the majority of Morocco's Jews lived under the protection of the sultans in the urban areas. The Jews who lived in Morocco consisted of two groups. Those earliest Jewish settlers were *Toshavim* who resembled Muslims in their language and customs, and *Megorashim*, the Jews expelled from Spain, who were better educated than the *Toshavim*. They enjoyed a higher socioeconomic status and dominated the life and customs of the Jewish community. In the early twentieth century, the Jews succeeded to establish Jewish communities across Morocco. Groups of Jews who lived in the towns on the Mediterranean coast; such as, Melilla, Tetuán, and Tangier, and along the Atlantic coast at Larache, Salé, Rabat, Casablanca, Azemmour, Al-Jadida, Safi, Essaouira, and Agadir were merchants who traded with Europe. Jews living in these centers sometimes enjoyed better conditions than their counterparts in the inland towns of Fez, Sefrou, Meknès, and Marrakesh. Due to economic opportunities of the larger areas, Jewish families migrated from small communities to the central inland and coastal towns (Reeva et al. 474- 5).

From an historical perspective, the Moroccan- Israeli relations have been special. Since the accession of King Hassan II, a special relationship; namely *Ariane Thread*, linking both countries; it has never been interrupted, even during the height of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The 700,000 Moroccan Jews play an important role in preserving this special relationship because of the

economic impacts and implications. Many Israeli officials have expressed the continuation of this special relationship between the two countries. Shalom Benami, the Israeli Minister of Security and Interior, had previously stated that King Hassan II had a pragmatic, insightful view of two dimensions: seeking to approach the West, and longing to link productive relations between Israel and Morocco. Before his visit to Morocco in November 2005, Silvan Shalom, the former Israeli Foreign Minister, strongly admitted that in regard to secret contacts and meetings with Moroccan ministers, it has become clear that Morocco decided to reestablish his relations with Israel. It is worth mentioning that Shalom Cohen, the Director General of Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has made several secret visits to Morocco. On the other hand, several Moroccan delegations, both official and unofficial, paid work visits to Israel, as well as Moroccan officials and businessmen regularly met with their Israeli counterparts, either in Israel or abroad. The last meeting took place in Paris between Muhammad Benaissa, Tayeb Fassi Al-Fihri, Yassin Mansouri, and the Minister of Affairs the Israeli Foreign Ministry (Cross 63- 4).

King Hassan II had admitted: “If I were in the place of the Arab states, I would have recognized Israel, and accepted its membership in the Arab League, because in any case, it is an existing state that cannot be removed” (qtd in Laurent 245). In the Islamic summit, held in Casablanca in 1965, the idea of “peaceful coexistence, or the declaration of war” emerged, noting that the Moroccan official position was based from the outset on supporting the Palestinian cause and unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian people on the one hand, and; on the other hand, moderation and realism in dealing with Israel as a *fait accompli*. King Hassan II approved a special tax on cigarettes and movie tickets, the revenues of which would go to the Palestinians, over a period of decades. He also sent Military troops to take part in the War of 1973, but he continued to adopt diplomatic means and communication channels with the Israelis. In this context, he held many secret meetings to facilitate the meeting between the Israelis and the

Egyptians, which ended in the signing of the *Camp David Agreements* in 1979, and contributed in the signing of the *Oslo Agreements* between the Palestinians and the Israelis in 1993. Morocco has always supported the efforts for making everlasting peace in the Middle East, and has encouraged Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. After signing the *Oslo Agreements* in 1993, Morocco quickly activated the establishment of ties with Israel at the level of bilateral liaison offices in September 1994 in order to enable the Moroccan Jewish community in Israel to communicate with its motherland. However, these offices were closed in 2000 because of Zionist violence and terror against the Palestinians (Cross 39).

On the security and intelligence level, Morocco has strong secret relations with the Israeli Mossad. Just before the Arab summit, held in Rabat in 1965, the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* revealed that King Hassan II had ordered that an entire suite of the hotel in which the Arab summit was held to be allocated to the Israeli Mossad agents, so that they could document the proceedings of the conference, which was closed in its section. However, at the last minute, the King instructed to cancel the plan, fearing that the Mossad chief, Meir Amit, and his men would be discovered in the hotel (Bergman). According to the head of the Mossad at the time, who spoke to the newspaper shortly after the conference ended, the Israeli Mossad obtained all the information, documents, and speeches delivered at the conference. He stressed: ‘When we got the documents, it became clear to us that all the leaders of the Arab armies confirmed during their speeches at the conference that the Arab leaders and their armies were still far from being ready to go on war against Israel. In the context of his speech, he stressed that this information was for Israel the greatest strategic treasure. The Mossad provided the Israeli policymakers with valuable information about the unwillingness of the Arab armies to engage in a military confrontation. This information was the main reason for Israel’s decision to wage a war against the Arab countries in June 1967 and inflicted a terrible defeat on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan (Sukers).

On the other hand, the Mossad provided a greatest service to Morocco by participating in the elimination of the Moroccan political opposition leader, Al Mahdi Ben Barka. In his book, Ronen Bergman mentioned that the disappearance of the Moroccan opposition leader and one of the third world famous leaders who was kidnapped in Paris and his assassination are still mysterious, and his family is still searching for the truth about this case, referring to Israel's involvement in the kidnapping and assassination. He confirmed that the Mossad participated in the elimination of Al Mahdi Ben Barka, the political opponent of King Hassan II; and that Israel had many reasons for being involved in his assassination, such as the efforts made by Al Mahdi Ben Barka to expose Israeli policies in Africa. Bergman, further, stated that Israel has been tracking its enemies around the world for decades, using direct espionage networks. He believed that the Mossad assassinated the Moroccan opponent in exchange for a service provided by Moroccan intelligence to Israel, "because in the intelligence world nothing is free. Moroccan intelligence provided a huge service to the Israelis by giving the Mossad the ability to eavesdrop on the secret talks of Arab leaders at one of the Arab summits that were held in Morocco," he said (92- 4).

1.2 – The Jews in Algeria

As a part of the Mediterranean Sea, the Arab Maghreb, and North Africa, Algeria witnessed the Jewish presence since the Phoenician times (500 B.C.E.). When the Kingdom of Carthage ruled North Africa, the Jews settled in the main towns of the Algerian coast. As they spread into the mainland, they had contacts with the Berber tribes, and as a result; they were converted into Judaism. It is worth mentioning that most of the Jews who lived in Algeria were originally descendants of the Sephardim who were expelled from Spain, Portugal, and Italy in the fifteenth century (Reeva et al. 459).

During the Ottoman rule, the Jews lived as *dhimmi*s. However, when the French colonized Algeria in 1830, their status changed. In an attempt to

protect the Jews and bring them under the French civil code, the French colonial authorities adopted the *Crémieux Decree*, issued in 1860, which granted French citizenship to the Jews living in Algeria. Although the *Crémieux Decree* assimilated the Jews to French culture and civilization, it completely changed the Algerian society. At the top of the social hierarchy were the French colons, followed in the second rank by the Jews who served in the French army. The third rank constituted foreign Europeans, including the Italians, Spaniards, and the Maltese. The Arabs were at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Abitbol 200- 3).

The Jews, who lived in Algeria, were profoundly influenced by the Arab culture and Islamic civilization, in contrast to the French culture. Since the 1930s, the Jews were faced with a political dilemma when the Nationalist Movement arose in Algeria. Being aware of the rise of the Nationalist Movement, the French government, headed by Leon Blum, proposed the *Blum-Viollette Plan* which opted for providing full French citizenship for Algerian Muslims. The proposal was; however, rejected by the right-wing settlers (Abitbol 210- 2).

When the Algerian Revolution began on November 1, 1954, it was headed by the FLN against the French government and colonial administration in Algeria. As for the Jews, they were divided into three factions: neutral, supporters of the FLN, and supporters of the French and *pieds noirs*. In December, 1960, the Jewish community in Oran joined the OAS (Organization Armée Secrete) after the Jewish cemetery was totally damaged. They participated in several attacks against the French Liberals and Muslims (Reeva et al. 466- 7).

Following the independence of Algeria on July 5, 1962, and the beginning of the Arab- Israeli conflict, the Jews became aware of the fact that living in a Muslim country would be a risky adventure. Although the FLN promised the Jews that they would be treated as Algerian citizens; they, however, chose to move voluntarily to France in 1962 and 1963, leaving

numerous properties, cemeteries, and synagogues. Another reason which convinced the Jews to leave the country was the institutionalization of a socialist regime in 1964 when Ahmed Ben Bella became President of Algeria (1963– 5), and later by Houari Boumedienne. The Jewish communities assumed that with the liberal economy in Algeria withering away, their only alternative was to leave (Reeva et al. 470).

Until now, Algeria remains amongst the countries which does not recognize the Zionist state and did not establish official, diplomatic relationships with Israel. In its constant foreign policy, Algeria supports the Palestinian issue, and strongly advocates the establishment of a free, independent Palestinian state.

1.3 – The Jews in Tunisia

Tunisia, the smallest country in North Africa and the Maghreb Union, witnessed the birthplace of the kingdom of Carthage which ruled over North Africa and challenged the Roman Empire during the Punic Wars (264- 146 B. C. E.). Like other countries of the Maghreb Union, Tunisia was another host country for the Jewish diaspora. They reached Tunisia after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. (Reeva et al. 444).

Historians and scholars assume that Tunisia has been an old Jewish implementation. In this regard, David Cazès suggest, on the basis of the biblical description, that close relations through maritime trade existed between Hiram, Phoenician king of Tiro, and Solomon, the King of Israel, which could have resulted in founding old Phoenician colonies, including Carthage in 814 B. C. (9- 11).

One of the founding legends of the Jewish community of Djerba relates that the Kohens, members of the Jewish priestly class, would have settled in present-day Tunisia after the destruction of the Solomon's Temple by the Emperor Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 B. C. They would have carried away a vestige of the destroyed Temple, preserved in the El Ghriba synagogue in

Djerba, and would have made it a place of pilgrimage and veneration to the present day (Sebag 5).

With the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, the French molded the development of modern Tunisia. They provided freedom from the restrictions of traditional society, new opportunities for the improvement of the economy, and new modes of expression and activity. All these became possible for Jews through French acculturation and the modernization process. However, the French culture presented the Jews with a challenge that was irresistible. Although the French rule was the source of the Jews' security, the main problem for the Jews was that they were living within a Muslim society that had set patterns for Jewish existence. In the past, a Jew had been obliged to be part of an autonomous Jewish community, living side by side with. The new colonial society gave Jews the freedom, within certain limitations, to choose how to live or identify themselves (Reeva et al. 447).

During World War II, the German occupation of France in 1940 led to the establishment of the pro-German puppet regime of Vichy whose anti-Semitic race laws were incorporated into the Statute Books of France and its protectorates, including Tunisia. Following the Allied victory at El Alamein in October 1942, German forces were ordered to occupy Tunisia, and therefore, took control of 90,000 Jews. The Germans immediately abolished all the communal organizations and mandated all Jews to wear the yellow Star of David on their clothing. Young Jews were taken into forced labor camps; a fine of twenty million francs was levied on the community as a whole; bank accounts were expropriated and valuables confiscated. With the ending of the German occupation, the rights of the Jews were restored. After 1945, the Jewish population in Tunisia rose to 105,000, along with hundreds of rabbis and synagogues. Jewish newspapers appeared in abundance, and Jewish students were graduated from the universities in significant numbers and entered a wide spectrum of professions (Abitbol 185- 6).

The independence movement started its activities in the 1930s under the leadership of the young Habib Bourguiba. It included a number of Jewish activists, most notably André Barouche. The struggle escalated with increasing ferocity until, in 1954, the French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France, granted Tunisia home rule as a first step to full sovereignty, which was achieved in March 1956. Habib Bourguiba became President and in his first government included his old comrade-in-arms, André Barouche (Laskier 254).

After Tunisia's independence in 1956, a series of anti-Jewish government decrees were promulgated. In 1958, Tunisia's Jewish Community Council was abolished by the government and ancient synagogues, cemeteries and Jewish quarters were destroyed for urban renewal. The increasingly unstable situation caused more than 40,000 Tunisian Jews to immigrate to Israel. By 1967, the country's Jewish population had shrunk to 20,000 (Maurice Roumani 33). During the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Jews were subjected to attacks by rioting mobs, and synagogues and shops were burned. The government denounced the violence, and President Habib Bourguiba apologized to the Chief Rabbi. The government appealed to the Jewish population to stay, but did not prevent them from leaving. Subsequently, 7,000 Jews immigrated to France (Stillman 127).

In another context, the Israeli Mossad has been able to strike most of Palestinian leaders in Tunisia. This, in fact, proves that the Tunisian territory is totally infiltrated by the Israelis. The assassination operations conducted by the Mossad in Tunisia can be explained by the following reasons: (1) the existence of a large Jewish community in Tunisia, (2) many Tunisian youths joined the ranks of the Palestinian resistance movements in the 1970s and 1980s, and (3) hosting the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) headquarters after leaving Lebanon in 1982 (Ghiles- Meilhac 6).

The success of the Mossad in implementing its plans and strategic goals in Tunisia was based on its wide network of agents, informants, and spies

who were recruited successfully inside Tunisia, and were used as means to implement several Zionist agendas. After the PLO headquarters moved to Tunisia after 1982, the Israeli Mossad was able to create a strong base of clients in Tunisia, and many of the Mossad agents visited Tunisia as tourists or as European businessmen frequently and under cover and in close periods. They succeeded to open branches of European companies in the capital city. These companies practiced covered activities for the Mossad (Roi).

On October 1, 1985, the Israeli Mossad conducted Operation ‘Wooden Leg’. It was an air strike on the PLO’s headquarters in Hammam Chott, near Tunis (Black and Benny 410). Shortly after the air strike, the Israeli Defense Forces succeeded to assassinate Abu Jihad, Second-in-command to Yasser Arafat, on April 16, 1988. He was shot dead in front of his family in the Tunis Raid by Israeli commandos under the direction of Ehud Barak and Moshe Ya’alon (Byman 56).

1.4 – The Jews in Libya

Jews had a presence in Libya at least since the time of Hellenistic rule under Ptolemy Lagos in 323 B.C.E. in Cyrene. The Jewish population of Libya, a part of the Sephardi-Maghrebi Jewish community, continued to populate the area continuously until the modern times (Sachar 400).

During World War II, Libya’s Jewish population was subjected to anti-Semitic laws by the Fascist Italian regime and deportations by German troops. Stillman reported that on November 5, 1945 the German troops in Tripoli killed more than 140 Jews and wounded hundreds more. Almost every synagogue was looted. In June 1948, rioters murdered another 12 Jews and destroyed 280 Jewish homes (145).

After the war, anti-Jewish violence caused many Jews to leave the country, principally for Israel, though significant numbers remained in Rome and many later emigrated to various communities in North America. Thousands of Jews fled the country after Libya was granted independence and

membership in the Arab League in 1951. After the 1967 War, the Jewish population of 7,000 was again subjected to pogroms in which 18 were killed, and many more injured, sparking a near-total exodus that left fewer than 100 Jews in Libya (Judith Roumani 241).

Under Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled the country from 1969 to 2011, the situation deteriorated further, and all Jewish property was confiscated and all debts to Jews cancelled. Eventually, it led to the emigration of the remaining Jewish population (Judith Roumani 269). After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the country broke into a civil war between two rival governments of Tripoli, headed by Fayez Al Seraj, and Tobruk government, headed by Akila Salah. The Israeli Mossad is active in the Libyan civil war through aid, support, and feedback given to Khalifa Haftar, commander on the National Libyan Army («Israel secretly supports putschist Gen. Haftar in Libyan civil war»).

1.5 – The Jews in Mauritania

Mauritania, as an Arab Maghreb country, witnessed Jewish presence during the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 B.C.E. As they spread throughout the Roman Empire, the Jews reached the province of Mauritania. Under the Romans and Vandals, the Jews of Mauritania flourished. After the Byzantines gained control in 534 C.D.E., a series of restrictive laws were enacted against the Jews, Arians, Donatists, and other dissenters («Mauritania Virtual Jewish History Tour»).

During the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Mauritania was officially in a state of war with Israel until that decision was reversed in mid-1999. Mauritania did not initially recognize Israel's right to exist; however, in October 1999, the two countries exchanged diplomatic representatives, making Mauritania the third member of the Arab League, after Egypt and Jordan, to recognize Israel as a sovereign state. Accordingly, Full diplomatic relations between the two states were officially established in Washington, D. C. on October 28, 1999, during the presidency of President Maaouya Ould

Sid Ahmed Taya. After the coup by the Military Council for Justice and Democracy in August 2005, recognition of Israel was maintained («Israel–Mauritania Relations»). Because street protests and popular demonstrations against the Israeli Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2009, the Mauritanian government recalled its ambassador, suspended its diplomatic ties, and froze all relations with Israel. On March 6, 2009, the Mauritanian government evicted all staff from the Israeli embassy in the capital city of Nouakchott, and likewise Israel officially did (Friedman). By March 21, 2010, all diplomatic relations between the two states had officially come to an end.

2 – Normalizing Ties with Israel: Moroccan Reasons and Objectives

The Arab-Israeli conflict has recently reached an important step towards the peace process when both United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed the *Abraham Accords*, a joint statement between Israel, the US, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain ('Israel, UAE and Bahrain sign Abraham Accord; Trump says "dawn of new Middle East" ').

The signing of the *Abraham Accords* is considered as the third step in establishing public, official diplomatic relations between Israel and an Arab country after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Originally, the *Abraham Accords* were signed by Abdullah Bin Zayed, UAE's Foreign Minister, Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani, Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli's Prime Minister, and Donald Trump, US President on September 15, 2020, at the South Lawn of the White House in Washington D. C. ("The Accords of Abraham").

After UAE, Bahrain, and the Sudan, the list of Arab countries which normalized its relationships with Israel included the Kingdom of Morocco, which officially declared the normalization agreement through King Mohammed VI. It was earlier declared by the White House on December, 22, 2020. Two days later, a joint declaration was signed pledging to quickly begin direct flights, promote economic cooperation, reopen liaison offices

and move toward full diplomatic, peaceful and friendly relations (“Joint Declaration”).

Under the agreement, Morocco will establish full diplomatic and trade relations, resume official contacts with Israel, and direct flights will be made between the two countries. Morocco officially communicated its recognition of Israel to Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister. According to Jared Kushner, the two countries «... are going to reopen their liaison offices in Rabat and Tel Aviv immediately with the intention to open embassies» (Hekking). Mohcine Jazouli, Minister Delegate of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said that Judaism is rooted in Moroccan culture, and that Jewish history would appear in school textbooks and would soon be taught (Sahib).

On December 22, 2020, Kushner and Israel’s National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat were among the high-level officials who boarded a flight from Israel to Rabat, Morocco, to sign a joint declaration pledging to start direct flights between the two countries, promote economic cooperation, reopen liaison offices, and move toward full diplomatic relations (Holland). The US also agreed to recognize Morocco’s claim to the disputed Western Sahara territory while urging the parties to negotiate “using Morocco’s autonomy plan as the only framework to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution.” Furthermore, Donald Trump added: «The US recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara territory and reaffirms its support for Morocco’s serious, credible and realistic autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory.” Kushner called on both sides to work with the UN in implementing a proposal to give the people of the territory broad autonomy. The US said it intends to open a consulate in Dakhla in Western Sahara (Krauss; Jakes et al.).

On December 11, 2020, according to three US sources “familiar with the negotiations”, the US was nearing the sale of at least four large

sophisticated MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones to Morocco, the sale of which must be approved by members of Congress. It is not known whether the deal, which has been in the works for months, is related to the normalization agreement (Zengerle and Stone).

It is worth mentioning that the Kingdom of Morocco has reasons and objectives for the signing of normalized ties with Israel, although this step has been largely denied by the Moroccan population. The reasons for normalization of ties are cited below.

2.1 – Special Ties between Morocco and Israel

The Moroccan decision to normalize its relations with Israel is; thus, not a question of recognition itself, but rather a resumption of earlier relations, especially in the economic and commercial field. As a matter of fact, Morocco's history with the Jews is unique, compared to other countries in the Arab world. Also, bilateral ties were already normal before diplomatic normalization was announced, as stated by Nasser Bourita, Moroccan foreign minister (“Morocco Underscores ‘Special’ Ties with Israel, Unique History with Jews”). Bourita, in an interview with Israel's *Yediot Ahronot* newspaper, claimed that Morocco's relations with Israel are special and incomparable to Israeli relations with other Arab countries. Therefore, Morocco has already had normal established relations with Israel, and the step taken by the Kingdom of Morocco is re-formalizing the relations between the countries (“Morocco's FM on Normalization: Relations with Israel were ‘already Normal’”).

In this important respect, it is better to understand the preliminary steps and efforts taken by Moroccan policymakers before the final normalization of relations with Israel. Historical factors, too, played a great importance in the Moroccan- Israeli rapprochement.

Morocco's enduring connection to Israel can only be explained through its domestic Jewish community and the estimated 700,000 Israeli Jews

of Moroccan descent. In contrast to the rest of Arab countries, special historical ties exist between Morocco and the Jewish community. At the same time, Morocco's openness to Israel also has deep historical, cultural, religious, and even personal roots. A special bond unites the two countries, resting partly on the Moroccan Jewish community. Though that community was not directly involved in the new normalization agreement, recent assertions from Moroccan officials that the heritage of the country's Jewish minority forms the backdrop for relations with Israel ("Morocco's FM on Normalization: Relations with Israel were 'already Normal' "). For years, thousands of Jews of Moroccan origin visited the land of their ancestors, to celebrate religious holidays or make pilgrimages, including from Israel. Morocco's Jewish community has been present since antiquity and grew over the centuries, particularly with the arrival of Jews expelled from Spain by the Catholic kings after 1492. At the end of the 1940s, Jewish Moroccans numbered about 250,000, comprising 10% of the total population. Many left after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the community now numbers around 3,000, still the largest in North Africa (Chtatou). Therefore, Moroccan population represents a cluster of several ethnicities living in the kingdom. This diversity of Moroccan identity is stated in the preamble of the Constitution of 2011 as follows:

A sovereign Muslim State, attached to its national unity and to its territorial integrity, the Kingdom of Morocco intends to preserve, in its plentitude and its diversity, its one and indivisible national identity. Its unity, is forged by the convergence of its Arab- Islamist, Berber ... and Saharan- Hassanic ... components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences... . The preeminence accord to the Muslim religion in the national reference is consistent with... the attachment of the Moroccan people to the values of openness, ..., of tolerance and of dialogue for mutual understanding between all the cultures and the civilizations of the world. ('Morocco's Constitution of 2011' 3)

At the religious level, Muslims and Jews all over the Moroccan territory live in interfaith coexistence. For example, in Sefrou, 30 km south of Fez, Muslim and Jews venerate the same “saint” buried in a grotto in a neighboring mountain, namely, “*Kaf al-moumen*” (grotto of the faithful) because it was a religious sanctuary for both Muslims and Jews. Similar examples of tightly interwoven communities of Muslims and Jews existed all over Morocco. The large communities of Jews were full Moroccans; they enjoyed the full rights and obligations of their Muslim brethren (Chtatou).

During World War II, when Nazi-occupied France wanted to persecute Morocco’s Jews, King Mohammed V resisted the order. He called for the persecution of all Moroccans, on the grounds that they were no different from his other subjects for whose safety he was responsible. Like his father, King Hassan II treated Moroccan Jews with great deference. He appointed André Azoulay as a royal advisor, and was instrumental in Egypt’s 1977 rapprochement with Israel under Anwar Sadat. Similarly, King Hassan II helped develop political contacts between Palestinians and Israelis leading to the *Oslo Accords* in 1993. In this context, the present monarch Mohammed VI is seen as a man of dialogue, coexistence, and tolerance. He works to build Morocco as a new haven of peace and coexistence, with its composite identities: Amazigh, Arab, Islamic, Jewish, African, Andalusian and Mediterranean (Chtatou).

In response to Moroccan-Israeli rapprochement, changes will be made in Moroccan curricula. As a result, Jewish history and culture in Morocco will soon be part of the school curriculum. The decision to add Jewish history and culture to lessons was discreetly launched before the diplomatic deal was announced. This; in fact, highlights Morocco’s diverse identity. In this regard, two US-based Jewish associations; namely, the American Sephardi Federation (ASF) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (COP), worked closely with the Kingdom of Morocco and the Moroccan Jewish community on the ground of academic reform in

order to integrate culture and counter extremism. The overall target is to ensure Moroccan students learn about the totality of their proud history of tolerance, including Morocco's philo-Semitism. The results of these steps led to the signing of a partnership agreement "for the promotion of values of tolerance, diversity and coexistence in schools and universities" between Said Amzazi, Minister of Education, and the heads of two Moroccan associations. Acting so, Morocco has not erased its Jewish memory, and future citizens will be conscious of their diverse heritage ("Morocco's FM on Normalization: Relations with Israel were 'already Normal'").

2.2 – Joining the Gulf Countries Approach in the Normalization Process

In light of the changes that have occurred in the Arab region which drove the Arab governments to normalize their ties with Israel, Morocco has found itself in front of a political opportunity that it tries hard to take advantage of to consolidate its settlement occupation project, on the one hand, and; on the other hand, preserve the interests of its Western sponsors and new supporters from the Arab regimes. It is worth recalling that the target of normalization process for Israel is to seek final liquidation of the Palestinian issue, and provide a new historical arena in which the Palestinians end their resistance, surrender, and accept the offer proposed by the Israelis. This, in fact, provides Israel with many benefits; such as, imposing the Israeli vision in resolving the Palestinian issue, achieving economic benefits from the surrounding Arab countries, and improving its international standing without making any concessions. The Israeli strategy of normalization aims to achieve peace with the Arab countries in order to dominate the Arabs.

Since the beginning of the Zionist attacks on the Palestinians, the Zionists, together with their supporters and sponsors, have sought to normalize relations with the Arabs in order to achieve their strategic goals in the region: implanting the Israeli colonial settlement, and forcing the Arabs' recognition of its existence. This endeavor to normalize relations with the Arabs had been already planned as a long- term strategy, with the use of various

mechanisms. From the Israeli perspective, the concept of normalization describes the relationship with the Arabs. The overall objective is to (1) seek recognition of the existence of Israel as a *fait accompli*, (2) end economic, cultural, and diplomatic boycott, and (3) start bilateral cooperation. To achieve these ends, Israel uses the following mechanisms of its strategy:

<i>Political & security normalization</i>	<i>To isolate the Palestinian issue from its Arab, Islamic, and humanitarian core</i>
<i>Cultural normalization</i>	<i>Developing channels of communication with the Arab public to change the aggressive image of the Zionist entity</i>
<i>Economic normalization</i>	<i>Promoting the theories of economic peace and bribing the Palestinians with some financial and economic temptations, in exchange for their giving up their fundamental rights</i>
<i>Media normalization</i>	<i>Portraying the Arab- Israeli conflict as a Palestinian- Israeli conflict</i>
<i>Technological normalization</i>	<i>Promoting technical cooperation in which Israel excels and the benefits it achieves for the Arab regimes, especially the software technology that enables these regimes to survive, as their survival constitutes a strategic interest of Israel</i>

As a matter of fact, Israel, with the US help, has succeeded to turn the tide of the conflict in its favor. The Arab countries; nowadays, have admitted the Israeli supremacy in the entire region of the Middle East and the Gulf. Because they are unable to fight Israel, the Arab countries, led by the Gulf countries, have initiated a new approach towards the Palestinian crisis and the normalization with Israel. The Gulf countries consider the Palestinian issue as an unresolved because of the constant US foreign policy towards Israel. Therefore, approaching Israel through normalization of relationships, the Gulf countries seek to build a new pact with Israel. Since they lead the

normalization process, the Gulf countries rely on the following criteria in building their normalization approach:

<i>Ending the Palestinian crisis</i>	<i>Portraying Israel as a true friend and neighbor</i>	<i>Relying on Israel as a mediator in their relations with the US</i>	<i>Eradiating the Palestinian Axis of resistance, headed by Hamas</i>	<i>The Making of Israel as Lord Protector of the Arab region</i>
<i>Working to implement the Deal of the Century</i>	<i>The building of an Arab- Israeli pact against Iran</i>			

2.3 – Gaining International Recognition of the Western Sahara as a Moroccan Territory

The crisis of Western Sahara is considered as one of the longest political and military struggles which lasted for decades in the world. The crisis also constitutes a stumbling block towards the promotion of peace in Africa and the establishment of the Maghreb Union.

Historically, the Western Sahara territory was a Spanish possession when Spain imposed its control on the region in 1884 and named it ‘Spanish Sahara’. In 1934, it became a Spanish province. The territory was found rich in fish and other natural resources; such as, Phosphate, oil, gas, iron, and steel.



Fig. 1: Map of Western Sahara (Source: CRS, 2020).

After the end of World War II, and with the growth of nationalism among the ‘Sahrawis’, and with the decline of colonialism, and the rise of independent movements in the world, there emerged demands for the departure of Spain from that region. Using guerrilla war against the Spaniards during the 1950s and 1960s, the ‘Saharawis’ fought for liberating their territory from the Spanish control. In 1973, the *POLISARIO* (Popular de Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro) a military organization fighting the Spanish colonizers for the liberation of Western Sahara, was created. Being hardly hit by the *POLISARIO* and with the rise of Spanish public and international community demands to end colonial rule in the region, Spain decided in 1975 to withdraw from the Western Sahara territory, but without resolving the problem of occupation.

Before the Spanish withdrawal in 1975, the case of Western Sahara was presented at the International Court, with three parts of the conflict. Morocco claimed that the Western Sahara territory, including nowadays Mauritania, was a true Moroccan territory for hundreds of years ago in what was known the ‘Grand Morocco’. Mauritania, on the other hand, claimed that the aforementioned territory belonged to Mauritania, and it was time to restore it back. The *POLISARIO*, the official representative of the Saharawi people, claimed the independence of the territory in order to establish a free state.

Spain, in its turn, wanted to grant the territory autonomy so as to be under its control. Despite these claims, the International Court did not accept them, and issued a declaration which considered the case to be in the hands of its people and their right to auto determination (Zoubir 3).

On November, 14, 1975, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania signed the ‘Madrid Agreement’, in which the partition of the Western Sahara territory was executed between Morocco and Mauritania. Accordingly, Morocco took 2/3 of the territory (the northern part), and Mauritania got 1/3 (the southern part). Also, Spain granted 35% of the rights to invest in the Phosphate mines and freedom of fishing in the waters of Western Sahara. However, this agreement was refused by the *POLISARIO*, which accordingly, escalated its military attacks against Spain. In February 1976, the Democratic Republic of Western Sahara was announced and chose Tindouf, south of Algeria, as its temporary governmental site abroad (Zoubir 3).

When the *POLISARIO* resumed its fighting against both Morocco and Mauritania, the latter was obliged to secede from the occupied southern part to the *POLISARIA* in 1979. However, this southern part was quickly occupied by Morocco, which claimed its total sovereignty on the territory. The conflict, therefore, escalated and the fighting was carried on between the *POLISARIO* and the Moroccan army which resulted in more than 20.000 of casualties from both sides. In 1991, the UNO intervened, and a cease-fire was made between both sides. Moreover, the UNO sent the MINURSO (Mission des Nations Unies pour l’Organisation d’un Référendum au Sahara Occidental, or United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) for the organization of the referendum of auto determination in Western Sahara in 1992 (whether joining Morocco, or total independence) (Zoubir 3- 4).

However, the referendum did not take place because of the disagreement over the issue of who is entitled to vote in this referendum between Morocco and the *POLISARIO*. In its turn, the *POLISARIO* accused Morocco of bringing

tens of thousands of Moroccans into Western Sahara to turn the tide of the referendum in its favor: annexation of Western Sahara to Morocco, or to grant autonomy under the Moroccan authority. Since then, the crisis has continued despite multiple international mediation to resolve the issue.

The recent developments in the Moroccan foreign policy generally affected the path of the crisis. In order to win international recognition of its total sovereignty over the Western Sahara territory, Morocco, too, followed the road map initiated by the Gulf countries in normalizing relationships with Israel. Acting so, Moroccan policymakers realized the fact that Israeli mediation will lead directly to the US. Morocco realized that the Israeli lobby is influential in both the US administration and the UNO; so, it approached Israel through normalization of relationships, and in return, President Donald Trump, on December, 10, 2020, announced, via a tweet, that the US has now recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, saying that the US supports the Moroccan cause. Sharing a series of tweets lauding diplomatic relations between the two countries, Trump stated that “Morocco recognized the United States in 1777. It is thus fitting we recognize their sovereignty over the Western Sahara.” He signed a proclamation that recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara and reiterated US support for Morocco’s Autonomy Plan. He also tweeted: “Morocco’s serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal is the ONLY basis for a just and lasting solution for enduring peace and prosperity!” (@realDonaldTrump)

Following Trump’s tweets, the White House shared a statement to reaffirm support for Morocco’s Autonomy Plan. The White House said “The United States recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara territory and reaffirms its support for Morocco’s serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory.” The White House emphasized that the US believes an “independent Sahrawi State” is not a “realistic option” to end the Western Sahara conflict (Kasraoui).

There are three reasons why the United States' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara is a peculiar policy reversal. First, it is striking that the most substantial change in US posture towards the territory conflict should have been pursued not for its own sake, but as a price paid to persuade the Kingdom of Morocco to agree to normalize relations with Israel.

Second, the decision comes as Morocco and the *POLISARIO*, engaged in active armed conflict. This is a recent change: A 29-year-old cease- fire agreement between the two groups, which promised a democratic resolution to the conflict, collapsed in November 2020 after protests escalated to an exchange of fire. The Moroccan military responded to demonstrations blocking a road near the Mauritanian border by breaching the buffer zone between the two territories and exchanging fire with the *POLISARIO* as they evacuated civilians. Third, and most importantly, the Moroccan presence in Western Sahara is illegal – a verdict long affirmed by the UNO and many international court decisions. The UNO considers Western Sahara to be a non-self-governing territory, rendering the celebrated 1975 ‘*Green March*’, when 300,000 Moroccan civilians settled in the territory, a deliberate act of colonization (Huddleston et al.).

Shortly after Trump's tweet and the White House declaration, many countries in the world that support Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara announced that they opened about 40 consulates in Al Dakhla. Thus, from the Moroccan perspective, this is a success in gaining international claims over the disputed territory.

2.4 – Enlisting the *POLISARIO* as a Terrorist Organization

In its political and military struggle with the *POLISARIO*, Morocco has succeeded in defeating the *POLISARIO* at the diplomatic level. In fact, the lack of reaching a final resolution to the crisis for more than thirty years of fighting has had some unsuccessful steps and negative consequences

for the *POLISARIO* whose *raison d'être* is the independence of Western Sahara. Moniquet assume the *POLISARIO*'s inability to reach a solution has considerably weakened the organization, and most of its former combatants have left it and have turned to doing business in Mauritania. Despite initial military victories, the actions of the *POLISARIO* have not enabled it to reach a political settlement of the conflict because of the emergence of a certain number of issues: (1) The construction of the 'defensive wall,' which was completed in 1987, and the cease-fire signed in 1991, considerably weakened the *POLISARIO*; (2) The spirit of the troops was indeed affected by military setbacks; (3) Immediately after the cease-fire, a large number of combatants withdrew to Mauritania; and (4) On the international scene, the *POLISARIO* has suffered because of its inability to negotiate and, also, because of the changing geopolitical context (68-9).

Furthermore, Morocco has blamed the *POLISARIO*, at the international scene, of criminality. Morocco has accused the organization of misappropriating humanitarian, financial and material aid provided by NGOs, as well as by international organizations. Morocco also accused the *POLISARIO* of practicing drug trafficking in 2007; accusations which were definitely denied. In another context, the normalization of ties between Morocco and Israel can only be understood by the fact that Morocco relies on Israeli mediation to enlist the *POLISARIO* as a terrorist organization, suspecting that it has links with Al Qaeda and its branches in the Sahel. Since 9/ 11, radical Islamism has appeared as the new transnational ideology challenging the present world order. Therefore, relying on the influential Israeli lobby in the US administration and the UNO, Morocco works hard to enlist the *POLISARIO* as a terrorist organization which must be fought and eliminated because it threatens the stability in the region. In fact, Morocco works for the total liquidation of the Western Sahara issue, as the Zionist approach which is working hard for total liquidation of the Palestinian issue.

3 – The Role of the US Administration in the Normalization Process

Trump's era is regarded as a special phase in the US history. During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump, the 45th US President, has already announced to work for the famous slogan *America First*. His entire policy was entirely based on reconstructing the US through focusing on domestic issues first, and then, directing the US policy towards the exterior and world issues. So, through *America First*, he wished to achieve glory to the US. However, Trump's policy isolated the US at the international level because of his ignorance of the fact that building international partnerships and alliances is beneficial to the US. Although the US achieved some economic progress during Trump's era, the country, like many countries in the world, has been hit hard by *COVID- 19*. The Trump administration was criticized of dealing not seriously with the *COVID- 19* issue. In fact, the latter was among the factors which caused Trump's failure in the US elections, held on November 3, 2020.

In foreign policy, Trump joined the Israeli approach of rebuilding the Middle East. After withdrawing from the US-Iranian Deal, which was signed in 2015, the US proposed on Gulf countries to build an Arab-Israeli alliance to protect the Middle East and the Gulf region from the Iranian threats. That it is to say that the new approach portrays Iran as a rogue state and an enemy which constitutes a great danger to peace and instability in the region, while Israel is seen as a true neighbor and a friend to the Arabs. In regard to the Palestinian issue, the new approach adopted by the Gulf countries, Israel, and the US intends to make an end to the issue by implementing the Deal of the Century and eliminating the axis of resistance in the region, which is led by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. As a matter of fact, he proposed, during his electoral campaign to win a second presidential term, promised to end the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, and also, to win the Zionist lobby in the US elections of 2020.

It is worth recalling that Trump, in his foreign policy towards the Middle East and the Gulf region, was viewed as a nationalist and a protectionist. The normalization process that occurred between the four Arab countries

and Israel can only be understood from the sole perspective that the US administration, headed by President Donald Trump, used its role of implementing several pressures on UAE to implement Trump's vision of a new Middle East, with its countries normalizing their relationships with Israel. As a matter of fact, the UAE has distinguished relations with the US. During the Trump administration, the US- UAE relationships grew deeper and wider than ever before. Within the framework of the partnership between the two countries, the focus has been on promoting key priorities; including combating terrorism and extremism, resolving regional issues, preventing nuclear proliferation, and regional threats.

It is noteworthy that the US-Emirati relations seek to improve human rights, deterrence of regional threats, fight terrorism, and new opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges. In addition, improving relations with Israel to achieve peace between both countries has been an issue of common concern. In the Gulf region, Trump, the ex- US President, considers UAE a peacemaker and strategic dialogue holder in the region. Therefore, Trump relied on UAE to convince other Arab countries, in both the Middle East and the Gulf region, to adopt its new approach towards the Middle East through normalizing their relationships with Israel. For the Emiratis, the normalization of relations with Israel was in exchange for a deal of F- 35 drones. A week after the signing of the normalization agreement, the UAE submitted a formal request to purchase advanced F-35 drones from the US. Moreover, UAE appealed to Donald Trump to put more pressure on other Arab countries to join in the process of normalization. Accordingly, Mike Pompeo, former US Secretary of State, announced that the list of countries to normalize with Israel will include other more twenty countries, both Arab and Islamic ones (“Pompeo: Other Arab Countries Will Normalize Relations with Israel”). As a result, the Sudan and Morocco joined the process, issuing normalization agreement with Israel.

As for the Sudan, which is still troubled in its transitional phase after the overthrow of Omar Al Bashir's regime last year, it seems that the deal of

normalization with Israel was the abandonment of the US sanctions on the country (De Waal). It is worth mentioning that the Sudan suffers from multiple economic crises as a result of US and international sanctions because of the US nomination of the Sudan as state-sponsorship of terrorism, after President Omar Al Bashir hosted Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda in 1993 (“Sudan’s listing as sponsor of terrorism ended by US”). So, it was made clear that the US administration would abandon its economic sanctions and declassify the Sudan from being a state-sponsorship of terrorism in exchange for normalizing its relationships with Israel, as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the US had begun steps to remove Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, saying that this will happen soon. He also revealed the US desire for the Sudan to quickly recognize Israel. Pompeo added that the US wants all countries to recognize Israel’s existence, including the Sudan (Pamuk and Spetalnick; “Sudan and Pompeo discuss removal from terror list”).

With regard to Morocco, Donald Trump sought to provide Rabat with diplomatic support in the issue of Western Sahara, by recognizing Morocco’s sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region with the *POLISARIO*. Although this declaration was highly appreciated, at the official level, in Morocco, this declaration was closely linked to the Moroccan normalization with Israel, as it was considered that the Kingdom’s establishment of official relations with Israel was in exchange of recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. In addition, the US is negotiating to conclude arms’ deal of 4 MQ-9B advanced drones to Morocco. This deal is also linked to the agreement to normalize relations between Morocco and Israel. Therefore, it is clear that these countries, which normalized their relations with Israel, understood that to win US approval they had to normalize their relationships with Israel and join its policy of rebuilding the Middle East through the Israeli approach.

4 – Normalizing Ties with Israel: Reactions of the Neighboring Countries

It is worth recalling that Morocco's decision to normalize its relationships with Israel has caused mixed global reactions. Although Gulf and Arab countries, which are pro-Israeli rapprochement, have welcomed the normalization agreement, the Arab public opinion all over the Arab region have condemned the deal. In their turn, Palestinians have been critical to the aforementioned deal because it strengthens Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands and denial of their historical rights. For the purpose of the present paper, it is worth mentioning that the reactions of the Maghreb union countries are taken into consideration, since the agreement deal affects directly the future of building the Maghreb union.

4.1 – Algeria

Being the largest and militarily the strongest country in the region, Algeria has totally felt threatened by the Moroccan normalization process. The public opinion in Algeria, including politicians, political parties, and scholars, has condemned the normalization agreement. Accordingly, the deal is viewed as an act of humiliation. While both Palestinian and Sahrawi peoples suffer from colonization and human rights' violations, the Moroccan government has celebrated, instead, the event of normalizing its relationships with Israel to win the approval and recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. In addition, Algeria has already refused the Deal of the Century to end the Palestinian issue (Abdelaziz). Therefore, Algeria's official position towards these issues is deeply rooted in its foreign policy: 'No normalization with the Zionist entity', supporting the Palestinians to establish their own free state', and 'supporting the Sahrawi people to auto-determination.'

In this context, Abd Al Aziz Djerad, the Algerian Prime Minister, has criticized the Moroccan step of normalization with Israel. He announced that Algeria has been targeted by foreign powers which work hard to bring the Zionists close to the Algerian borders in order to destabilize the country. Furthermore, he stressed that the Moroccan step is shameful because it

brings threats to the countries of the Arab Maghreb, and makes them enter stages of unrest. In this regard, he blamed the Moroccan government for bringing the Israelis close to the Algerian borders, and they had to bear the serious consequences this decision (Associated Press).

At the military level, General Said Chengueriha, Chief- Joint- of the headquarters of the Algerian Army, announced in a meeting held at the Ministry of Defense that:

I am totally convinced that the Algerian Army ... possesses the skills and experiences that is acquired during the civil war the several tough moments Algeria has passed through. Therefore, the Algerian Army is, nowadays, ready to confront the several threats and challenges that Algeria will face the future. (Boubartakh 8)

He added:

These challenges are great and dangerous, and; in the meantime, require from us to live up to the greatness of Algeria. Throughout history, the fate of Algeria has been facing the several threats and challenges and eliminate them at whatever costs. (Boubartakh 9)

Moreover, the Chief-Joint-of the headquarters, in his visit to the third military region of Bechar, southwest of Algeria and near the borders of Morocco, on January, 17 and 18, 2021, launched and supervised military tactic trainings; namely, 'Al Hazm 2021', which aimed at testing the combat readiness of the different military units, as well as training the military commanders and the corps of (1) directing the military operations, (2) developing their knowledge abilities in planning, (3) making appropriate preparations, and (4) organizing and executing in real combats (Mosadaq 8).

These statements and military tactic trainings can only be explained as direct messages to Moroccan policymakers that despite Algeria has been targeted and threatened by foreign powers, and the Israelis, it will use all its military capabilities to eliminate these threats that the country will face.

4.2 – Tunisia

Like the rest of the Arab peoples, Tunisians refused the agreement of normalization between Morocco and Israel. It is regarded as a denial of the Palestinian right to establish their free state. At the official level, Hichem Al Mechichi, Tunisian PM, says his country has no intention of following in Morocco's footsteps and normalize ties with Israel. In an interview, Al Mechichi said: "For Tunisia, the question is not on the agenda," but insisted it nevertheless respected the kingdom's choice. "Every country has its own reality, its own truth and its own diplomacy, which it considers best for its people." Al Mechichi added. "We respect Morocco's choice, Morocco is a sister country that we love very much." ('Normalisation with Israel "not on Agenda", says Tunisian PM').

4.3 – Mauritania

In Mauritania, a number of politicians and activists have expressed their rejection of Morocco's decision to normalize relations with Israel, expressing concern at the same time that their country will join this path. The 'National Bond for the Support of the Palestinian People' stated that it followed 'with deep regret the news of the normalization decision between Morocco and the Zionist entity that occupies the holy land of Palestine and its holy sites' (Ouled China).

The Moroccan decision of normalization with Israel shocked the 'National Bond for the Support of the Palestinian People', a local committee for support of the Palestinians. It stated that 'the Moroccan- Israeli normalization agreement is deniable and unacceptable. Furthermore, the committee expressed its condemnation of the 'unprecedented pressure from the US President, who made the liquidation of the Palestinian issue one of his first priorities, adopting the policy of the Zionist extremist of Netanyahu' (Ouled China).

After Morocco's decision, the Mauritians feared that their country would take a similar step, since the Mauritanian regime has been under great pressure in recent months to join the ranks of the printing press. It is stated that these pressures began in Riyadh, KSA, during the visit made by the Mauritanian President Mohamed Ouled Al-Ghazwani months ago. It is also certain that the contact that the US Secretary of State made two months ago with the Mauritanian President fell in the same context, especially since this contact followed the ones the US Secretary made with the Sudan. Therefore, Mauritania is thought to join the ranks of the countries which normalized with Israel (Ouled China).

It is worth mentioning that Mauritania had previously established diplomatic relations with Israel during the era of former President Muawiya Ouled Taya, before former President Mohamed Ouled Abdel Aziz made a decision to break the relationship between Mauritania and Israel in 2009 in protest to the Israeli war waged against Gaza, during which the Israeli ambassador was expelled from the country.

4.4 – The *POLISARIO*

The US decision which recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara shocked the *POLISARIO*, which issued an official statement declaring that Trump's declaration will not change the legal status of the Sahrawi case. In its statement, the *POLISARIO* stated that, 'the *POLISARIO* condemns in the strongest terms the decision by outgoing US President Donald Trump to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.' The *POLISARIO* added, 'the position announced by Trump constitutes a flagrant violation of the UNO Charter and obstructs the efforts of the international community to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict between both sides' ("An angry *POLISARIO* comment on US recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara"). Moreover, António Guterres, the UN Secretary- General, announced that his position will not change on Western Sahara and that 'a solution to this issue can still be found on the basis of the UN Security

Council resolutions’ (“UN position on Western Sahara ‘Unchanged’ Following US Move”).

5 – The Implications of Moroccan Normalization of Ties with Israel

The US recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara in return for the resumption of its relations with Israel is a formula that is seen as a concession of one of the country’s foreign policy constants. Although the news was surprising, it was also expected following the events during the past months. Morocco’s normalization of relations with Israel, albeit partially, according to the Moroccan assertion, did not come out randomly. Over the course of 2020, there were clear indications for this settlement, since a US report exclusively reported that Israel sought to persuade Donald Trump, the US President, to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, in return for Moroccan normalization of relations with Israel (Ravid). Although Morocco gained US recognition over the Western Sahara territory, its normalization agreement will result in serious consequences in the region. It will specifically threaten security and relationships with the neighboring countries.

5.1 – The Future of the Maghreb Union

It is worth recalling that the Moroccan step of normalizing its relationships with Israel aroused resentment, and was largely condemned by the Arab public opinion, especially in the Maghreb whose peoples dream to build. Since Morocco has normalized its relationships with Israel, it provided legality to the Israelis and their criminal acts towards the Palestinians. In return, it gained claim of its sovereignty over the Western Sahara territory. What makes matters worse is the fact that Morocco is straightening its position with Israeli support, especially, in a way that it seems clear to make Israel intervene in the region’s problems so as to become an important actor in the region. This, in fact, will encourage other countries of the region approach other super powers. An approach that will result in the rise of

proxy wars in the region. With the Moroccan normalization agreement, it becomes clear that the Maghreb regions, like the Middle East, is also threatened by the *Creative Chaos Theory*.

The concept; in fact, provides a clear overview of the way of thinking which characterizes the US strategic mind in conducting US foreign policy and dealing with international issues. Ideologically, Creative Chaos theory is a political doctrine which means the formation of a political situation after a period of intended chaotic events led by a group of a people for the sake of adjusting issues to their own agenda. Strategically, Creative Chaos is more related to crisis management. In this context, the concept means the science/ or art of creating and fabricating crises and administer them successfully to achieve certain objectives. To achieve these ends, Creative Chaos theory dismantles the targeted system so that it becomes easy to reach its essential components, which leads to total collapse of the system, and reconstruct it in a way that it reflects the intended interests (Schumpeter 82- 3).

The concept was; in fact, introduced by Condoleezza Rice, former US Secretary of State, during her press briefing at the State Department, on July 21, 2006, when she was questioned on the initiatives, she intended to take to bring peace back to Lebanon.

She responded:

What we are seeing here, in a sense, is the growing- the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one. ('Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe: Secretary Condoleezza Rice', 2006)

Being a staple of US foreign policy after 9/11 attacks, Creative Chaos is a strategy used by the US administration, in which the US tries to destroy nations in sharp contrast to its aims and interests. As a matter of fact, the US administration uses a range of tools; such as, media propaganda, and domestic and international lobbyists to cause creative chaos in an attempt to achieve its goal in other

nations. Therefore, the theory of Creative Chaos is a series of instructions in policymaking on which the US administration relies to execute its policies in order to achieve its objectives and aims in the Middle East. It has the aim of fragmenting large countries into smaller ones as a way of constructing a more divided, weak states with fragile political institutions. Moreover, these new states will be always dependent of strong foreign countries for help ('Constructive Chaos Theory: When Terrorism is of Much Avail to US').

As a true example of implementing the theory of Creative Chaos, the current situation of Iraq presents a clear proof of how the US used the aforementioned theory successfully to destroy the Iraqi state and rebuilding it. There has been an impending collapse of the Iraqi government, which lost its power and influence in the Iraqi political arena. Consequently, its weakness led to establish an integrated government that caused Iraq to lose control of its institutions and security services. Moreover, it would inevitably damage the existing state structure. The Iraqi forces failed to suppress ISIS, in addition to its incapability to prevent the Iraqi government from controlling the sectarian conflict between the Shiite and Sunni people (Renad 5- 6). After Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Maghreb countries are next in the agenda. The target now is Algeria which refused to normalize with Israel.

After Morocco's normalization with Israel, the dream of the Arab Maghreb Union and unification of its peoples, which witnessed many difficulties, became more complicated, and almost impossible. The Moroccan normalization step was seen as a murder of the Maghreb union integration project. On the other hand, what Morocco has done has undermined all hope for the establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union, whose leaders agreed to leave the Western Sahara issue to the United Nations to organize the referendum. The Maghreb union, which is clinically dead, has no hope of continuing, and every country in the Maghreb union has to search for its own interests away from being integrated into the Maghreb union. The future of the Maghreb union, and under the current ruling regimes, was a far-

reaching objective, but with the step taken by Morocco, it was completely extinguished. Morocco, under the cover of its sovereignty over the Western Sahara and its keenness on preserving its territorial integrity, abandoned the Palestinian cause, in exchange for Trump's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara.

The implications of the Moroccan normalization agreement will (1) deepen conflicts between the neighboring countries, (2) reinforce the position of Algeria, which has always maintained its reservations in dealing with Morocco, (3) fuel conflicts in the region, (4) exclude the possibility of reaching a peaceful resolution to the Sahrawi issue, and (5) establish a common unified Maghreb market. Both national sovereignty and logic impose on the countries of the Maghreb union to request the change of the headquarters of the General Secretary of the Maghreb union from Morocco and to transfer it to another country.

The realization of the Maghreb Union was obstructed by many obstacles related to the different policymaking of the countries. Historically, there have been major conflicts between Algeria and Morocco over the issue of the Western Sahara. There were conflicts between Libya and Tunisia in the 1980s. Therefore, differences were already present, and the regimes in the region have undergone transformations which affected democratic change. Algeria has suffered from terrorism for a decade in the 1990s, and Libya's options were different at the strategic level and its position at the international level. Thus, the internal conditions of the Maghreb countries prevented rapprochement towards the establishment of the Maghreb union. Tunisia and Morocco were closer to Western liberalism. On the other hand, Algeria and Libya adopted socialism. Tunisia has experienced the Arab Spring, Libya has undergone armed movements, Algeria has witnessed a peaceful movement recently, and the Moroccan experience has known political reforms. Thus, the normalization agreement added fuel to the flame. The Maghreb union remains ineffective like the Arab League. As the peoples of the region still dream, especially in light of global conglomerations,

there is no other option than establishing the Maghreb union, but who will implement the future project?

5.2 – Israeli Infiltration into the Countries of the Region

In regard to the historical and special ties between Morocco and Israel, Morocco has been, since 1980s, the sole gateway to Israel's penetration and infiltration into the Arab Maghreb and Arab countries. It was the basis of the Israeli Mossad. King Hassan II opened Morocco to the Mossad and hired Andre Azoulay, the Zionist banker of Moroccan origin, who worked hard to facilitate the Israeli presence in Morocco and in various parts of the Maghreb countries (Gideon; Bennour; "Hassan II et son fils Mohammed 6 agents du Mossad").

It is worth mentioning that Algeria is the most prominent and powerful country in the Maghreb region due to its potential, natural resources, its distinguished strategic and geographical location. Therefore, it was a target of the Israeli Mossad. The Zionist entity considers Algeria as a first-degree enemy. Israeli officials have regarded Houari Boumediene, the former Algerian President, as one of worst enemies to Israel because of his total support to the Palestinian cause. Therefore, Israel does not hesitate to destroy Algeria's security and stability through numerous espionage activities in order to weaken Algeria and make Israel infiltrate thoroughly in the Maghreb region. Israel also works hard in order that Algeria will not be the most powerful, militarily, country in the Mediterranean region. It is worth recalling that Israel employed an espionage satellite to operate on the Algerian territory. The Israeli intelligence released photos of air missile bases near Algiers. *Defense Update* published images taken by the espionage satellite *Eros B*, showing military installations in Algiers surrounded by air defense systems to protect important government centers; such as, the Presidency Palace and the Ministry of Defense ("Satellite Imagery Uncovers New S-300 Sites in Algeria").

Since the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, the Israeli Mossad intensified its activities in Tunisia. It formed three active espionage units in the capital

Tunis, Djerba, and Sousse to practice espionage activities in Algeria and Libya. The CIA helped the Mossad to activate these units which consist of young spies who were instructed to monitor a number of targets and collect various information about various security, political, and economic issues, and strategic locations. The Mossad network in Tunisia focuses on four goals: (1) building networks of sabotage and incitement, (2) monitoring what is happening in Algeria and Libya, (3) monitoring Palestinian activities in Tunisia, and (4) tracking Islamic movements. Algeria remains amongst the few Arab countries that Israel has never been capable of spying on especially in the field of the military and the development of nuclear technology (Roi).

The Israeli Mossad has been trying to infiltrate Algeria and conduct espionage activities on its various sectors as a preliminary step to carry out operations within the framework of the Israeli plan that tries to access all the data related to Arab and Islamic countries, seeking to weaken it in order to consecrate Israel as the sole powerful state in the region. General Amos Yadlin, who held the position of Director of Israeli Military Intelligence *Aman* (2006-2010), stated that the Zionist security forces had monitored more than 300 espionage operations between Israeli agents and Moroccan collaborators from the Moroccan territory, in a massive operation against Algeria, with the help of the Moroccan regime which supported the activities in order to destabilize Algeria (“Mossad’s war on Algeria”).

5.3 – The Rising of Tensions between Morocco and the Neighboring Countries

For the Moroccans, Algeria is to blame for causing instability in the region for its total support of the *POLISARIO*. i. e. It was Algeria which created the *POLISARIO* and the Western Sahara issue. The struggle has already existed between Algeria and Morocco, since every regime has built its political ideology on hostility towards the other. It is worth recalling that the Moroccan regime still claims lands in the Algerian territory, and has intention to restore them. So, shortly after the independence of Algeria in

1962, Morocco launched the ‘Desert’s War’ in 1963 in an attempt to restore litigious lands. Although the Moroccan regime was helped by the Israeli Mossad, it was unable to restore the claimed lands. Although relationships were resumed in the 1980s, terrorist attacks in 1994 in Marrakech made the Moroccan regime accuse Algeria as being the instigator of the attacks. Since then, borders were closed and relationships deteriorated.

As a matter of fact, there has been an arms’ race between both countries. However, Algeria remains the dominant country in the region, with its military capabilities. It is worth mentioning that through the normalization agreement with Israel, Morocco seeks to conclude arms’ deals with both Israel and the US in order to strengthen its military capabilities. On the other hand, Algeria is militarily linked to the ex-USSR; Russia nowadays, for Algeria adopted socialism after its independence, which strengthened its bi-lateral relations with Russia. In regard to its foreign policy, Russia has renewed its doctrine of military alliances with its allied countries, which are rich in natural resources in order to strengthen their military capabilities. Russia succeeded to turn Venezuela into an important military power in Latin America. It acted likewise with Algeria so as to remain a strong regional power in the region by renewing its military capabilities with M S 400 air missile defense, *ISKANDAR* missiles, and other military capabilities. Therefore, the arms’ race between the two countries indicates that both countries will engage in a military confrontation, whether directly, or indirectly. In fact, both countries have engaged in a long cold war.

5.4 – The Rise of Terrorism: Targeting both Moroccan and Israeli Strategic Interests in the Region

As an international phenomenon, almost all countries in the world suffered from terrorism. With no exception, the Arab countries of the Middle East and the Arab Maghreb suffered, too from the rising tide of terrorism. Al-Qaeda, a leading Jihadist organization, has targeted both US and Israeli interests in the world by their terrorist attempts. Moreover, the return of Moroccan ISIS

fighters back to Morocco constitutes a real threat to Moroccan authorities in the sense of preventive measures in order to face the threat. The return of ISIS fighters to Morocco will enable terrorist units to be reformulated and grow again in order to attack both Israeli and Moroccan interests. With the Moroccan normalization agreement with Israel, terrorism will strike again, whether in Morocco or in other countries, to destroy both Moroccan and Israeli interests. This will, in fact, provide a justifiable reason for terrorist groups to rise and strike again.

5.4.1 – The Future of Western Sahara Territory: Resuming Military Confrontation between the *POLISARIO* and Morocco

It is worth recalling that the price for the Moroccan normalization agreement with Israel was Western Sahara: Morocco's normalization of relationships with Israel in return for claiming sovereignty over the Western Sahara territory. After 29 years of cease-fire between Morocco and the *POLISARIO*, military confrontations were resumed recently, even a month before the Normalization agreement, when the clash broke out in Al Guergarat border between Western Sahara and Mauritania. The reasons behind the clash outbreak differed. On the one hand, Morocco claimed that they fought the *POLISARIO* fighters for days-long blockade of the road, holding up 200 trucks, and threatening to deteriorate trade with Mauritania. On the other hand, the *POLISARIO* front claimed that they fought the Moroccan troops in revenge for their attempt to open Al Guergarat standoff by force, and for attacking the Sahrawi civilians who protested peacefully against Morocco's colonization in the area. As a result of the skirmish, fighting was resumed, and the *POLISARIO* accused the Moroccan regime to break the cease- fire agreement. Moreover, it declared war on Morocco, as announced by Mohammed Salem Ouled Salah, Sahrawi Foreign Minister, "war has begun, and the Moroccan regime has abandoned cease-fire. We are in defensive position to counter Moroccan forces' attacks" (Dahir).

With the resumption of military confrontations, international fears and concerns were expressed about enlarging the conflict's zone between the *POLISARIO* and the Moroccan regime (“Fears Grow of New Western Sahara War between Morocco and Polisario Front”). In his address to the UN Security Council, Ibrahim Ghali, the President of Western Sahara and the Secretary General of the *POLISARIO*, blamed the international community which remained silent towards Moroccan violations and colonial practices in the Western Sahara territory. He also blamed the Moroccan regime and held it accountable for repercussions of its military activities. Ibrahim Ghali appealed to Antonio Guterres, UNO Secretary General, to schedule the Western Sahara issue at the UN Security Council (“Polisario blames UN for ‘political deadlock’ over Western Sahara”).

As a matter of fact, ending cease-fire indicates that the war was resumed between the *POLISARIO* and Morocco, but in favor of the *POLISARIO*. The Moroccan regime used force to open Al Guergarat standoff in order to resume trade route with Mauritania and West Africa because (1) Moroccan economy was hit hard by COVID6 19, and (2) competition with Algeria which opened a trade route with Mauritania through Tindouf, south of Algeria. Besides, Morocco lives in social unrest because of demand protest movements in the Kingdom. There are also international accusations of Morocco because of violations of human rights in the Western Sahara. Another factor which motivates the *POLISARIO* is the fact that the Moroccan regime violates Moroccan legality in the Western Sahara issue by encouraging world countries to support its claim of Western Sahara as a Moroccan territory, and inciting them to establish consulates in the disputed territory. Therefore, resuming the conflict between both sides escalates and drive the issue towards proxy war in the region, and the conflict will notice the intervention of foreign powers in favor of both Morocco and the *POLISARIO*. This, indeed, complicates the issue and leaves no chances for diplomacy to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Conclusion

The present paper analyzed the Moroccan normalization agreement with Israel and its implications on the future of the Maghreb Union. Although the normalization agreement, which claimed Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara, was critical to the Algerian foreign policy in the region, it is regarded as a barter deal brokered by Donald Trump, the ex- US President, who intended to serve Israel and pose a *fait accompli* for the newly elected US administration.

In fact, the US administration, under Biden's presidency, did not reject the Moroccan normalization agreement with Israel. It approved the Moroccan-Israeli normalization agreement because of the Zionist lobby's influence in US politics, despite the Democrats' ideology towards the Arab regimes. In his press briefing at the Department of State on February 23, 2021 Ned Price, US Department of State Spokesman, announced "We welcome the new steps Morocco is taking to improve their relations with Israel. They will have long term benefits for both countries. We will continue to support the UN Process to implement adjusting, lasting solution to this long- standing dispute... ." ("Daily Press Briefing"). However, in regard to the US declaration of Western Sahara as Moroccan territory, it has been recently blocked by the US administration because this declaration will not solve the problem of the disputed territory. Moreover, Ned Price stated in the press briefing "We also support the work of the mission of the UN for the referendum in Western Sahara to monitor the cease fire and prevent violence in the area." ("Daily Press Briefing").

For decades, the US has insisted on solving the Sahrawi issue within the international legitimacy: the MUNIRSO organizing a referendum for self-determination. So, with the US declaration of Western Sahara as Moroccan territory, the US foreign policy will face serious critics from Russia, the EU, and other countries, which will, in return, not trust US foreign policymaking in regard to world crises. In addition, Moroccan policymakers knew that the

US declaration on Western Sahara will not bring a resolution to the issue. However, it will become clear that Moroccan normalization agreement was achieved under Emirati and Saudi pressures. In the case of Morocco, the US is expected to withdraw its declaration, but; in return, it will provide Morocco with other viable options; such as, arms' deal, economic investments and commercial deals, strengthening Morocco's position against Algeria, and helping Morocco to play a pivotal role in the Maghreb region and Africa.

Although the normalization agreement was totally rejected by the mass population in Morocco and the neighboring countries, it will boost Moroccan-Israeli relationships, both economically and militarily. This will strengthen Morocco's position in the region. Algeria will challenge with its western borders with the Israeli presence, and the danger of a war to break out between both sides is plausible, as it was recently resumed between the *POLISARIO* and Morocco. All these circumstances will have negative impacts on reviving the building of the Maghreb union. The Moroccan step of normalization represents a strong proof that each country in the region has sought its own efforts and relied on its sole approach to conduct its foreign policy making at the expense of the future of the Arab Maghreb Union and the hopes of the peoples of the region.

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