

**The United States, Iran's Revolution, and the USSR Communist Phantom:
The Linchpins that Triggered the Emergence of the Moroccan
"Modern" Armed Forces from 1979 to 1982? ☐**

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Abstract

The ghost of the USSR was one of the most important weapons used throughout the Cold War. This phantom made the US act almost immediately, helping his allies or to outmanoeuvring his political opponents. In the case of Iran, it made the US try to solve a deep social/economic problem by showering Iran with military and economic aid, which would prove to be fatal.

Moroccan king Hassan II, an expert and savvy political manipulator, would use his position as a US proxy agent to manoeuvre in the shadows within the Arab-speaking world and Africa. This position came to be in full effect when Morocco invaded Western Sahara, with the confidence that it would be a short affair. This proved to be difficult, almost impossible, as a short war became a long one. However, when in 1979, Iran, a stable political ally of the US, plummeted there were a shift in the US politics. The very public rhetoric branding Polisario as a communist agent proved to be a stepping stone into reverting an almost lost war into a stalemate. The US, not wanting a replication of what happened in Iran to happen in Morocco, changed its policies. Polisario was now seen as a threat to the Moroccan Regime. Therefore, trying to prevent possible proxy problems such as

☐ DOI: 10.21747/21846251/jour3a2

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internal un-ruling and uprisings that could lead to the fall of the kingdom, the US used the Iranian solution: military and economic aid.

Keywords: Morocco, USSR, US, Iran Revolution, Cold War, Weapons Trade.



1. Introduction

A worldwide chess game ensued immediately after the end of WWII. Risen from the change in geopolitics, the World saw the creation of two major blocks. The Western Block, led by the United States (US) and the Eastern Block, led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This division created an atmosphere of asymmetrical warfare which was exploited by the two superpowers, where the "Third World were likely to become the principal battlegrounds for the Cold War during the decades ahead." (Little 194). The USSR was viewed as "[...] a mortal threat to the United States and that dictated global vigilance against Russian-backed communist subversion, U.S. policymakers [...]" (Little 117). This period, between 1947 and 1991, became known as the Cold War.

Communism was seen as a major threat to Western Democracies, capitalism, and Western Values. Hence, the US "[...] waged a Cold War against the Kremlin from the sun-drenched shores of the Eastern Mediterranean to the snow-capped mountains of Afghanistan." (Little 117). Within this logical framework, the Middle East was seen as the gateway to the control of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. As it also holds another important resource, oil. If it falls into the hands of the USSR, the Kremlin's sphere of influence would be guaranteed access to those resources, as all the geopolitical and military advantages of the region (Little 216). This would also compromise the defence of one of the US's most important allies, Israel.

The strategies were simple in design but very complex to implement. As the smoulders of WWII were still fading out, the Allies started to drift apart, and the USSR, the great victor in Europe, started to consolidate its power in Eastern Europe. In response, in 1949, a coalition of European nations, the US and Canada, created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1955, the USSR and the seven socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe signed the Warsaw Pact (WP) as a direct response to

NATO. This period was characterised by indirect intervention via proxy wars, economic influence, and trade agreements, creating an asymmetric war environment. The focus was to negate advantages, utilise the enemies' vulnerabilities, avoid attrition, and exploit the initiative (Eaton 52). Why enter a direct confrontation, where the most important resources of a nation would be depleted when it is possible to gain a strategic advantage?

After the Suez Canal Crisis and the continuous rise of communist sympathisers in the region. Securing key strategic points such as Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia became even more important (Santos, 184). The US strategy passed through an "improvement of quality of life and modernization" to stop the spreading of communism (Little 195). This would be achieved by inciting social reforms, economic growth, and the spread of western-style democracies. The US would provide the necessary help².

In this paper, we will try to see the ripple effect caused by the fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, had on the US foreign policies to fight against communism. For this, we will go through the change in stance towards another US strategic partner in Africa, Morocco. By analysing the US and Morocco's weapons sales and military agreements between 1960 and 1980.

2. The decline of the Iranian State

The US applied an economic approach in trying to maintain the Middle East away from communist hands. However, this strategy will be proven, at the same time, plentifully and fruitless. For example, after years of being pro-west, Iraq would fall into a prolonged dictatorship that would be pro-soviet at the start (Little 202-203). Later, when Saddam Hussein grabbed the reins of power, it became a more traditional-religious-based dictatorship (Little 206). So, when we analyse the US policies in Iran, we

² Either through military assistance and loans or through Financial Assistance Programs, grants, and direct financial aid, depending on which administration was in power.

see that "Nowhere in the Middle East did the United States push more consistently for reform and modernization after 1945 than in Iran, and nowhere did America fail more spectacularly." (Little 215).

On the 25th of August 1945, an Anglo-Soviet coalition invaded Iran and deposed Reza Shah Pahlavi. The objective was clear, remove a Nazi sympathiser from power³, and protect the USSR's southern flank. Replacing him with Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, his twenty-one-year-old son (Little 215). The US would counterbalance both by being the one that helped the young Shah to consolidate his power. Immediately focusing on the 20 million Iranians that were impoverished and abused by the Majlis⁴ (Little 215). Despite all US efforts, the problem subsisted by the Shah only focusing on security, prompting the US to "encouraged the Iranian government to focus on political and economic reform, as opposed to national security, which, to all intent and purposes, was taken care of by America." (Murray 2).

In the 1950s, the Tudeh Party, a left-wing party with ties to the USSR led by Mohammed Mossadegh⁵, tried to take over Iran despite being in charge by trying to steer the country towards left-wing policies. Like the nationalisation of the AIOC. This prompted the intervention of the Iranian army, with secret/covert support of the US, which restored the power of the Shah and the country to a right-wing political course on 19th August 1953 (Little 217). A US analyst would later confirm that the failed attempt by the Tudeh Party was a direct result of the abject poverty Iranians still lived in (Murray 3). Moreover, the US support to the Shah, via the support for the coup d'état, put them in the middle of the brewing storm. In 1958, despite the US State Department putting together a 125M USD stimulus package,

³ To protect the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) a British oil company.

⁴ Majlis were the Iranian parliamentary elites that controlled the land.

⁵ A sixty-nine-year-old Majli.

the Shah asked instead for military aid. Stating the fear of a new Communist Party due to the new Iraqi government's influence (Little 217).

In the 1960s, Presidents Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy (JFK) ordered a review of Iran's situation. And both teams bore the same conclusion "Unless the Shah embarked upon widespread and pervasive social, economic and political reform, he would lose control of Iran." (Murray 4). The JFK Administration, proposed a plan of action based on "[...] appoint Ali Amini, a pro-Western technocrat [...] stimulating growth, redistributing land, and cleaning up corruption [...]" (Little 219).

However, the Shah had become increasingly more worried about his safety, although he believed that Iran was on the verge of becoming a powerhouse in the Persian Gulf. Such reform would only hinder his supporters (Little 219). This attitude led to several meetings and pressure from Washington, resulting in 1963 in the so-called White Revolution (1973-1979), that is "a series of reforms designed to address some of the most egregious social and economic problems but without similar progress on the political front." (Murray 4). As long this revolution maintained the feeling that it was local and occurred in the local timeframe, not as an American-imposed one, it had a chance to succussed.

With the assassination of President JFK on the 22nd of November 1963, Vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) became the 36th President of the United States. This unforeseeable occurrence made the situation in Iran flip out of control. LBJ was less interested in dealing with the Shah, and more preoccupied with the situation in southeast Asia (Murray 4). The result was a Shah that became more defiant with the US⁶ in public, claiming that he was the true responsible for Iran's progress. At the same time, in private, "It was by now a relationship bound by so many ties that the US could ask for and be granted an immunity law that effectively gave carte blanche to

⁶ Albeit Iran needed to import weapons from the US, and need to export oil.

American citizens of all hues in Iran.” (Murray 4). The “security situation” escalated to the point that the White House believed that the Shah “was justified in citing the Soviet threat as a reason for his substantial military purchases.” (Murray 5). The CIA formed and trained the SAVAK⁷, and increased weapons sales and military exchange programs.

During the Nixon Presidency, Iran had become the go-to ally in the Middle East, especially against the USSR's influence in the region. And between 1962 and 1970

“US–Iranian relations reached an apex. [...] this resulted in a 600 per cent increase in Iran's military expenditure and a 10-fold increase in US military sales to Iran. [...] At the same time, increasingly segregated US personnel in Iran (largely tied to the military equipment sales and training) exacerbated the underlying tensions in Iran.” (Murray 5).

Iran was now allowed to buy any type of weaponry, except Nuclear, from the US. The regional political influence of Iran became so entrenched with the American anti-communist sentiment that they, with the blessing of the Ford Administration, intervened in Afghanistan in favour of Mohammed Daoud Khan in July 1973. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi offered a “\$400 million loan to encourage political reform, strengthen Afghanistan's economic infrastructure, and accelerate Kabul's tilt toward the West.” (Little 223). This program was not appreciated and led to violent protests all over Afghanistan in 1975. Not from communists but Islamic landowners and clergy that fled to Pakistan due to the heavy persecution (Little 223).

Internally, the continuous overreliance on the US and the almost state of impunity Americans enjoy, enhanced by SAVAK's continuous violent repression, foster even further the anti-American sentiment within Iran's population (Murray 7).

⁷ The Pahlavi dynasty secret police, formed in 1956 to protect the Shah, that turned to be a source of contest, contempt and hate due to its interrogation practices.

The protests against the “White Revolution” started in 1963. Being Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini⁸ a leading figure. (Little 220). Protesting against “American-backed initiatives as secular education, women’s rights, and land reform as affronts to Islamic tradition” (Little 220). With this rhetoric, he gathered around him the disenfranchised of the major cities of Iran. The first wave of repercussions happened almost immediately. With the blessing of US diplomats, “the shah ordered a brutal crackdown that left more than 1,000 Iranians dead and then placed Khomeini and dozens of other clerics under house arrest.” (Little 220) led by the SAVAK. Six months later, when Khomeini resumed his rhetoric, the Shah had him exiled⁹.

On January 8th 1978, a group of students and mullahs, supporters of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, started a protest against the Shah. Government forces gunned them down, and two dozen were killed. This led to a wave of protests and violent repressions. On September 8th, a group of “20,000 pro-Khomeini protesters gathered in Tehran’s Jaleh square, killing 400 and wounding 4,000. Angry students, shopkeepers, and mullahs responded by organizing even bigger protests against Pahlavi rule.” (Little 224).

Despite the visible escalations of the violence, the US still denied the problem and supported the Shah. This was the start of the countdown to the end. Marked by the realisation by the Carter Administration that Shah’s policies, brutal repression of protesters, and dependency on the US, while publicly maintaining the version that he was in control, made Iran a loose cannon. Trying to avert a civil war, “President Carter rejected last-minute calls for an American-backed military takeover in Tehran and quietly encouraged the shah to leave the country instead. [...] On 16 January 1979 Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi bid his unruly subjects farewell and departed for exile in Egypt.” (Little 226).

⁸ A right-wing conservative unknown muslim clergyman in the holy city of Qom.

⁹ First in Turkey and then in Iraq.

3. Morocco, Iran's shadow in Northern Africa for the United States?

While believing the danger would come from outside Iran, especially the communist sphere of influence. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's rhetoric and its acceptance by the population proved two points:

- 1) Iran's fall came from the inside, not the outside.
- 2) The US and the Shah were blind to the problem.

And while still blaming outside communist forces, Iran's bubbling situation worsened to the point of a revolution-enforced change. So, we must ask, was there another country within the logical structure of the Cold War where the US applied the same policies? The answer is yes, Morocco.

Although the relations between Morocco and the United States date to 1777 (United States Government). The figure Sultan Sidi Muhammad Ben Abdullah¹⁰, sought and formerly sign an official treaty in 1786 (Roberts & Tull 249; U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Morocco). The actual modern relation started with WWII when the US used Morocco as a Logistics platform during the war. The relationship flourished after it, and now it is common to see US Navy ships call ports in Morocco's Atlantic shore (Solarz 293), both countries doing joint military exercises. Morocco was even designated, in 2004, as a Major Non- NATO Ally, by the US. As we see in Table 1¹¹, between 1950 and 2021, US exports of weaponry to Morocco represented 42.2%, making the US the number 1 provider of military weaponry to Morocco.

¹⁰ Modern Morocco didn't exist at that time, so we cannot say that it was the Moroccan State that sign the treaty, we can only say that it was Sultan Sidi Muhammad Ben Abdullah that sign it.

¹¹ The USSR cease to exist in 1991, so the data shown in Table 1 for the USSR will only go up to 1991.

Although, despite their long relationship, the first weapons trade treaty was signed in 1960¹², with one of its major clauses being “prohibiting use of U.S. arms by Morocco outside its internationally recognized borders, and the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which limits to defensive purposes the use of American weapons by recipients of military aid” (Zunes 425).

Signed amid the Cold War, the US-Morocco agreement was part of the fight against the communist Soviet area of influence in Africa and to protect NATO’s Southern flank (Saidy 87). At that time, both Libya and Algeria had significant diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union (Hodges 254). Morocco is at a very strategic point. Located in the northern part of Africa, right next to the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea, which means that: 1) no ship can enter or leave the Mediterranean without passing through Moroccan territorial waters; 2) makes this country a point of entry into Africa.

As a political player, “[...] has long had a special place in U.S. diplomacy and strategic planning.” (Jensen 1), and vice-versa. Morocco intervened quite a lot in favour of the US interests.

In Africa, they intervened in 1) the Shaba crisis of 1977-1978¹³ (Solarz, 293; Santos, 185); 2) Hosted a joint military training facility with the US¹⁴; 3) the Comoro Islands in 1982¹⁵; 4) Benin in 1979¹⁶; 5) Equatorial Guinea in 1979¹⁷ (Zunes 434).

¹² This is confirmed when we analyze the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) database for Morocco’s overall imports of weapons.

¹³ Sending troops to help squash a communist rebel coup, trained in Angola, into Zaire.

¹⁴ Where members of UNITA, MNR and MMD were trained.

¹⁵ Moroccan armed forces have played a significant role in overthrowing the government.

¹⁶ the forces that tried a coup d’état were trained in Morocco.

¹⁷ Moroccan forces were sent in support of Colonel Teodoro Nguema Mbasago, after his coup d’état.

In the Middle East, 1) helped to establish the first contacts between Israel and Egypt¹⁸ (Solarz 293); 2) Military intervention against Israel in 1973¹⁹; 3) Lebanon in November 1973²⁰. In 1982 King Hassan was chosen as the Arab League representative for a meeting with President Reagan during the Fez Summit 1981 (Zunes 433-434). For its troubles, Morocco received, between 1963 and 1983, more than 1 billion USD in aid from the US (Hodges 355) and the "shadow" protection of a superpower (Zunes 436). Overall "the United States gave more economic and military aid to Morocco than to any other African country since the end of World War II, with the exception of Egypt." (Jensen 2).

Although the clear pro-western politics, Morocco had economic agreements with the USSR, in particular,

"[...] on March 10, 1978, it sealed a multi-billion-dollar deal [...] The USSR agreed to export oil, chemicals, timbre and ore-carrier ships to Morocco in return for phosphates and phosphoric acid over a period of thirty years and to finance an estimated \$2-billion investment in the development of a new phosphate mine at Meskala [...]" (Hodges 355).

Algeria had a closer diplomatic and economic tie with the USSR and could not come close to those values. And if we look at the data shown in Table 1, we see that the USSR was the ninth largest arms exporter to Morocco, with 85 Million USD, representing 1.3% of the Top 10 biggest exporters.

¹⁸ Which ultimately would lead to the Camp David Agreements and the 1979 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel

¹⁹ Morocco still holds secret meetings and was considered one of Israel's closest contacts within the Arab-speaking world.

²⁰ Morocco offered to send 3900 troops for a peacekeeping mission to President Amin Gemayel.

Table 01 – Top 10 Countries that sold weapons to Morocco between 1950-2021

Position	Supplier	Total of Weapon Sales (\$ Million US) 1950-2021	Percentage
1	United States	4794	42.20%
2	France	4017	35.30%
3	Netherlands	572	5.00%
4	Spain	498	4.40%
5	China	478	4.20%
6	Italy	448	3.90%
7	Belarus	17	1.50%
8	Russia	156	1.40%
9	Soviet Union	142	1.30%
10	Austria	85	0.70%
	Total	11356	

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14, https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php.

By virtue of Hassan II disavowal of the USSR in 1977 (Garí 71-72) and by pro-west political approaches, it constitutes no surprise, that the idea that “que no existía causa de liberación nacional saharauí, sino solo interés expansionistas de Argelia y, tras ella, de ambición hegemónicas de la Unión Soviética por el control de África”²¹ was spread by Morocco (Garí 64).

Although the Saharawi cause is one of the “[...] the only major liberation movement in Africa that has not received direct Soviet, Cuban or Chinese military assistance. [...]” (Solarz 287), a 1975 United Nations Visiting Mission, composed with representatives from Iran and Ivory Coast, contradicted Moroccan version (Solarz 286). The social geography of

²¹ Translation of the author: “that there was no cause of Saharawi national liberation, but only the expansionist interests of Algeria and, behind it, the hegemonic ambitions of the Soviet Union for the control of Africa”.

Western Sahara²², could not support the traditional Marxist view of the world, an explored population by the capital (Zunes 432). Plus "[...] Polisario has affirmed its 'opposition to imperialism, colonialism and exploitation' and its commitment to 'national construction and socialism'. Its socialism, it claims, is inspired by Islamic rather than Marxist precepts. The Front advocates 'the suppression of all forms of exploitation', the 'just distribution of national resources and the suppression of disparities between the countryside and the towns', the Arabization of education and the provision of free medical care, free, universal, compulsory education, and adequate housing. [...]" (Hodges 87).

So, why does the "[...] impression has developed in some Western circles that the Polisario is the cutting edge of Soviet expansion in the Maghreb. [...]" (Solarz 287) stay so prevalent?

4. Moroccan Armed Forces

In terms of manpower²³, in 1974, before the invasion, the FAR total numbers were 56000 units. In 1975, during the invasion, we see a +9% increase to 61000 units. In 1979, four years after the invasion, that number increased by +42000 more units, to 98000. A drastic 75% increase in recruitment, training, and deployment.

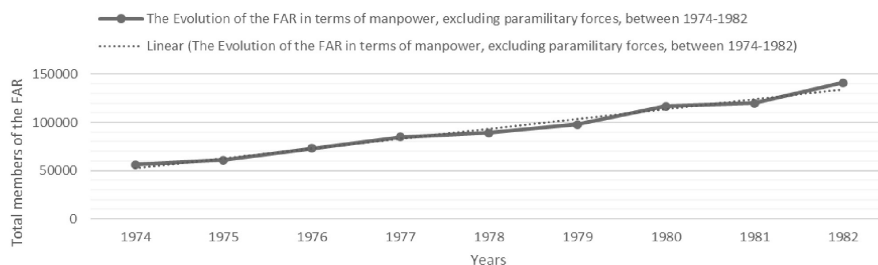
This was achieved with the instruction of a law in 1976 that made mandatory military conscription for students (Hodges 293).

If we add the numbers for the paramilitary units, which have also increased from 23,000 to 30,000. Morocco had, in 1982, nearly 171,000 soldiers ready to fight in Western Sahara (Hodges 293). How much did Morocco spend with their armed forces?

²² Group of nomads, travelling from point-to-point, in search of water for the cattle.

²³ Excluding paramilitary forces.

Graphic 1 - The Evolution of the FAR in terms of manpower, excluding paramilitary forces, between 1974 and 1982



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14, Link: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

Table 02 – The Evolution of the FAR in terms of manpower, excluding paramilitary forces, between 1974 and 1982.

Year	Total Forces	Increase	Increase (%)	Average Increase	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation
1974	56000	—	—				
1975	61000	+5000	+9%				
1976	73000	+12000	+20%				
1977	84650	+11650	+16%				
1978	89000	+4350	+5%	10625	#N/A	10325	6093.234
1979	98000	+9000	+10%				
1980	116500	+18500	+19%				
1981	120000	+3500	+3%				
1982	141000	+21000	+18%				

Source: (Hodges 293)

Table 03 – Military Expenditure – Morocco between 1960-1980

Year	Military Expenditure (current USD)	Military Expenditure (% GDP)
1960	41 596 762.37	2,32%
1961	48 275 957.47	2.70%
1962	53 848 540.36	2.57%
1963	74 893 933.20	3.20%
1964	69 993 222	2.84%
1965	63 175 700.38	2.43%
1966	67 938 085.05	2.68%
1967	70 348 918.78	2.62%
1968	90 900 288.31	3.00%
1969	84 972 008.64	2.39%
1970	88 924 195.09	2.32%
1971	111 288 010.20	2,63%
1972	140 446 991.60	2.84%
1973	185 783 993.80	3.06%
1974	241 889 161.20	3.15%
1975	413 326 127.90	4.60%
1976	577 239 433.30	6.22%
1977	731 455 472	6.62%
1978	772 559 382	5.84%
1979	896 353 802	5.63%
1980	1 117 955 622	5.94%

Source: The World Bank- Retrieved in 10 July 2022, at 17:41 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960&view=chart>

In 1960, the total value of Morocco's expenditure on the military was 41,5 billion USD, a total of 2.32% of its GDP²⁴ (Table 3). In percentage, it did not grew much until 1974 (3,1% of GDP). Average of 14% up to 1974, with a value of 241,889,161.2M USD, as demonstrated in Graphic 2.

²⁴ Gross Domestic Product

From 1974 to 1975 we see an immediate increase of 71%, going from 241,889,161.21 USD to 413,326,127.88 USD. Onwards we see an average increase of 31% in the expenditure, with no negative values of increase, like in 1964-1965-1969, being the biggest value registered at 71% and the lowest at 6% (Table 4). Note that

“Morocco’s army was also battle-tested. Moroccan troops had seen action in the Congo (1960-1961); against Algeria in the 1963 “Sand War;” and with Syrian troops against Israel in 1973. Most Moroccan troops, Arabs and Berbers were drawn from populations north of the High Atlas. These soldiers were accustomed to a moderate Mediterranean climate and largely unfamiliar with the terrain and harsh aridity of the Sahara.” (Mundy 215).

This is reflected in the military budget’s weight on GDP (Table 5). And there are just the costs of maintaining an at-the-ready military corps. Since Morocco did not have a state-of-the-art weapons manufacturing industry, to these we must add the values/costs of weapons acquisitions, in other words, imports.

If we analyse the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database and divide the data by decades, we see that the overall weapons provider to Morocco is the US, with a total of 4794M USD. Followed by France with 4017 M USD. The data also indicates that France was the first country to sell weaponry to Morocco, having started to export weapons in 1956, Graphic 3. These weapons are just the most visible sign and the easiest data to quantify. However, accompanying the augmentation of “Morocco’s arsenal included arms supplied by the United States, Europe, and the Eastern Bloc, backed up by training programs”. (Mundy 215).

**Graphic 2 – Military Expenditure- Morocco between 1960-1980,
in current USD and % of GDP.**



Source: World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960> Retrieved in 10 July 2022, at 17:41

Putting this data into context, by comparing the data between the three major military powers of the region, we can see that between the 1950's²⁵ and the 1980's²⁶, Morocco imported 5,554M USD, Algeria 11,795M USD and Libya 30,729M USD (Table 7).

Even though Morocco had the early lead, by the time of the Western Sahara invasion, in 1975, it was the region's 3rd most powerful military powerhouse. Prior to the invasion, the 'Alawi dynasty was in danger of being overthrown. Earlier in the 1970's Hassan had survived two coup d'état perpetrated by the armed forces (Garí 9), so he was in a desperate situation even before the invasion of Western Sahara. And this act was

²⁵ The 1970's, makes references to the data in the SIPRI database collected from 1950 to 1959

²⁶ The 1980's, makes references to the data in the SIPRI database collected from 1980 to 1989

seen as a way for him to maintain his crown by redirecting the blame of his subjects to an exterior enemy. By sending them into the Sahara desert part of his military, he would keep away the bulk of the armed forces from the towns and cities, where they could congregate and consolidate power to try once again to topple him (Gari 9-10).



**Table 04 – Military Expenditure - Morocco (Current USD)
between 1960-1980**

Year	Military Expenditure (Current USD)	Increase (Current USD)	Increase (%)	Average Value of Increase %	Mode of value of Increase %	Median of value of Increase %	Standard Deviation of the value of Increase %	Max value of Increase %	Minimum value of Increase %
1960	41596762.4	—	—						
1961	48275957.5	6679195.098	16%						
1962	53848540.4	5572582.892	12%						
1963	74893933.2	21045392.84	39%						
1964	69993222	-4900711.2	-7%						
1965	63175700.4	-6817521.62	-10%						
1966	67938085	4762384.67	8%						
1967	70348918.8	2410833.733	4%	14%	#N/A	14%	16%	39%	-10%
1968	90900288.3	20551369.53	29%						
1969	84972008.6	-5928279.67	-7%						
1970	88924195.1	3952186.448	5%						
1971	111288010	22363815.11	25%						
1972	140446992	29158981.4	26%						
1973	185783994	45337002.24	32%						
1974	241889161	56105167.37	30%						
1975	413326128	171436966.7	71%						
1976	577239433	163913305.4	40%						
1977	731455472	154216038.7	27%						
1978	772559382	41103909.92	6%	31%	#N/A	26%	21%	71%	6%
1979	896353802	123794420	16%						
1980	1117955622	221601820.2	25%						

Source: The World Bank- Retrieved in 10 July 2022, at 17:41 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960&view=chart>

**Table 05 – Military Expenditure – Morocco (% GDP)
between 1960-1980**

Year	Military Expenditure (% GDP)	Increase of Military Expenditure (%GDP)	Increase (%)	Average of Increase %	Mode of Increase %	Median of Increase %	Standard Deviation of Increase %	Max of Increase %	Minimum of Increase %
1960	2.32%	—	—						
1961	2.70%	0.39%	17%						
1962	2.57%	-0.14%	-5%						
1963	3.20%	0.63%	25%						
1964	2.84%	-0.36%	-11%						
1965	2.43%	-0.41%	-14%						
1966	2.68%	0.25%	10%						
1967	2.62%	-0.06%	-2%	2.99%	#N/A	5.20%	12.49%	24.54%	-20.45%
1968	3.00%	0.39%	15%						
1969	2.39%	-0.61%	-20%						
1970	2.32%	-0.07%	-3%						
1971	2.63%	0.31%	13						
1972	2.84%	0.22%	8%						
1973	3.06%	0.22%	8%						
1974	3.15%	0.08%	3%						
1975	4.60%	1.46%	46%						
1976	6.22%	1.62%	35%						
1977	6.62%	0.40%	6%						
1978	5.84%	-0.78%	-12%	13.00%	#N/A	5.93%	20.77%	46.32%	-11.83%
1979	5.63%	-20%	-3%						
1980	5.94%	0.31%	5%						

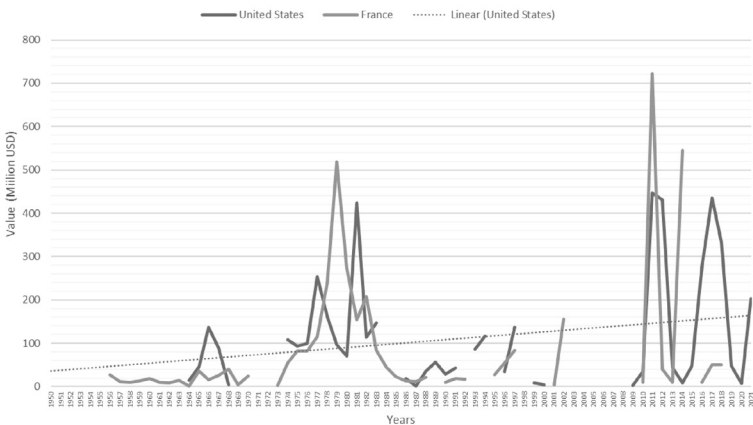
Source: The World Bank- Retrieved in 10 July 2022, at 17:41 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960&view=chart>

**Table 06 – Top 10 Countries, divided by decade,
 that have sold weapons to Morocco between 1950-2021**

Position	Country	Decades								Total of Weapon Sales (\$ Million US) 1960-2021
		1950's	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000's	2010's	2020's	
1	United States	0	314	814	868	454	27	2107	210	4794
2	France	63	177	1121	833	212	160	1438	13	4017
3	Netherlands	0	0	0	48	0	0	524	0	572
4	Spain	0	0	0	436	62	0	0	0	498
5	China	0	0	0	0	0	0	478	0	478
6	Italy	0	26	216	100	0	0	106	0	448
7	Belarus	0	0	0	0	51	120	0	0	171
8	Russia	0	0	0	0	0	156	0	0	156
9	Soviet Union	0	141	0	1	0	0	0	0	142
10	Austria	0	0	47	38	0	0	0	0	85

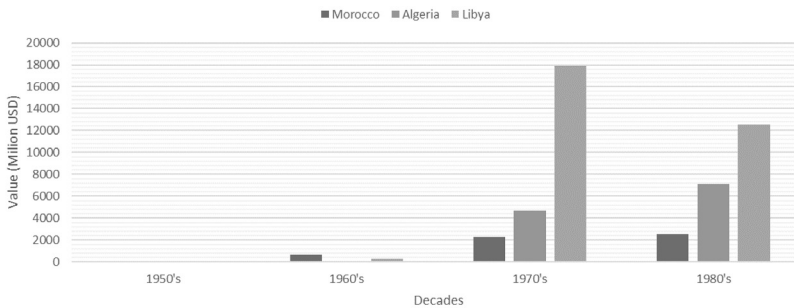
Source: The World Bank- Retrieved in 10 July 2022, at 17:41 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=1980&locations=MA&start=1960&view=chart>

**Graphic 3 – TIV of arms exports to Morocco,
 1950-2021 Seller: United States and France.**



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14, <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>

Graphic 4 – Morocco’s, Algeria’s, and Libya’s total of weapons imports between the 1950’s and the 1980’s (\$ Million US).



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14,
Link: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

Table 07 – Morocco’s, Algeria’s, and Libya’s total of weapons imports between the 1950’s and the 1980’s (\$ Million US).

Country	1950's	1960's	1970's	1980's	Total of Weapons Imports (Million USD)
Morocco	63	679	2277	2535	5554
Algeria	0	36	4654	7105	11795
Libya	4	310	17886	12529	30729

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14,
Link: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

However, this war would have a high cost and it would come in the form of an economic crisis. In 1975 Morocco was hit by the phosphate crisis²⁷, alongside the oil crises, and a series of bad agricultural years would make

²⁷ Morocco main export. Not being an oil-based exporter nation, its main source of income is the export of phosphates and its derivatives. When the war started, this raw material was in high demand, but soon after the war started, there was a crisis.

the country's finances spiral out of control (Santos 186-187). Prompting the IMF "By 1980, facing an untenable economic situation, the Moroccan government accepted an International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic rescue package. At that time, the plan amounted to the second largest of its kind for a developing country and included \$1 billion in standby credit. Under the IMF's program, Morocco was forced to cut state subsidies, which resulted in "bread riots" of May 1981 and 1984." (Mundy 223)

If considering the economic situation, how did Morocco pay for the military equipment that it needed to continue the war?

5. The Anti-communist Rhetoric Turns into an Opportunity?

The explanation for this misconception could lie in the fact that the biggest supporter of Polisario, as we have stated already, was Algeria and at a time Kaddafi's Libya²⁸ (Zunes 431). By virtue of both countries being within the sphere of influence of the USSR and that both supplied weapons (Hodges 354), made that a great part of the weaponry used by the Saharawi's being of soviet-origin (Solarz 287), the other part made of captured/abandoned (Santos, 186).

In fact, the USSR bogymen was one the most common cards that Hassan II played throughout the I Sahara War (Garí 59) the other one would (Santos, 187). Hassan's intent was to, undoubtedly, put Morocco on the Pro-Western Camp of the Cold War and to put Polisario as a new USSR conduit in Africa²⁹. To be within the eastern side of the conflict could

²⁸ Muammar Kaddafi was an unstable ally, this is supported by the fact that Libya only recognized the Saharawi nation, the SADR, in 1980. But still during the high of his support, 1980-1983, he vehemently insisted in the idea that Mauritania and SADR should fuse and form a Federal State, because he was a supporter of a Pan-Arab unity. If a new Arab state should appear, it would be one more problem to the creation of his Pan-Arab unity.

²⁹ In spite the multitude of evidence that Polisario and the SADR never actually received, at the time, help from the USSR, Eastern States, China, or Cuba. And they would shoot at USSR fishing vessels when they were fishing in Western Sahara coast.

allow the claim that the Western Sahara War was part of the Cold War. (Mundy 211).

With this, Morocco could gain international support and, more importantly, access to military support, either by monetary aid, military equipment, or both. So how was the FAR adapting to the conflict? Not great, they would be outwitted by Polisario several times, and the economic strain the war aggravated the domestic recession. (Santos, 186-187).

In 1979, Morocco was already four years deep into the I Western Sahara War, a war that was seen as unjust, unnecessary, and unwinnable. Plus, the King was seen as unstable and on the verge of losing the throne (Zunes 429). So, when Iran's Shah departed to exile and the Iranian regime fell, and the USSR invaded Afghanistan, the opportunity arose for the claims that Morocco had been making since 1975. Although, the US were in possession of intelligence reports that clearly stated that Polisario had never received aid from the USSR (Zunes 430), and a few groups of people believed that the war in Western Sahara was a Cold War proxy fight (Mundy 224).

However, years of playing the role of proxy for the US interest in Africa and the Arab-speaking world (Zunes, 433; Santos, 188), had solidified Morocco's position as stable and important ally, bringing with it advantages as well. From 1979 to 1981, Morocco received financial help from Saudi Arabia, summing a total of 1 billion USD per year, halve that value on the years afterwards, and by pardoning Morocco debt in 1991 (Mundy 223). The Saudis have also acted as a surrogate of the US military industrial complex, by buying weapons from the US and supplying them to Morocco (Solarz 294). Reports from the World Bank, also suggest that, near 60% of the war cost were covered by Saudi grants.

When it comes to the US, and the rest of the West, they weren't in a position, that would allow the loss of another allied nation, like Iran (Zunes, 425; Santos, 188). However, it was only obtained when the public opinion in the US changed. The Carter Administration was reluctant to increase the

number of weapons, believing that “to view African problems in an African context, would also see such a change in policy as an implicit repudiation of the new direction in which the President has steered our African policy.” (Solarz 290). Arguing that the policy could not be changed because the US was prohibited by law, the 1968 Foreign Military Sales, in specific the Chapter 1 – Foreign and National Security Policy Objectives and Restraints, Sec.4 “PURPOSES FOR WHICH MILITARY SALES BY THE UNITED STATES ARE AUTHORIZED. – Defense articles and defense services shall be sold by the United States Government under this Act to friendly countries solely for internal security, for legitimate self-defense [...]”, the Arms Control and Disarmament Act of 1961, and the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, plus a clause in the 1960 US-Moroccan Agreement, prohibit the US to sell offensive weaponry and weapons sold could only be used for self-defense, within the international recognized borders at the time of signing (Solarz, 297; Zunes, 425).

The war in Western Sahara, was not part of Morocco, so, in the eyes of US Law, this was an offensive war. “It is hard to see how giving Morocco permission to utilize American military equipment throughout the Western Sahara could be in any way squared with the relevant legislation’s reference to “legitimate self-defense.” It would in fact be seen by the world as a reward for aggression.” (Solarz 292).

But this would turn with the events of 1979, by altering the perception of the war, by making appear that Morocco was the victim, not the perpetrator (Garí 65), and this was helped by the Polisario operations in Western Sahara “[...] attacking commercial and fishing ships of various national origins [...] Algerian-backed escalations of Polisario’s capabilities only engendered more sympathy for Morocco, one of the West’s most steadfast client regimes. The October 31, 1981, battle of Galtah Zammur (Guelta Zemmour) is a case in point. The multi-pronged attack saw Polisario’s use of tanks for the first time. More devastating, though, were Polisario’s Soviet-made SA-6 surface-to-air missiles. With these, the Sahrawi fighters downed

two F-1s, an F-5, a C-130 command plane, and a troop carrier.” (Mundy 220-221), and Polisario attacked within Morocco borders (Zunes 425) This, plus the political pressure that the Carter administration was facing (Gari 29), when allied with the same aura that Iran had (Zunes 438), plus USSR the invasion of Afghanistan 1979 (Ohaegbulam 129&131) made it easy for the political machine of Washington to spin the situation. By the end of the Carter Administrations, “direct U.S.-arms sales deliveries grew from \$33 million in 1977, to \$86 million in 1978, to \$133 million in 1979.” (Mundy 224), and the military aid grew from 4.1M USD in 1974, to 99.8M USD in 1978 (Zunes 425).

The Reagan Administration, doubled down on the military aid, by utilizing various programs such as the International Military Education and Training Program for combat flying (Mundy 224). This would become the main form of US help, weapons sales (through credit lines, loans, and programs) and military training (Ohaegbulam 130), “...despite their knowledge [US] of the economic hardships such military transfers imposed on Morocco and the northwest Africa region generally.” (Ohaegbulam 139).

The Moroccan armed forces also received training in counterinsurgency warfare, their military command and control strategies were update³⁰, military grade weaponry and hardware was made available to Morocco.

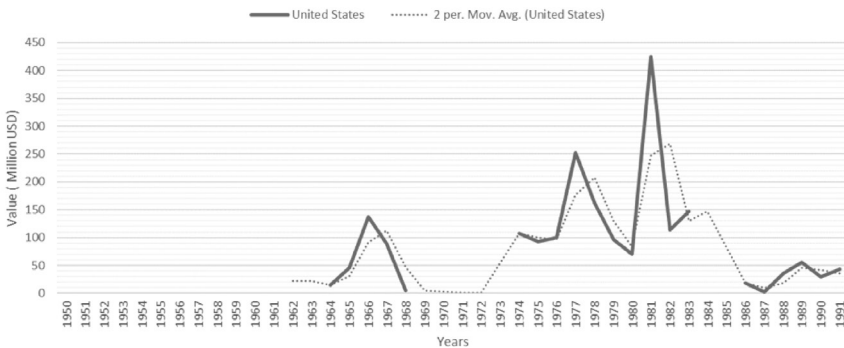
The exchange of personel and knowledge, also increased between both countries. “By 1982, there were approximately 130 U.S. military advisors supporting the Moroccan armed forces, including members of the Special Forces (Green Berets), as well as U.S. military attachés seen wearing Moroccan uniforms in the Western Sahara battle zone. Over \$1 million is spent annually to train Moroccan military officers, and training has also been provided for counter-insurgency commandos and pilots. C-130s with side-

³⁰ One of the Polisario main advantages was the snail pass that the orders and communications of FAR had. Due to the earlier 70’s coup attempts, every single decision and communication had first to received and passthrough Rabat.

looking airborne radars have been supplied along with other reconnaissance and intelligence assistance, possibly via satellites.” (Zunes 425-426).

However, if we look at the data (Graphic 5), we see the bulk of the US military help, would be concentrated between 1980 and 1981, the clear aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the Invasion of Afghanistan. By adding the US financial aid and the change in tactics, initializing the constructing of the “Berm”, a US initiative (Zunes 426), a military wall that would divide the Western Sahara in two, it was enough to change the tides of war in Morocco’s favor, the war still was unwinnable, but this time, for neither side. The I Western Sahara war would be forced into a stalemate and the signing of a cease-fire in 1991, and in the end, it would trigger the evolution of the FAR into a “modern” military.

**Graphic 5 – United States United States weapons export
to Morocco 1950-1991**



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Consulted in: 02 July 2022 at 16:14,
Link: https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

6. Conclusion

Despite all the episodes that the US went through before the Iran Revolution, nothing was learned. The ghost of the USSR was enough to launch the US political machine of the 1970's, 1980's and the 1990's into overdrive, even though the ghost was just that, a ghost. The complete lack of oversight, lack of procurement of accurate information, and almost belief that the image of the US was at risk, paved the way for a right-wing revolution in Iran in 1979. This sent a ripple effect throughout the US, creating the need to strengthen its allies, and in the process reverting some of its policies of neutrality, and view that regional conflicts should be seen as that and should be resolved within the regional confinement. This posed a risk, but one that was assumed by the Washington political machine without a second thought.

Hassan II, king of Morocco, was a political savvy-man, and this is the biggest difference between Morocco and Iran. Hassan II understood two things: 1) Morocco's problems were internal instead of external; 2) Hassan tried to use the politics of the world powers, for his own benefit, and succeeded for a while, between 1979-1982. He did this by acting as the US proxy in Africa and in the Arab-world, just like Iran, but to a greater extent and success. With this he was able to gather the political will necessary to help his cause, although playing the realpolitik game, he gambled his throne by invading Western Sahara, and this powerplay, almost caused his downfall. The invasion rapidly became a source of problems, the constant need of weapons, resources and money, transformed the war rapidly and grew into a nation scale problem, due to consecutive economical and agricultural crises, the country's economics soured needing an IMF intervention.

All his public rhetoric, of accusing the Polisario of being a USSR and Algeria proxy agent, would pay off in the public eyes in 1979, when the Iran Revolution shocked the world, followed by the USSR invasion of Afghanistan. As a counter measure, the US, started to move into a

right-wing political spectrum, pressed by an increase of public fear of losing another important ally, despite the high spheres of power having information, that in the case of Western Sahara, this was not the case.

This was achieved by starting to invest and to give a helping hand to allies, like Morocco. This help could be either indirectly through allied nations, like Saudi Arabia that in the case of Morocco, first financed the purchase of weapons and secondly and gave monetary aid, and finally pardoned the debt. However, when it became necessary, the US intervened directly, by using military analysis, military joint exercises, financial aid and by offering programs/courses, that could benefit the armed forces of its allies. In the case analyzed in this paper, this changed the face of the I Western Sahara War. The restructure that the FAR would go through, would transform them into a "modern" armed force, capable of using modern equipment, that was given/bought, capable of acting in any theater of operations, which was impossible to achieve prior the US intervention.

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