

Scripting (In)security:
Cartographic Violence and Performances of Securitization in the
Western Sahara

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Abstract

Throughout the forty-year conflict over the Western Sahara, the United States has supported Morocco's occupation of the disputed territory. This overall policy has remained relatively consistent over time, yet constantly subjected to contestation. The debates over policy and various modes of exercising American power in this North African region have shifted over time as the structure of global politics changed. My research is guided by two interwoven questions: (1) How did the discourses on the Western Sahara conflict produced by U.S. policymakers change or remain consistent with shifts in the perceived imperatives of foreign policymaking from the Cold War to the War on Terror? And, (2) what do these discourses reveal about the state and the process of statemaking? My project is to explore how the Western Sahara has been scripted as a place of insecurity in the geopolitical imaginations of U.S. foreign policymakers and what this process can reveal about the nature of the state.

I examine the practices of representation, with a particular focus on discourses of security, which have situated the Western Sahara conflict in the imaginary geographies of U.S. policymakers. I trace the reformulations and reiterations of these discourses across historical shifts in international politics. Through close examination of the discourses of foreign policymakers recorded in official texts, I explore continuities, ruptures and contestations of representations of the conflict and their impact on policy decisions. My research specifically focuses on the language used by congressmen, State Department officials and presidents, seen in the texts of congressional hearings and other government documents. I argue that historical moments of opportunity to resolve the conflict were foreclosed by the discourses of security and the imperial practices of American statecraft. I conclude that understanding these discourses as part of a performative process of statecraft helps to reveal the vulnerability of the imperial state, and to make possible interventions into the discourses to produce real change and a just resolution to this conflict.

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Preface

The way that we narrate places, peoples and events situate them within preexisting norms of intelligibility that limit possibilities for political understanding and action. When I first began to read about the Western Sahara in the summer of 2012, I was struck by the incongruity among various narratives and frameworks for understanding the forty-year conflict over the territory. How was it possible, I wondered, that observers could disagree so fundamentally over the narratives of what had happened in this large swath of territory contested between the state of Morocco and the Sahrawi independence movement? What material effect did these interpretations have on the ongoing conflict and the lives of people living in this region? The various lenses imposed on the Western Sahara region restricted interpretations of its history and constrained possibilities for political action with respect to the region. I am concerned that the modes of seeing and representing the Western Sahara that have circulated in the discourses of United States policymakers have erased and obscured the experiences and desires of the Sahrawi people, and have instead produced the conditions of possibility for increased U.S. influence and control over the broader North African region.

In the fall of 2012, while studying in Rabat, Morocco, I travelled to the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara territory to interview self-identified human rights defenders. I arrived just after the two-year anniversary of the infamous and contested events of a demonstration known as Gdeim Izik, intending to evaluate the challenges facing nonviolent civil society resistance against the Moroccan occupation. In November 2010, a large-scale peaceful encampment that been built by Sahrawi protestors outside of the city of Laayoune was violently dismantled by Moroccan security forces, resulting in destructive riots in the administrative capital, Laayoune. I was drawn to investigate the conflicting narratives of

these events when I read that Noam Chomsky had alluded to the Sahrawi protests at Gdeim Izik as the beginning of the Arab Spring.¹ Inspired by the movements for political change that had spread across the Arab world in the spring of 2011, and troubled by their violent repression, I was interested in understanding the possibilities for, and challenges of, sustaining nonviolent social movements. My research concluded that, despite the fact that knowledge of the Gdeim Izik encampment and its aftermath was too well restricted by the Moroccan media embargo to have directly inspired the later revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the strategies, demands, and challenges endured by the Sahrawi protestors bore similarities with other contemporary attempts at nonviolent revolution and reform.

The process of researching, travelling, interviewing and writing about these events drew my attention to the deep importance of the politics of representing the conflict. In my report, which focused on the role of media and representations of violence during the events of Gdeim Izik, I included a note of introduction to acknowledge the complex role that conflicting language plays in polarizing the narratives and interpretations of the conflict. In a sense, this thesis project is an expansion of that note. At the time I was concerned with the contested use of specific words such as ‘occupation’ or ‘annexation.’² This interest in the political impact of language in the ongoing Western Sahara conflict translated into a theoretical exploration of the politics of representation and the performativity of language that has informed my thesis project. I am concerned with how the language of foreign policy, and its accompanying discourses of security, identity and power, enables a view of the world that

¹ Chomsky, Noam. “The Genie is out of the Bottle: Assessing a Changing Arab World with Noam Chomsky and Al Jazeera’s Marwan Bishara.” *Democracy Now*. February 17, 2011. Accessed: September 20, 2012. http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/17/the_genies_are_out_of_the

² The note was initially intended to assert the impossibility of neutrality, and to justify my use of specific terms. Despite this frankness, the Moroccan professors to whom I presented my work accused me of bias. To this, I would add, the language I use to write about this conflict is cannot be neutral. It circulates certain discourses of power and privileges some narratives over others. Bias, if that is what some choose to call it, is inevitable, and denial of this is a disavowal of one’s own political subjectivity.

propagates violence and the disenfranchisement of marginalized peoples. I am drawn to thinking about the performative power of discourse, the ways of seeing and understanding that are excluded and foreclosed by certain discourses, and the possibilities for intervention and change.

Before delving further, I must first give a brief overview of the major historical events of the conflict over the Western Sahara, if only to provide broad strokes of reference for readers who may be unfamiliar with the narratives of this region.³ The conflict over the Western Sahara originated from an interrupted process of decolonization that deviated from the pattern of contemporary processes of decolonization that had taken place in most parts of Africa.⁴ The territory was colonized by Spain in 1884, and remained a Spanish colony when the modern nation-state of Morocco became independent in 1956.⁵ In 1973, the rebel group Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro, known as the Polisario Front, was founded as one of several factions fighting for independence from Spain. The United Nations began planning for a referendum vote to give the inhabitants of the region the right to exercise self-determination, and Spain conducted a population census for that purpose in 1974. Morocco petitioned the International Court of Justice for a legal decision regarding Morocco's claim to the territory. The 1975 ICJ opinion held that Morocco did not have a historical claim to the territory prior to Spanish colonization, and advocated a process of self-determination.⁶

³ For comprehensive histories of the region see: Zunes and Mundy (2010), Shelley (2004), Jensen (2005), Pazzanita and Hodges (1994), and Hodges (1983).

⁴ Munene, Macharia. "Multiple Colonialism in Western Sahara." *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*. Vol.2, No.2 (2010):1-18

⁵ As part of a narrative of nation-building after independence, Moroccan King Mohammed V asserted a historical claim to this region (as well as parts of Mauritania, Algeria, Mali and Senegal) as part of an idea of "Greater Morocco." The regions of Sidi Ifni and Tarfaya in Southern Morocco were incorporated into the modern nation state, while this expansionism provoked a bitter war between Morocco and Algeria in the 1960s. The legacy of this war still lingers in the tense relationship between Morocco and Algeria that plays out over the Western Sahara territory.

⁶ International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion on Western Sahara*, (1975)

In response, however, King Hassan II immediately declared his intention to reclaim the Sahara as part of the Moroccan nation-state.

In an event known as the Green March, the Moroccan government mobilized 350,000 Moroccans to march, unarmed and waving Moroccan flags and Qurans, into the Spanish Sahara on November 6th, 1975. In Morocco, this event is celebrated as a moment of national unity and a reunion with their “Saharan brothers.” For dissident Sahrawi communities, this event accompanied an invasion which initiated the war between Morocco and the Polisario.⁷ The war lasted until the UN brokered a cease-fire in 1991, and resulted in the exile of half of the Sahrawi population to refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. The conflict has been at a stalemate for the last twenty years, while the UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINURSO, has failed to implement the promised referendum vote for the Sahrawi people to choose between independence, autonomy or integration with Morocco. Throughout this period, a Moroccan system of economic incentives has lured residents from Morocco proper to settle in the eighty-five percent of the territory that they currently control. Debates continue over who is eligible to vote in the proposed referendum; Morocco continues to move people into the territory while Polisario clings to the 1974 census participants and their descendents as the only rightful voters. Accusations of human rights abuses are thrown at both sides, yet MINURSO lacks the power to monitor and prosecute human rights violations. Despite the long-standing political impasse, recent years have seen increasing unrest and vibrant civil society resistance from within the occupied territory.

⁷ The Polisario also fought against Mauritanian claims to the territory in the initial stages of the conflict, but a peace deal was signed with Mauritania in 1979.

The United States has played an active role behind the scenes throughout the duration of this conflict.⁸ U.S. officials were involved in and aware of Morocco's plan to take the Sahara from Spain, and sold arms to Morocco throughout the Cold War, while simultaneously proclaiming their support for a process of self-determination for the Sahrawi people. In the 1990s, the United States played an important role in the United Nations efforts to resolve the conflict, while continuing to support Morocco's successful attempts to stall the peace process. The beginning of the War on Terror prompted new military and economic collaborations between the United States and Morocco. U.S. officials continue to express that policy towards the conflict has remained consistently neutral from administration to administration.⁹ While officially the U.S. supports the UN peace process to resolve the conflict through negotiation and a referendum for self-determination, the U.S., along with France, has strongly backed Morocco's continued control over this territory in a variety of ways over time. Most observers consider political, economic and military interests to be the driving factors behind U.S. policy toward this conflict; as Teresa Whitfield notes, "realism won out."¹⁰ However, U.S. policy towards this conflict has been shaped by far more complex processes of producing and circulating ideas of the national interest and the imperatives of policy.

In what follows, I will look at debates among statemakers over policy toward the Western Sahara conflict in order to make sense of the nature of American power as it was constituted and debated in relation to changes in global politics. Understanding the changes

⁸ For analyses of the role of the United States see: Zunes and Mundy (2010), Mundy (2007), Zunes (1987, 1998), Zoubir (2009), Saidy (2011), and Wright (1983).

⁹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. "Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Kingdom of Morocco." November 22, 2013. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/22/joint-statement-united-states-america-and-kingdom-morocco>

¹⁰ "In the stark juxtaposition of international law and political realism that Western Sahara represents—and East Timor represented until 1999—realism won out, with the interests pursued by the Friends a central driver in a process that was not able to move beyond the zero-sum options pursued by the parties." Whitfield, Teresa. *Friends Indeed?: The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict*. (US Institute of Peace Press, 2007): 189.

and continuities in policymaking over these historical-political shifts requires looking past labels such as realist or liberal in order to see how state discourses and practices of representation produce specific policy imperatives and performances of state power. The theoretical orientation introduced in the following chapter will guide my analysis of the foreign policy practices that have enabled the current status quo policy toward the Western Sahara. My intention is to understand how we arrived at this political moment, and what ways of thinking need to be questioned and subverted in order to produce real change and a just solution to this conflict.

Chapter One: Introduction

The discourses of statemaking have scripted the conflict over the Western Sahara into the geopolitical imaginations of U.S. foreign policymakers.¹¹ Policymakers in the United States represented and located this conflict within contemporaneous regional and global geopolitical landscapes. Thinking about the changes in these international political landscapes over time reveals moments in which the official narrative on this region could have advanced a just resolution to the conflict, and the ways that the discourses were reconstituted to foreclose real political change. The ongoing struggle over the Western Sahara territory has spanned the transition in global politics from a Cold War era predicated on bipolarity and balancing of power to an era of American global hegemony in the context of the Global War on Terror. In this context, examining United States policy towards the Western Sahara conflict is a useful means to explore the ways that the practices of statemakers imagined, produced and debated the nature of state power and the relationship between the U.S. and the world.

My research explores how narratives of the Western Sahara conflict, in the discourse of officials in the United States, has evolved over time, and what this story can illuminate about changes and consistencies in the practices of U.S. statemaking. Two interwoven questions guide my research; first, *how did the discourses on the Western Sahara conflict produced by U.S. policymakers change or remain consistent with shifts in the perceived imperatives of foreign policymaking from the Cold War to the War on Terror?* And, second, *what do these discourses reveal about the nature of the state and the process of statemaking?* I trace the evolution of the narrative on the Western

¹¹ In this text, I use the term “Western Sahara” in a few different ways. Geographically, my usage of the term “Western Sahara” refers to the land formerly known as Spanish Sahara now claimed in its entirety by the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. (See Appendix for maps). I use the modifiers “Moroccan-occupied” or “Moroccan-controlled” to refer to the approximately 85% of this territory which is currently administered by Morocco. I also use the term “Western Sahara” to refer more generally to the conflict over this land.

Sahara and the framing of, and the tension between, the interests and principles perceived to be at stake. I look at statements of policy and human rights reports produced by the State Department, debates in congressional hearings, and presidential statements on foreign policy. My research focuses on textual analysis of U.S. government documents in order to understand the process of decision-making with respect to this conflict. My attention is to the ways that ideas about national security and interests were constituted and employed in representations of this conflict.

Running through my investigation is an exploration of the role of representation and discourse in the process of statemaking. I attempt to unpack the discursive practices that produce and perform the state, and the relationship between foreign policymaking and statemaking. My chapters analyze the practices of representation used to promote, explain and justify the policies of the United States towards the conflict in the Western Sahara, with attention to the elements of continuity and discontinuity that reveal changing ideas and realities of state power and statecraft. Language plays an important role in these processes, not only as a tool for justifying policy decisions, but also as a means of knowledge and power production. I am concerned with how material practices of U.S. policy were influenced by the inscription of particular narratives of security and interest onto this conflict and the broader region.

Central to my analysis is a discursive approach to thinking about power and an orientation towards understanding the state as a performative process, rather than as a unitary actor. I am concerned with the imperial undertones of the process of scripting places according to perceived interests and principles of the state, and disturbed by the effects of material and discursive practices of securitization on human lives.

While traditional writings on international relations engage in debates on the governing logic of states, they begin from incomplete assumptions about the nature of power, its relationship to territory, and the concept of the sovereign state. A realist orientation views states as unitary actors governed by interests, who are sovereign over a delimited area of territory from which they project power in a global political system made up of other state actors. This orientation leads policymakers to follow perceived policy imperatives without questioning how the interests of the state are constituted and which foreclose thinking about the exercise of power outside of the framework of the state. It is an orientation fundamentally biased against the interests, needs and desires of marginalized (non-state) groups such as the Sahrawi community, and which presumes that the state is the only legitimate political actor. Liberal internationalists, on the other hand, give credence to supranational powers and institutions; yet take for granted the definitions of national interest and security that are produced by discourses of the state. The debates over policy that I examine with respect to the Western Sahara are shaped by the contestations between liberals and realists over the best way to pursue national interests and principles. However, what must be further interrogated are the discourses that produce the boundaries of the state, its perceptions of interest, and the performance of state power in the international realm.

The end of the Cold War and the launch of the Global War on Terror are generally understood as major turning points that required the questioning, reformulating, and reasserting of the role of the United States in a changing global political order.¹² Realist neoconservatives, such as Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, predicted the “end of

¹² From a U.S.-centric perspective, the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the War on Terror are often seen to mark epochal changes in world history. I do not mean to suggest that I view the fall of the Berlin Wall or the events of September 11, 2001 as singular events that marked fundamental ruptures in human history. Rather, my intention is to trace the modes of thinking that carry over across this perceived ruptures and the ways that they were reconceived. The linear bracketing of world history often disguises the ways that histories overlap and obscure the pasts that are still with us.

history” and a coming “clash of civilizations.”¹³ They, and many members of the Bush administration welcomed the new unilateral hegemony of the United States and sought to preserve its unilateral dominance. Liberal internationalists, such as Anne-Marie Slaughter and many in the Clinton administration, saw the international political order as increasingly dependent on collective security and multi-lateral cooperation, albeit still lead by the indispensable United States.¹⁴ Realists and liberals clashed in their attempts to define the new interests and principles at stake for the United States, but the consensus was that fundamental change had occurred and that the U.S. must strive to maintain its global power. Skeptics, such as historian Andrew Bacevich, later asserted that the rhetoric of freedom and change disguised the fact that there was a “coherent grand strategy conceived many decades earlier and now adapted to the circumstances of the post-cold war era.”¹⁵ Bacevich saw continuity in American foreign policy across shifts in the global geopolitics. In *American Empire*, he identifies the purpose of U.S. foreign policy to preserve and expand an American empire through a commitment to global openness in a world shaped by American democratic capitalism with the United States as the “ultimate guarantor of order and enforcer of norms.”¹⁶ Tracing these debates in the context of discussions over the Western Sahara conflict will help to reveal the ways that foreign policy norms, constituted as imperatives of order, stability and security, were implemented and contested across these transitions.

My research traces changes and consistencies over time in order to understand how the narratives and discourses on the Western Sahara changed from the Cold War, to the post-war optimism of the 1990s to the current era of the ‘War on Terror.’ The early 1990s saw a

¹³ See: Fukuyama, Francis and Allan Bloom. *The End of History?*. Vol. 16 National Affairs, Incorporated, 1989. and Huntington, Samuel. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 23. (Summer 1993): 23-49.

¹⁴ Slaughter, Anne-Marie. *The Idea that is America: Keeping Faith with our Values in a Dangerous World* Basic Books, 2008.

¹⁵ Bacevich, Andrew J. *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002): 3.

¹⁶ Bacevich, 3.

burst of scholarship seeking to imagine what the new political order would look like. Debates between various international relations schools of thought presented predictions and proscriptions for new ways to order global politics and new priorities for U.S. policy. However, this period also produced a growth of critical literature that sought to unpack traditional forms of speaking and writing about global politics and foreign policy. Working from a perspective inspired by the post-structuralist and post-modern work of Foucault, Derrida and others, critical political scientists and geographers began to focus attention on the role of discourse in producing political realities. Scholars in a variety of disciplines were concerned with the process of speaking and writing about politics to produce particular forms of power and knowledge, to the exclusion of others.

A Foucauldian approach to power calls on us to think of power as relational, which produces and is produced by discourses that claim to be truth. As such, “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.”¹⁷ Neither the state nor foreign policymakers possess power in themselves, but instead exercise power through the production of truths. The narratives that they tell about the United States and about other places and peoples claim to be truths, yet are shaped by the dominance of statist discourses of security and sovereignty, and the subjugation of local discourses of rights and freedoms. Foucault sought to direct our analyses of power away from the centralized, unitary state, to the practices of subjugation taking place in the margins. The Western Sahara, as it has been conceived by U.S. statemakers, is such a place. The practices of occupation by the Moroccan state, aided and abetted by the United States, occlude and subjugate local knowledges, ways of beings, identities, and the political capacity of the Saharawi people. A place and a people relegated to the periphery of hegemonic U.S.

¹⁷ Foucault, Michel and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. (American ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980): 93.

power, Western Sahara is a site of the exercise of violent, subjugating, and disciplining relations of power.

This thesis project focuses on the role of discursive power and practices of representation in producing, legitimizing and maintaining violent, statist and reductionist policies and ways of thinking. I begin from political scientist Roxanne Doty's assertion that "The goal of analyzing is not to reveal previously obscured truths, but to examine *how* representations underlie the production of knowledge/identities and make certain courses of action possible."¹⁸ Following Doty's directive to interrogate how certain discourses made particular policies or courses of action possible, I focus on how the broader narratives of the U.S. relationship to the world shifted from the era of the Cold War and the War on Terror and how those narratives impacted representations of the Western Sahara conflict in U.S. policy circles. The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the War on Terror are generally understood as moments when the structure of global politics underwent fundamental shifts. However, it is important to see these shifts as occurring at the level of the discursive and the performative, rather than take for granted the 'truths' about global politics that they represent. Doty writes that, "International politics are inextricably bound up with discursive practices that put into circulation representations taken as 'truth.'" Such 'truths' bear interrogating, in particular those discourses that perpetuate violence through assumptions about state power and security.

Writing in 1990, political scientist Michael Shapiro defines discourse as a "linguistic practice that puts into play a set of rules and procedures for the formation of objects, speakers

¹⁸ Doty, Roxanne Lynn. *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 5.

and themes.”¹⁹ Specific discourses shape and delimit the conditions of intelligibility through which we understand people, places and events in the world. Along these lines, Roxanne Doty’s work is concerned with the way that discursive practices “highlight the arbitrary, constructed and political nature of the binary oppositions through which we have come to “know’ the world and justify certain practices and policies.”²⁰ This strain of thought sees the rhetoric of foreign policy as part of a larger discursive economy through which global power and authority are exercised. I am concerned with the power exercised by the use of particular terms, concepts, and ways of framing issues. To this end, I understand discourse as embodied sets of practices of representation, not simply linguistic exchange or debate.

The process of representing the Western Sahara conflict through the discourse of foreign policymaking imposed particular meanings and imaginations of the place and the people, and the relationship to Morocco and to the broader region. Drawing on Michael Shapiro’s understanding of representation as a practice through which things take on meaning and value, I interrogate the practices of representation that acquire discursive power in thinking about the Western Sahara. Central to this discursive process of representation is the practice of engraining a binary of us (the nation-state of the U.S.) versus them (the Sahrawi other) by locating (in)security in places defined by their otherness. In this formulation, Morocco is identified as other, yet friendly, and is conscripted into the practices of securitization by the United States. The Western Sahara has consistently been scripted as a site of insecurity despite shifts and reformulations of the security discourses that governed the political eras of the Cold War, post-Cold War and the War on Terror.

¹⁹ Shapiro, Michael. "Strategic Discourse/Discursive Strategy: The Representation of "Security Policy" in the Video Age." *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3, Special Issue: Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissidence in International Studies (Sep., 1990): 330.

²⁰ Doty, 3.

Central to my exploration of the discourses of statemaking in relation to the Western Sahara conflict is an orientation towards a theoretical lens employed by scholars of critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics seeks to critique the imperial and colonial roots of conventional geopolitics, which is concerned with the spatialization of power across territories, in order to think new relationships between geography and international politics.²¹ Critical geopolitics scholars, such as Gearoid O’Tuathail, David Campbell, John Agnew, and Derek Gregory, seek to fundamentally question and deconstruct hegemonic geopolitical discourses of power, space, and identity.²² This approach is concerned with how places are scripted into the imaginative geographies²³ of the ‘intellectuals of statecraft’ by discourses of power and security.²⁴

Urban theorist Michael Sorkin traces the genealogy of the concept ‘imaginative geographies’ as a term that “denotes the ways in which imperialist societies tend to be constructed through normalizing binary judgments about both foreign and colonized territories and the home spaces which sit at the heart of empire.”²⁵ The constitution of the nation-state of the United States depends on a process of determining the conditions of exclusion and inclusion within the nation in response to spaces defined as other and threatening. The Western Sahara is inscribed by the geopolitical gaze of policymakers as a external place of insecurity that must be secured. As used by critical geographer Gearoid O’Tuathail, the ‘geopolitical gaze’ is always possessive, and reinforces imperial, hierarchical,

²¹ “The study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states.” Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. Vol. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 60.

²² See Tuathail (1996), Campbell (1992), Agnew (1994), and Gregory (1995) for example.

²³ For Gregory, Edward Said’s term ‘imaginative geographies’ refers to a process of folding distance into difference through a series of spatializations. He understands this as fabrication, noting that the concept “usefully combines something fictionalized and something made real because they are imaginations given substance.” Gregory, Derek. *The Colonial Present*. (Malden: MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 17.

²⁴ O’Tuathail refers to the intellectuals of statecraft as those statesmen, politicians and military commanders who concern themselves with the everyday conduct of foreign policy.

²⁵ Sorkin, Michael. *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Security State*. (London: Routledge, 2013):1. Sorkin traces the concept of ‘imaginative geographies’ from Michel Foucault, to Edward Said, to critical geographer Derek Gregory. I revisit to the idea of ‘home spaces’ and the homeland in chapter four, drawing on the work of Amy Kaplan.

and violent relations of power. The geopolitical gaze of U.S. policymakers sights (sees) and sites (locates) the Western Sahara according to prevailing discourses of truth. The geopolitical gaze and its practices of representation securitize regions and peoples in order to produce and enable imperial modes of exercising state power.

By security discourse, I refer to the use of rhetoric that represents places, identities and conflicts as dangerous and threatening to the nation-state. Following the theoretical framework of political scientist David Campbell, I understand discourses of security to be boundary-producing processes that locate danger in places that are characterized as foreign. This process of defining the state through discourses of danger and difference delimits the boundaries of the state's identity.²⁶ The state, and the leaders and officials who act for the state, understands it's self in relation to external others characterized as dangerous. The discourses of the state define who is to be included and protected, and who is to be feared and defended against. Foreign policy, as an integral practice of statemaking, depends on a process of identifying what is external to the state and designating it as dangerous. Investigating the discursive process of producing the Western Sahara as a location of external insecurity and potential danger located in the periphery requires a process of gaining insight into our understanding of the 'self' of the American State.

The classic Weberian definition understands the state as an institution with a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within a fixed territory. Political scientist Timothy Mitchell criticizes statist scholars such as Theda Skocpol for their narrow understanding of the state as actors who make policy decisions independent from society.²⁷ Mitchell's understanding

²⁶ Campbell, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). Campbell's work focuses on the theme, "that the boundaries of a state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy." (3).

²⁷ Mitchell, Timothy. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics." *The American Political Science Review*. Mar 1991; Vol. 85, No. 1: 77-96.

of the state seeks to complicate the boundary between the state and society by focusing on this boundary as a *process*. My work will attempt to understand the state as a performative process of *statecraft*, whereby a wide range of actors constantly negotiate and perform the meanings and power of the state's identity and actions. I use the term 'statecraft' in Roxanne Doty's sense of the "never finally completed project of working to fix meaning, authority, and control."²⁸ As a process, statecraft relies on the relentlessly continuous production of discourses of security and power. According to Campbell, "The paradox inherent to their being renders states in permanent need of reproduction: with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are (and have to be) always in a process of becoming. For a state to end its practices of representation would be to expose its lack of prediscursive foundations: stasis would be death."²⁹ While the discourses of the U.S. state must constantly produce its identity, it is important to understand this process as one that requires the securing of interests deemed necessary for the identity of the state. The Western Sahara is one of the many locations where the power of the U.S. state is performed through practices of securing interests directly or through proxy states, economic policy, or diplomacy. These practices have changed over time to suit changing political landscapes, as I will explore in subsequent chapters.

The state is neither a unified nor a centralized institution, though it may present itself as such. Rather, it is made up of a variety of state actors from elected leaders, officials, theorist-practitioners and sympathetic media.³⁰ In this text, I use the general term 'policymakers' to refer to elected representatives and state officials. The consistent use of this term is meant to emphasize the constructed and performative nature of the state, and its

²⁸ Doty, 177.

²⁹ Campbell, 11.

³⁰ The scope of this project limits me to looking at the discourse of state officials, though I recognize a broader range of actors that function as agents of the state.

multifaceted components.³¹ The policymakers in the State Department and Congress whose language I will examine are not autonomous state actors producing political realities through discourse, but are themselves subject to and constituted by the discourses of state-making.

With respect to the Western Sahara conflict, debates over policy relied upon commonly accepted ideas about power and its exercise over the space of territorial states. As the conditions of global politics changed, through the end of the Cold War, the emergence of the War on Terror, the spread of globalization and policies of liberalization, these ideas were tested, reconfigured, changed, and reclaimed. The narratives, lenses and political orientations that shaped the ways U.S. policymakers saw the Western Sahara changed over time with prevailing assumptions about the nature of global political imperatives. The Western Sahara case is helpful for understanding how exertions of power have changed; been deterritorialized, decentralized, and become more dependent on economic, cultural and discursive processes.

The Moroccan occupation of the Western Sahara in many ways resembles patterns of European colonialism in the region. As a post-colonial state, Morocco relied upon its claims to the Saharan territory as a central piece of its performance as a modern nation-state. The war over the Sahara was initiated to rally support for the King and to unify the nation as a political state. The idea that the Sahara is, has been and will always be Moroccan is central to modern Moroccan nationalism, and carries as much power now as it did in 1975. So while this work is focused on understanding how the U.S. supports Morocco's control over the Sahara in order to serve its interests of state, we cannot overlook how Morocco makes use of this to further its

³¹ I attempt to avoid reducing the state to a unitary and undifferentiated actor, though at times my use of the term 'United States' may read as reductionist. I too am subject to the dominant discourse of the state, and for the sake of expediency I occasionally fall into this trap. I intend this text to be read with attention to the specificity of these terms and their complex meanings and uses, even when I fail to articulate these differentiations.

own interests of state.³² Modern practices of exerting power over territory outside the bounds of the nation, often termed neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism, are seen in the U.S.'s subtle and indirect support for the securing of the Sahara.³³ The legacies of colonialism and its modern iterations shape the possibilities, desires, and imaginations of the peoples in this region. Morocco's assertion of sovereignty over the Sahara is part of practices of expansion and of determining what is included and excluded in the nation-state.³⁴ The legacies of colonialism have also trapped the Sahrawi population in a discourse of self-determination that follows a pattern of Eurocentric norms of state sovereignty and identity that exclude their previous nomadic and borderless modes of life.

³² This is seen in the Moroccan government's highly successful investment in lobbying firms in Washington who advocate for its interests and help to shape the narratives of Congressmen that will be examined here.

³³ The meanings and relationships between the words imperialism, neo-imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and hegemony need to be further investigated. As understood by Robert Young in his definitive text on postcolonialism, imperialism differs from colonialism in that it is driven by a strategy of state expansion while colonialism develops haphazardly as a practice rather than as policy. According to Young, imperialism is "characterized by the exercise of power either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination...Typically, it is the deliberate product of a political machine that rules from the centre, and extends its control to the furthest reaches of the peripheries: think of the Pentagon and the CIA in Washington, with their global strategy of controlling events in independent states all over the world in order to defeat communism or Islamic resistance and further U.S. interests." (Young, 27). John Agnew, on the other hand, seeks to replace the term empire with the concept of hegemony. He argues that in the context of globalization and the changing relationship between territory and power, hegemony is better suited to describe the new kind of power that is exerted by the United States. Each of these definitions leaves me unsatisfied, with avenues for further explorations beyond this thesis project. While I agree with Agnew that the nature of power and its relationship to territory and space have changed, policymakers are still rooted in traditional conceptualizations of power that make sense with the use of the terms imperialism or neo-imperialism. Young writes, "Imperialism, on the other hand, operated from the centre as a policy of state, driven by the grandiose projects of power." (Young, 17). However, unlike Young's definition, the state is not a unitary actor and its relationship to ideology is far more complex to fully adopt his definition of imperialism. For lack of a simultaneously more specific and encompassing term at the moment, I chose to use both of the terms hegemony and neo-imperialism to describe the exercise of United States power beyond its boundaries, and I characterize the nature of this power as hegemonic and imperial in the text that follows. See: Young, Robert. J.C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001). And: Agnew, John. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Revisionist legal scholar Antony Anghie argues that international legal principles developed out of the processes and legacies of colonialism. His thesis is that the Euro-centric doctrine of sovereignty developed as a principle of international law in relation to the colonial encounter. Important for the Western Sahara context is his argument that once 'Third World countries' gained European-style sovereignty through decolonization, they struggled to solidify sovereignty internally by assimilating and incorporating minorities as a practice of nation-state-making. Anghie, Antony. *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law. Vol. 37. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

The process of scripting the Western Sahara conflict through the discourses of foreign policymaking is directly dependent on the marginalization and occlusion of alternative narratives and interpretations. Attention to what is not said or not highlighted in the discourse of policymakers is as revealing as the words and frameworks they do use to discuss the region. My project identifies and analyzes how these exclusions and ways of thinking have enabled certain modes of policy towards the region, and what this process reveals about the nature of the state. In his work, *Critique of Security*, Mark Neocleous asserts that his project is to “open up the analysis to the ways in which spaces and places, processes and categories, are imagined through the lens of insecurity and in turn appropriated and colonized by the project of security.”³⁵ Along similar lines, this thesis analyzes the specific language that was and is used to imagine the Western Sahara as a site of insecurity, and discusses how this imagination enables the imperial practices of securitization that the United States is currently undertaking in the Sahara region. I refer specifically to the upsurge of U.S. military involvement in the Sahara over the last decade through programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and AFRICOM.

In sum, the theoretical framework guiding my research is predicated on thinking explicitly about representational lenses and modes of seeing the Western Sahara conflict through the eyes of policymakers in the United States. As scholars of performing security suggest, looking at practices of representation and imaginative geographies is not simply about language as it constructs and describes ideas, but about the power and knowledge produced by the performativity of discourse.³⁶ In other words, discourse is not a tool that subjects use to describe political ideas, but in fact constitutes and makes possible political realities and

³⁵ Neocleous, Mark. *Critique of Security*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008): 3.

³⁶ Bialasiewicz, Luisa and David Campbell, Stuart Elden, Stephen Graham, Alex Jeffrey and Alison Williams. “Performing Security: The imaginative geographies of current U.S. strategy.” *Political Geography Vol. 26*. (2007): 405-422.

subjects. The discourse and policies of state actors in the United States helped to produce the Western Sahara's territory, history, and people, while simultaneously producing and defining the identity of the United States. The lens of performativity helps to understand these discourses as productive of the material effects that they name.³⁷

The language that policymakers used to describe, debate and justify policy is important not just as a veneer that may disguise underlying intentions and meanings, but as a tool of shaping what was possible or logical to think. This process was undertaken both consciously and subconsciously. Shapiro notes that, "To maintain the credibility of its strategic discourse, the American state must therefore manage the articulation and expression of policy."³⁸ Policy makers were acutely aware of the power of their words. Upon entering office in 1989, Secretary of State James Baker noted, "I wanted to make sure I controlled policy, and at State, that meant controlling words."³⁹ Baker, who presided over several important moments in the history of the Western Sahara conflict, was highly conscious of the power of language in statemaking. The discourses of policymakers exerted their power over this conflict region through its control over the conditions of intelligibility and possibilities for policy. It is with this orientation in mind that I read the texts of U.S. foreign policymakers speaking and writing on the Western Sahara conflict.

In the United States, making foreign policy decisions is a multilevel, multilayered process undertaken in numerous ways by a variety of actors. While the discourses of statecraft are produced by a range of official, elected, academic and media voices, I focus primarily on official statements in the public record by congressmen, State Department officials, and

³⁷ See: Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is life grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009): 168.

Butler's concept of the performative requires constant iteration for performative effects to become part of the process of materialization. The state is relentlessly iterated through the performances of discourses of power.

³⁸ Shapiro (1990), 334.

³⁹ Baker, James Addison and Thomas M. DeFrank. *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995): 33.

presidents. Drawing from close readings of statements and debates over U.S. policy towards the Western Sahara and foreign policy more generally, I look at the language of policymakers to understand how central discourses of interests, power, security, sovereignty and self-determination were constituted, intersected, changed and contested.

My chapters are structured chronologically to trace the development of the narratives on the Western Sahara conflict over time. I identify tensions between conflicting representations and seek to understand how certain discourses on the region became dominant, to the exclusion of others. I will argue that as the global political landscape changed, there were moments of opportunity for the narrative on the Western Sahara to be reframed and for the U.S. to take concrete action to help resolve the conflict, protect human rights, and allow the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination. While there were changes and opportunities during these periods, the reformulations of the discourses of security and stability that were consistently invoked by policymakers foreclosed possibilities for real shifts in policy. The tensions, challenges and reformulations revealed in this analysis are best understood as part of the performative nature of the process of statecraft, and will help to identify methods and moments of intervention to change the narrative on this conflict.

My second chapter locates the conflict within the framework of the Cold War and the effect of this framework on the narrative that emerged in the United States regarding the Western Sahara bounded loosely by the years 1975 to 1990. I focus on the beginning of the conflict in 1975, the involvement of the United States in supplying arms to Morocco, and the debates over this policy in various congressional hearings. This chapter addresses the question: *What were the discourses applied to the Western Sahara conflict and what does this show about the way that American policymakers saw the world and their place in it during this period?*

My third chapter centers on the end of the Cold War and the involvement of the United States in United Nations efforts to resolve the conflict. I explore changes in thinking about foreign policy that emerged during this transition period, and its impact on the narrative told in the United States about the Western Sahara conflict from 1991 to approximately 2000. This chapter focuses on the ways that policymakers debated and re-imagined the role of the United States in the new post-Cold War order and how this affected the (ir)resolution of the Western Sahara conflict.

My fourth chapter centers around the impact of the emerging framework of the War on Terror on the U.S. narrative of the Western Sahara conflict. This chapter addresses the question: *How did the discourse of the War on Terror and the new security situation shape representations of the Western Sahara conflict and what have been the effects of this discourse on the region and on the self-conception of the U.S.?* I look at the language used to explain and justify efforts to securitize and militarize U.S. policy in this region, and how the increasing incorporation of the Western Sahara and Maghreb/Sahel region into the narrative of the global war on terror has further entrenched the irresolution of this conflict to the benefit of Morocco and the United States.

These three body chapters lead me to a concluding chapter that highlights the moments of opportunity for change that were foreclosed and begins to suggest possibilities for intervening in and changing prevailing narratives on this conflict and of foreign policy in general. I argue that the foreign policy discourse of the United States on this distant and obscure conflict helped to reformulate and maintain its self-conception as an imperial state and benevolent hegemon. My concluding chapter then briefly discusses what voices, narratives, and alternative political frameworks are/were silenced by the dominant narratives in the United States on this region, and what the implications of this silencing are for the Sahrawis affected by this conflict as well as for American citizens/subjects.

Chapter Two: The Cold War Lens

Congress: "How does one reconcile, however, a position of neutrality with a provision of arms to Morocco without any stipulation that those arms are not being used in the Western Sahara conflict?...I am simply asking how one reconciles a posture of neutrality with a provision of arms to be used in the conflict for only one side?"

State Department: "Our position is neutral on the outcome, but we are not indifferent to the need to make progress toward a negotiated settlement...[T]here is a need to wrap up this conflict and stabilize the North African region."

*~1981 Congressional hearing "Arms Sales in North Africa and the Conflict in Western Sahara: An Assessment of U.S. Policy."
Exchange between Morris Draper, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Department of State and Congressman Howard Wolpe (D-MI).*

The geopolitics of the Cold War generated particular modes of viewing the world that United States policymakers were both subject to and also played a role in performing and reproducing. The conflict over the territory known as the Western Sahara emerged in the context of the political imperatives of the Cold War era, and was sustained in part because of the Cold War geopolitical lens employed by United States policymakers. The phrase "Cold War era" designates the period in world history shaped by the competition for global predominance between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. However the concept of the "Cold War era" also designates a set of political assumptions and imperatives that governed the statecraft of U.S. policymakers. The discourses at work during the Cold War were dominated by iterated performances of certain scripts of national security and national interest.

The Cold War lens framed international politics as a tension between moralized binaries of good over evil, capitalism versus communism, democracy and freedom against political enslavement. The predominant narrative told the story of a 'good,' principled ideological system, that of the United States and its allies, pitted against an 'evil,' immoral and dangerous ideological system, the Soviet Union and its 'satellites.' The story was set in a world where power was projected from territorial states, produced and secured by military, economic and diplomatic means, and needed to be balanced in order to ensure the stability of world order. The narrative relied upon simplistic categories, and required that all actors fit

into a mold of either friend or enemy. It was a world in which general discourses of necessity were deployed to justify specific realist pursuits of perceived interests. Cold War realism was concerned with instability, weak states, and political deviance, all concerns that were used to characterize the Western Sahara territory. In this story, these practices of representation interpellated⁴⁰ the Western Sahara and the broader region of North Africa as a space that needed to be secured by the United States, acting with and through its ‘ally’ Morocco.

It was within the Cold War discourses of security and interest that the Western Sahara was scripted as a place of concern to United States policymakers. The Cold War lens required policymakers to situate the Western Sahara conflict within a regional and global context of contemporary forces, actors, and events. From the beginning of this conflict, a ‘geopolitical gaze’ informed the lens used to view the region.⁴¹ The term geopolitical gaze, as used by critical geopolitics scholar Gearoid O’Tuathail, refers to the spatialization of the world map according to a Western, imperial vantage point, measured by Western conceptual systems of identity and difference which brings places into the scope of Western geographic imaginings. This way of viewing the world inscribes certain identities onto places by virtue of their physical and political location.⁴² The geopolitical gaze is attentive to place and spatial location, and implies an imperial orientation that is both possessive and concerned with spheres of influence and power. The practices of representation that constitute this geopolitical gaze participate in a cartographic violence rooted in legacies of colonialism.

⁴⁰ As articulated by Louis Althusser, the concept of interpellation describes the act of hailing—of naming, fixing and asserting power—to call someone or thing into being.

⁴¹ Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. Vol. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*

This chapter explores the language deployed⁴³ by policymakers to understand and situate the Western Sahara conflict in their geopolitical imaginations. Drawing on congressional hearings and State Department statements, the first half of the chapter traces the involvement of the United States in the initiation of the Moroccan invasion and subsequent war during the Ford, Carter and Reagan administrations. I identify the various overlapping discourses used to script the Western Sahara conflict, and argue that discourses of security dominated representations of the conflict and U.S. involvement. The second half of the chapter looks closely at the congressional debates over U.S. arms sales policy towards Morocco during the early stages of the Saharan War to identify points of tension and resistance to patterns of U.S. policymaking that were then foreclosed by the dominance of discourses of security.

Mapping the U.S. role

The strategic location and geographic character of the Western Sahara territory brought it to the attention of United States policymakers who thought of world politics in terms of the projection of power across space. This spatialized orientation shaped the way that both Morocco and the disputed Western Sahara territory were scripted in policymakers' geographic imaginations. Morocco, located at the entrance to the Mediterranean, poised between Europe, Africa and the Middle East,⁴⁴ was well placed to be seen as a vital ally for a United States seeking to project power into this region and beyond. The Western Sahara territory, located between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, was also situated as an

⁴³ I use the term 'deployed' in a highly self-conscious way that is aware of the militarism and violence that it implies. While I am personally uncomfortable with the use of military metaphors in diplomacy and politics, my usage is consistent with the prevailing discourse of policymakers. I chose to use the term 'deploy' to remind the reader of the material violences that these discourses produce, justify and enable.

⁴⁴ Zunes, Stephen and Jacob Mundy. *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*. Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2010): 71.

important space of transition. In the binary world of the Cold War, political imperatives to control territorial space played out in superpower competition over ‘spheres of influence.’ Morocco’s geographic location made it a desired ally and a strategically useful addition to the U.S. sphere of influence. As such, Morocco’s role in the U.S. centric view of the world was as an administrator of areas of interest to the United States.

Within the framework of the Cold War, both Morocco and the colonial power Spain, which had controlled the territory in question since 1884, were seen as pro-Western allies in the rivalry with the Soviet Union. In the mid 1970’s, as Spanish dictator General Franco lay on his deathbed, the United States grew increasingly concerned with the potential for destabilization in Spain during the inevitable transition of power. At the same time, reports from the CIA influenced perceptions that King Hassan II of Morocco’s hold on the throne was tenuous and he faced domestic opposition.⁴⁵ These concerns for the stability of U.S.-allied regimes shaped the response of policymakers to the growing tension over the Western Sahara territory that emerged during this period.

It is important to differentiate between the nature of these allied relationships. In the story continually told by U.S. policymakers, the United States has a long-standing relationship with Morocco, which was the first country to recognize the independence of the U.S. in 1777 and with whom the U.S. had sustained a Treaty of Friendship since 1787, the longest in U.S. history. The strong relationship between the U.S. Army and Morocco dated to the Allied landing in Casablanca in 1942 and the U.S. maintained bases there until 1963. However the story of constant friendship with the Government of Morocco erases the story of the French and Spanish colonial intervention into a region at one point governed by a

⁴⁵ According to Ohaegbulam, “Ultimately, therefore, the stability of the Hassan regime was the principal consideration that influenced U.S. policy on the conflict.” Ohaegbulam, Festus Ugboaja. "Ethical Issues in US Policy on the Western Sahara Conflict." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2002): 88-115.

Maghrebian sultanate and previously colonized by successive waves of Arab Islamic empires. U.S. policy toward Morocco centered the objective of preserving the current Moroccan monarchy as an ally of the West, a policy that maintains the nationalist myth that the modern Moroccan nation-state has always been as such. While U.S. policymakers rhetorically describe Morocco as an ‘ally,’ this relationship has always had paternalistic and imperial elements as policymakers interpellated Morocco as an assistant to achieving U.S. objectives in the North African region.

Contemporary decolonization movements in Africa and elsewhere prompted three United Nations resolutions between 1960 and 1975 supporting the self-determination of the Sahrawi people which called on Spain to initiate a process of decolonization in, what was then, the Spanish Sahara.⁴⁶ The United States abstained from these votes, later asserting that “We thought that [the resolutions] were deficient in that while they satisfied the interested of the indigenous peoples they did not respect all the legitimate interests of Spain. Our votes were consistent with our general objectives at the time.” This testimony, from State Department representative Nicholas Veliotis at the 1977 Congressional hearing on self-determination in the Western Sahara, is representative of the U.S. tendency to support the rights of Western imperial powers over those of colonized peoples. This perspective then informed and enabled the involvement of the United States in the questionable legal and diplomatic behind-the-scenes process that lead to Morocco’s invasion of the territory in 1975.

⁴⁶ The UN designated the Spanish Sahara as a non-self-governing territory in 1963, ensuring that it fell under the jurisdiction of UN Resolution 1514 of 1960 which established the right to independence for colonial countries and peoples. In 1965 the UN passed Resolution 2072, calling on Spain to initiate a process of decolonization. The U.S. abstained from a voting on Resolution 2229 in 1966 that explicitly granted the right to self-determination to the Spanish Sahara. The U.S. again abstained from Resolution 2983 in 1972 that supported the territory’s right to independence.

The Ford Administration and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger himself, were both aware of and also complicit in the process by which Morocco claimed sovereignty over the territory. Leo Kamil, whose 1987 work *Fueling the Fire* documents the U.S. involvement in the early stages of this conflict, reported that the CIA notified Kissinger of Morocco's plan to invade the Spanish Sahara three weeks before the event of the Green March. The United States played a private role in the Madrid Accords, which illegitimately negotiated the transfer of the Sahara territory from Spain to Morocco and Mauritania.⁴⁷ In a 1978 interview, former CIA official Vernon Walters confirmed that he had played a role in the negotiations leading up to the Madrid Accords. He refused to discuss the details of the talks because "it would look like the King of Morocco and the King of Spain are pawns of the United States and that wouldn't be in anybody's interest."⁴⁸ While both Morocco and Spain certainly acted on their own agendas in this process, it is clear that the United States played a larger role than it wanted to admit publically.⁴⁹ While Zunes and Mundy (2010) are right to clarify that the conflict over the Western Sahara never took on the form of a proxy war between the U.S. and the USSR, it is useful to think of the ways that Morocco played proxy to exertions of U.S. power within its 'sphere of influence.'

In the days leading up to and following the Green March, a set of declassified conversations between Kissinger and Ford illuminate the geopolitical lens that informed and

⁴⁷ The Madrid Accords are not recognized as legitimate because Spain, as the colonial power that the UN had tasked with decolonizing their territory, did not have the legal power to transfer its sovereignty or administration to another national entity without an act of self-determination of the people of the territory. The Mauritanian role is not discussed in the scope of this project. Mauritania fought unsuccessfully against the Polisario for control of the southern third of the Western Saharan territory, until it concluded a peace agreement ceding the territory to the Polisario in 1978 in the context of an internal military coup in Mauritania.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Kamil, Leo. *Fueling the Fire: US Policy & the Western Sahara Conflict*. Vol. 1 (Red Sea Press, 1987): 11.

⁴⁹ Walters was required to link Spain's request for \$1.5 billion in U.S. weapons and the renewal of the lease for U.S. air and navy bases in Spain on generous terms with the letters of cooperation with Morocco on Western Sahara. See: Hodges, Tony. "At Odds with Self-determination: The United States and Western Sahara," in *African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Gerald J. Bender, James Smoot Coleman, and Richard L. Sklar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 264.

produced policy toward the region. By November 10th 1975, four days after the Green March, it was clear that these statemakers saw Moroccan control of the territory as integral to the stability of the Moroccan regime. Kissinger communicated to Ford, “Hassan has pulled back in the Sahara. But if he doesn’t get it, he is finished. We should now work to ensure he gets it. We would work through the UN to ensure a favorable vote.”⁵⁰ The next day he pronounced, “the hope is for a rigged UN vote, but if it doesn’t happen soon...Hassan may be overthrown.” The stability of friendly regimes was clearly articulated as the primary interest of the United States on this issue, while the Sahara was spoken of simply as a territorial possession, devoid of a people and a legitimate resistance movement.⁵¹ Kissinger’s assertion that the “U.S. would not allow another Angola on the east flank of the Atlantic Ocean”⁵² demonstrates both the prevailing orientation towards the ideas of balancing power between spheres of influence, and the hubris of a United States that envisioned itself as the center of the world.

From the very beginning, the conflict was a point of contention between the Morocco and its regional rival Algeria, a member of the Non-Aligned Movement with whom the United States had a complicated relationship, to say the least. A declassified conversation between Kissinger and then Algerian Foreign Minister Bouteflika from December 17, 1975 documents Bouteflika admonishing Kissinger for his pretense of neutrality towards the developing conflict over the territory. In response to a comment from Kissinger that for Cold War reasons they could not risk their relationship with Morocco and instead took a neutral position on the conflict, Bouteflika asserted, “Your role could never be marginal or

⁵⁰ Kissinger, Henry and Gerald Ford. Memorandum of conversations between Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford, Washington, DC, November 10, 1975.

⁵¹ Anti-colonial resistance movements first became active in the 1960s, but were consolidated into a political and military force with the formation of the POLISARIO (Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro) which began actively fighting for the independence of the territory from Spain in 1973.

⁵² Kamil, 10.

devoid of interest because obviously there was military cooperation with Morocco, so, given that, you could not be neutral between Morocco and Algeria.”⁵³ Bouteflika, now president of Algeria and still an important player in the ongoing conflict, recognized the impossibility of U.S. neutrality in this conflict, yet U.S. policymakers have continued to describe the U.S. relationship to the conflict as if they were neutral.

On the contrary, it is clear that not only has U.S. policy been consistently biased towards Morocco as an actor in this dispute, but that the United States played an active role in facilitating the occupation of the Western Sahara territory. On the eve of the Green March, the United States announced its intention to deliver 24 F-5E fighter planes to Morocco.⁵⁴ In the weeks leading up to the Moroccan invasion, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Daniel Patrick Moynihan was ordered to obstruct the Security Council from taking action against the impending Moroccan invasion. Moynihan later admitted, “The United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success.”⁵⁵ Despite their claims to neutrality, the geopolitical gaze interpellated both Morocco and the UN as tools to help policymakers accomplish their goals of maintaining power and control in North Africa, and interest to which the struggle for the independence of the Western Sahara was inconvenient. Publically the U.S. asserted its neutrality towards the outcome of the regional dispute, but privately supported Morocco’s efforts militarily and politically.

⁵³ Kissinger, Henry and Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Memorandum of conversation between Henry Kissinger and Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Paris, December 17, 1975. <http://wlstorage.net/file/kissinger-bouteflika.pdf>

⁵⁴ Franck, Thomas M. "The Stealing of the Sahara." *The American Journal of International Law* 70, no. 4 (Oct., 1976): 694-721.

⁵⁵ From Moynihan’s *A Dangerous Place*, quoted in Ohaegubulam, 128.

The policy of public neutrality and private support for Morocco carried through to successive administrations. According to Nicholas Veliotis, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in 1977, the “U.S. plays no role and have maintained a policy of neutrality” by recognizing Moroccan administrative control over the territory, though not its claims to sovereignty, and professing “no judgment” on the issue of self-determination.⁵⁶ When the Carter administration took power in 1977, it attempted to rebrand its foreign policy as a new shift towards respect for human rights in an effort to paint a new post-Vietnam image of the United States. In a 1977 speech, President Jimmy Carter articulated his intention to follow a foreign policy doctrine “that is democratic, that is based on fundamental values, and that uses power and influence, which we have, for humane purposes.”⁵⁷ In his speech Carter claimed that Americans were now “free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.” Yet, the policy that the U.S. pursued with respect to the Morocco’s occupation of the Western Sahara during his administration is a salient example of support for an undemocratic and despotic monarch who violated international law by invading the Sahara and inflicted human rights abuses upon its population. Between 1974 and 1978, U.S. military aid to Morocco increased from \$4.1 million to \$99.8 million as the war in the Sahara escalated.⁵⁸ The disconnect between the discourse of human rights and its application in policy is most evident in the debates over the arms sales policy to Morocco that I will engage with in the second part of this chapter. Under President Carter, arms sales to Morocco were

⁵⁶ United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Africa and International Organizations. *Hearings on the Question of Self-Determination in Western Sahara. Ninety-Fifth Congress, First Session, October 12 1977*. Washington: US, G.P.O., 1977.

⁵⁷ Carter, Jimmy. "President's Commencement Address at the University of Notre Dame." *Notre Dame L.* 53, (1977).

⁵⁸ Zunes, Stephen. "The United States and Morocco: The Sahara War and Regional Interests." *Arab Studies Quarterly* (1987): 425.

briefly restricted to limit their use in the Western Sahara territory, but resumed without any conditions in 1979.

In a memo to Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski from National Security Council member William Quandt in 1977, the tendency of U.S. policymakers to regard the conflict through a geopolitical lens and to overlook the role of local desire for independence in the region is clear. Quandt is frank about the fact that Morocco is in the wrong; he acknowledges "the simple fact that they annexed the territory by force" and that its claim to the territory is "not overwhelmingly impressive."⁵⁹ However, he dismisses the Sahrawis as a "small nomadic population" and notes that, "In any case, nomadic tribal allegiances have not been very stable, and the dominant sentiment is one of fierce independence and disregard for such niceties as frontiers." The Western-centric language Quandt employs paints the Sahrawi people as uncivilized and premodern, stripping them of legal and moral power. He presents the conflict as one between Morocco and Algeria, and does not take the Polisario seriously as an independent actor.⁶⁰ While Quandt notes that the issue is not "vital to world peace," he advocates efforts to resolve it because the conflict impedes "more serious issues of [economic] development." Haunting the interests articulated in U.S. policy towards this region is the impulse to 'develop' the region economically, a means of expanding and exerting U.S. power and paternalistic control over the region.

The Reagan administration, which came to power in 1981, was frank in its pursuit of state interest and did not pretend to be concerned about human rights or the principles of international law. The tone of Reagan administration policy is well expressed by Jeanne

⁵⁹ "The Western Sahara Conflict." Memorandum from William Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski. *National Security Council*. Washington DC, September 15, 1977.

⁶⁰ In fact, the US did not have direct contact with the Polisario until December 1979, and then still did not treat them as equals to dialogue with, citing their lack of statehood. See: Ohaegbulam (2002), 101.

Kirkpatrick, a national security adviser to President Reagan. Kirkpatrick published a 1979 article titled “Dictatorships and Double Standards” in which she criticized the Carter administration for prioritizing principles over interest, and laid the foundation for what would later be known as the ‘Kirkpatrick Doctrine.’ Acknowledging that “governments behave hypocritically when their principles conflict with the national interest,” she laid out a realist argument for supporting authoritarian governments whose interests align with our own.⁶¹ Central to her argument was both a strong anti-communist posture, and an assertion that the economic structure of authoritarian regimes, as opposed to totalitarian communism, was more in line with U.S. efforts at economic expansion through liberalization. Propping up dictators who supported economic policies beneficial to the United States was central to a set of foreign policy practices that assured continued access to resources in the post-colonial era.

While Kirkpatrick is generally credited with and criticized for imperialistic policies that supported repression by authoritarian dictatorships in Latin America, her “Kirkpatrick Doctrine” was similarly applied to Morocco in the case of its occupation of the Western Sahara. When the Reagan administration took power in 1981, the State Department explicitly articulated the importance of a strong friendship with Morocco for the benefit of U.S. interests. State Department representative Morris Draper asserted in a 1981 Congressional hearing, “It is, however, the prevailing view of this administration that America’s allies and close associates should expect understanding and reliable support. It would not be in the spirit of this administration’s policy if support for America’s traditional and historic friends—to meet reasonable and legitimate needs—were to be withheld or made conditional

⁶¹ Kirkpatrick, Jeanne J. "Dictatorships and Double Standards." *Commentary Magazine*. Vol.68. No.5.(1979):34-45.

other than under extraordinary circumstances.”⁶² Words like ‘reasonable’ and ‘legitimate’ (and the more recent overuse of ‘credible’ and ‘moderate’) were used to lend political legitimacy and authority to Morocco’s Sahara policy as it aligned with the U.S. interests in the region.

Under the Reagan Administration, military and economic assistance to Morocco increased dramatically. According to political scientist David Seddon, “The justification for the large scale military aid provided to Morocco by the United States, in the words of the Reagan Administration’s official budget request to Congress in 1985, is that ‘it helps to maintain the stability of a pro-Western country.’”⁶³ The designation of Morocco as ‘pro-Western’ located it in the U.S. sphere and also interpellated it as an actor in the service of Western interests, rather than an ally on an equal playing field. As such, the United States intervened to help its client state to administer its own partially colonized territory. In 1981, a group of Pentagon and Defense Department officials visited the territory, followed by visits by Jeanne Kirkpatrick herself, CIA personnel and State Department officials.⁶⁴ In 1982 the United States and Morocco signed a joint military agreement, U.S. Green Berets were dispatched to the territory to help train and advise Moroccan forces, and the U.S. began providing intelligence assistance for the building of a defensive wall in the desert. The ‘berm,’ as it is known, is a series of fortified sand walls defended by Moroccan troops and monitored with electronic surveillance provided by U.S. companies. Scholars have agreed that U.S. support for Morocco, and the building of the berm in particular, was fundamental

⁶² United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs and United States. *Arms Sales in North Africa and the Conflict in the Western Sahara: An Assessment of U.S. Policy: Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-Seventh Congress, First Session, March 25, 1981*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1981.

⁶³ Seddon, David. "Morocco and the Western Sahara." *Review of African Political Economy* 14, no. 38 (1987): 29.

⁶⁴ Kamil, 69 and Zunes and Mundy, 66.

to its success in securing and maintaining control over most of the Western Sahara territory and for turning the tide of the war in Morocco's favor.⁶⁵

The narratives of the Western Sahara that emerged in U.S. policy circles in the early stages of the conflict centered on its strategic importance geographically, the threat to the Moroccan ally, and the fear of destabilizing the region. In practice, Morocco was enlisted as a colonial administrator to maintain U.S. power and secure U.S. interests in North Africa. The primary motivations for U.S. concern over the region were connected to a Cold War spatialization of the world into spheres of influence. Through that cartographic lens, the Western Sahara was produced as a place that threatened the interests of the United States. The securitization of the region scripted the Western Sahara as a site of threat, danger and Otherness. To U.S. Cold Warriors, security was about power and control, its tools military and economic. It was in this context that U.S. policymakers debated and contested policies that provided arms and military support to Morocco. A close read of these debates reveals moments of discord and incoherence among policymakers that failed to resist the securitization of the region.

Congressional debates over arms sales policy

Starting in 1977, hearings held by congressional foreign relations committees on the subject of the Western Sahara provided a space for democratic deliberation over the interests and principles at stake in policy decisions towards this region. These hearings also provided a space for the relatively active Congress of the post-Watergate period to interrogate and challenge the policymaking of the executive branch. The tensions and debates between a variety of voices in these hearings reveal the multifaceted nature of U.S. statemaking, and the

⁶⁵ Zunes and Mundy, 22.

role that policymakers play in performing the institution of the state. The performative discourses articulated in these hearings relied on practices of representation to make sense of the political situation. Seeing the state as performative helps to identify and unpack the incoherence of the policy assumptions and imperatives. As the debates show, imperatives, representations and ideas were contested and required constant reiteration in order to sustain their discursive power. The hearings were structured to open with a statement from the presiding chairman, included testimony from outside experts and State Department officials, and provided opportunities for congressmen to question and challenge them.

Underlying the specific debates about policy towards the Western Sahara is an ongoing debate about the interests and principles of the United States. Foreign policy scholars in the liberal tradition tend to see decision-making as a choice between interests and principles. The congressional debates of this period help to illuminate how interests and principles were produced, and the relationship between them contested.⁶⁶ Through the lens of the Cold War, policymakers discussed the categories of interest and principle as if they were discrete and mutually exclusive. In general, policymakers defined national interest in terms of security, stability, and economic and political power. The concepts of sovereignty, self-determination, human rights, and democracy are consistent principles present in the discourse of American foreign policy. However, as the hearings show, the boundaries of these designations are fluid and contested, and their meanings were in constant process of being constituted and performed.

⁶⁶ As Claudia Wright pointed out, "These events [in the WS] have made little public impression in the United States, but they prodded the Carter Administration and then the Reagan Administration into detailed, often controversial assessments of the policies the U.S. has pursued in the region for over twenty years." Wright, Claudia. "Journey to Marrakesh: U.S.-Moroccan Security Relations." *International Security* 7, no. 4 (Spring, 1983): 163.

The first of these hearings was held in 1977 by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to address the question of self-determination for Western Sahara and the implications for U.S. foreign policy. Nicholas Veliotis, the official who represented the State Department at this hearing, laid out a view of the interests at stake in the conflict that was deeply embedded in Cold War imperatives. He was concerned that the conflict would complicate “our longstanding and broadly based relations with Morocco—an influential moderate in the strategic North African area—and our friendly relations with Mauritania, on the one hand; or our important economic interests and improving relations with Algeria on the other.”⁶⁷ Veliotis framed the conflict as one between Morocco and Algeria, referencing Polisario only as “a Sahrawi guerrilla group.” The term guerrilla is used to classify the Polisario’s violence as illegitimate in contrast to the legitimate violence of the Moroccan state. Despite the fact that the hearing was ostensibly about the question of self-determination, Veliotis claimed that it was State policy to not make a judgment on whether an act of self-determination had taken place in the Sahara. His framing of the conflict failed to consider the rights of Sahrawi people. Instead, Veliotis focused on the State Department’s concern that the conflict might become a site of contestation between the great powers.

This framing of the conflict helped to normalize a self-contradictory and contested policy of expressing neutrality while providing arms to Morocco. A 1960 treaty restricted the U.S. arms provided to Morocco for use within Morocco’s internationally recognized territory. State Department officials were vague, at first, regarding whether or not Morocco was using U.S. arms in the Western Sahara war. It soon became clear that they were, a fact

⁶⁷ U.S. House 1977.

admitted by Veliotis in testimony.⁶⁸ In 1979, a congressional hearing on the arms sales policy opened up debate on whether or not to continue providing arms to Morocco, and whether or not to restrict those weapons for use in the Western Sahara.

Congressman Stephen Solarz began the 1979 hearing by placing the Western Sahara conflict in the context of U.S. military interests. He asserted, “U.S. interests in the conflict go beyond questions of self-determination and international law. The Moroccan monarchy has been traditionally friendly to the United States. It permits our 6th Fleet to call at its ports, has encouraged the Israeli-Egyptian peace proposal, quietly sent troops to help preserve Western interests in Zaire’s Shaba province and has acted as a moderate force in various international forums.” Morocco’s military cooperation and assistance demonstrates its status as an administrator to U.S. interests, who was treated less as an ally, than as a resource to use to defend U.S. imperial interests. Subject to the discourse of the Cold War, Solarz was concerned with the idea that “War between Algeria and Morocco, which is a clear and present danger, could draw the U.S. into a serious confrontation with the Soviet Union.” This geopolitical gaze refused the separation of local conflicts from the broader narrative of global conflict, and led U.S. policymakers to value the strategic, military position of compliant Morocco above the issues of international law.

The State Department official who testified in the 1979 hearing, Harold Saunders, described the conflict in a similar framework. Saunders began his testimony by “underscoring the American interests in this area.” He emphasized “the importance of this area on the southern coast of the Mediterranean to us strategically” and the “important national resources, petroleum and phosphates in these areas.” To the State Department at this time, the region was important because of its militarily useful location and the potential

⁶⁸ U.S. House 1977.

benefit of natural resources, in particular speculation about oil. The region was viewed as a place from which to extract resources and from which to base military action, a view which required the U.S. efforts to 'secure' it under their sphere of influence.

However, other voices in the hearing expressed concern that arms sales to Morocco were in fact detrimental to U.S. interests in the region. Congressman Houser, for example, asserted that continued U.S. arms sales to Morocco were contributing to the destabilization of the region, and undermined U.S. interest because the inconsistency between Washington's professed neutrality and the arms sales was eroding U.S. credibility with Africa and other parts of the world.⁶⁹ Congressional challenge to the policy of providing arms for Morocco pushed the administration to restrict the sales of offensive weapons to Morocco as a small attempt to prevent the use of U.S. weapons in the Western Sahara. In general, these contestations of the dominant narratives objected to strategy and tactics, rather than the overall aim of exercising U.S. power in regions around the globe. The policy of restricting arms for Morocco was dropped in late 1979 in response to ongoing events in the global political climate.

The fall of the U.S. backed Shah in Iran in 1979 gave strength to the fear that King Hassan's friendly regime was at risk, and the restrictions on the use of arms were removed.⁷⁰ According to a statement by Congressman Solarz, who ultimately disagreed with the change in policy, recognized that "a change in our [arms] policy would be seen by other countries as a manifestation of our overall global credibility in the aftermath of perceived defeats in

⁶⁹ United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. Subcommittees on Africa and International Organizations. *The Question of Self-determination in Western Sahara. Ninety-Sixth Congress, first session. October 13, 1979.* Washinton:U.S. G.P.O., 1979.

⁷⁰ United States. *U.S. Policy Toward the Conflict in the Western Sahara : Report of a Staff Study Mission to Morocco, Algeria, the Western Sabara, and France, August 25-September 6, 1982 to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1983.

As David Seddon recorded, "After the fall of the Shah of Iran and Somoza of Nicaragua in 1979, President Carter dropped an earlier ban on the sale of certain kinds of aircraft to Morocco and agreed a multi-million dollar arms package for Morocco." (Seddon, 29).

Angola, Iran and Nicaragua.”⁷¹ According to political scientist Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, “concerns that arose in Washington about the stability of the Moroccan monarchy after the fall of the Shah of Iran in February 1979 and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan prompted the administration to decide to strengthen security ties with traditional U.S. allies in the Third World.”⁷² This the concern for the stability of the Moroccan monarchy was placed in context with other ongoing Cold War proxy conflict’s (or conflicts that were represented as such) in Angola, Iran, Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Ohaegbulam writes, “During the Cold War, when the U.S. globalist view that local conflicts were primarily the result of America’s geopolitical rivalry with the Soviet Union, U.S. administrations never perceived Morocco or the entire northwestern Africa region as part of the vital security interests of the United States. Yet the administrations acted as if Morocco were one, a U.S. ally against the Soviets and their northwestern African surrogates.”⁷³ The views of policymakers on the Western Sahara conflict were influenced by the geopolitical and global power-balancing discourses of the time, which carried through in their relationship with Morocco.⁷⁴

Harold Saunders, as the official representing the State Department at a 1980 hearing, announced that the “Administration proposed to thread its way through the labyrinth by reversing its previous policy of refusing to sell Morocco arms suited for use in the Western Sahara and attempting to use the new sales of counterinsurgency equipment as a means of

⁷¹ Solarz, Stephen. “Arms for Morocco?” *Foreign Affairs*. Vol 58. (1979): 278-299.

⁷² Ohaegbulam (2002), 104.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 112.

⁷⁴ The connection to events in Iran was underscored when Reagan appointed Joseph Reed as Ambassador to Morocco in 1981. Reed, who previously was Nelson Rockefeller’s liaison with King Hassan and the former Shah of Iran, told King Hassan upon his appointment “The leadership of the Reagan administration has stated that your country’s concerns are my country’s concerns. The United States will do its best to be helpful in every area of need that may arise. Count on us. We are with you.”

Wenger, Martha. “Reagan Stakes Morocco in Sahara Struggle.” *MERIP Reports*. No. 105., Reagan Targets the Middle East. (May 1982): 22-30.

acquiring leverage on the parties to promote a compromise negotiated settlement.”⁷⁵ The new policy was rooted in the idea supplying arms would give the U.S. more leverage to resolve the conflict. It is clear that selling arms to one side only is an irreconcilable strategy for resolving a conflict with a pretense of neutrality. Instead, supplying arms to Morocco was a means of exerting U.S. power in the region and supporting its own interests through its client state. Speaking to the administration’s plans to sell to Morocco an additional \$232.5 million worth of military aircraft in 1980, Saunders added, “We believe an outright victory over Morocco by Morocco’s adversaries would constitute a serious setback to major U.S. interests.”⁷⁶

Under the Reagan administration arms sales increased, as did Congressional skepticism to this strategy. The extent of Congress’ discomfort with State Department policy under Reagan can be read into the report produced by a 1982 Report of the Staff Study Mission to Western Sahara. A group of staffers for the Committee on Foreign Affairs traveled to the region and met with officials in Paris, Rabat, Laayoune, Tindouf and Algiers. Their highly critical report asserted, “Continuation of the conflict, along with the perceived US tilt toward Morocco, contains serious risks for a number of important US interests.”⁷⁷ The committee staff members identified a broad range of U.S. foreign policy interests at stake in the conflict: “maintenance of good bilateral relations with Morocco and Algeria, which impact on our strategic interests in the Mediterranean, concern that existing regional

⁷⁵ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs and United States. *Hearings on Proposed Arms Sales to Morocco. Ninety-Sixth Congress, Second Session. June 24 and 29, 1980.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1980.

⁷⁶ U.S. House 1980.

According to Ohaegbulam (2002, 96), U.S. military support for Morocco received additional impetus from three events that occurred in October 1981: a military victory for Polisario at Guelta Zemmour, a report by former U.S. President Richard Nixon following a visit to King Hassan II on the need for increased U.S. military support, and uncertainty in the region due to Colonel Muammar Qaddafi’s activities and the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

⁷⁷ Report of the Staff Study Mission 1982.

conflicts not escalate and become internationalized, our traditional support for the self-determination of colonized peoples, and relations with the Organization of African Unity and such important friends as France, Spain, and Saudi Arabia.” By emphasizing self-determination and the importance of working with multilateral institutions, this articulation of the interests at stake in this conflict challenged the exclusively realist policies of Reagan-era State Department officials.

The staffers recognized that the effect of pro-Morocco policies undermined some of the professed interests of the state. They did not challenge the consensus that the U.S. should exert power to control the region. It was still a place that needed to be secured by the United States, but they did challenge the realist and militarist strategies to pursued by the Reagan administration to do so. Their critical report sought to change policy in order to align with their perceptions of American interest, rooted in commitment to American values. The report’s claim that “U.S. support for the principle of national self-determination is also a major U.S. asset in world diplomacy and a striking contrast to the behavior of its Soviet rival” was an attempt to reorient the understanding of U.S. national interests around the principle of self-determination.⁷⁸ Their attempt to redefine U.S. interests in this conflict had little impact on Reagan administration policy. This missed opportunity to redirect U.S. policy demonstrates a longstanding divergence between foundational principles and perceptions of interest, as well as differences in the strategies to pursue them.

The Reagan administration framed its military assistance to Morocco as a means of helping to resolve the conflict and maintain the stability of the region. Military support for Morocco, from arms sales, U.S. contractors, Green Berets, military advisors, and technological assistance with building of the berm, was clearly designed to help resolve the

⁷⁸ Though of course, the Soviet Union was supporting ‘self-determination’ by supplying arms to other decolonization and rebel movements in Africa and elsewhere.

war by aiding a de facto victory for Morocco, rather than enabling negotiation as the State Department pretended. The depth of involvement of the United States in the Saharan war indicates the success of the efforts to securitize the region by representing it as a threat.⁷⁹

Securitization of the Western Sahara region

The idea that the conflict in the Western Sahara posed a security risk, however remote, to the United States was directly linked to the geopolitical thinking that located the territory in a broad region of power politics. Looking at the conflict through the lens of U.S. Cold Warriors, we can understand that their geopolitical concerns were part of their performance as statemakers intent on projecting and performing the power of the U.S. State. Statemaking, to them, required that external, peripheral areas be painted as places of potential danger and as threats to the interests of the State. Congressman Stephen Solarz, introducing the issue at the 1979 Congressional hearing, asserted that the conflict itself “presents a major threat to peace and political stability in North Africa and contains serious implications for U.S. international diplomacy in the Middle East and Africa.”⁸⁰ This process of securitizing the conflict was enabled by a number of strands of thinking and speaking about the region, and helped to produce the identities of the statemakers and of the State itself.

The idea that the conflict posed a danger to the United States was reflected in the constantly repeated refrain about the potential for the conflict to escalate into a great power confrontation. As Congressman Solarz expressed in 1980, the fear was that “continued

⁷⁹ U.S. military support for Morocco between fiscal years 1975 and 1984 escalated to include \$880 million in foreign military sales (FMS) agreements, \$55 million in grants to finance military sales, \$352 million in credits, \$84 million in licensed commercial arms exports, and \$10 million for the provision of training. By 1998 Morocco had received from the United States a total of \$1 billion in military aid and \$1.3 billion in economic assistance. See: Ohaegbulam (2002), 98.

⁸⁰ U.S. House 1979.

conflict over the Western Sahara could eventually jeopardize economic and political stability in Morocco, escalate into broader regional conflict and attract great power intervention.”⁸¹ This fear both reflected a broad Cold War concern, and also produced the possibility for this to become the reality. The framing of the conflict within the Cold War balance of power imperative was a discursive practice that helped to securitize the region in policymakers’ language and practices.

This framework required that the actors involved in the conflict be understood as located on one or the other side of the divide between friend and enemy. Reflecting on the conflict much later, statesman James Baker emphasized the friend/enemy dimension in his explanation of why the U.S. provided intelligence to help Morocco build the berm. He observed, “Now that was back in the days of the Cold War when the POLISARIO Front was aligned with Cuba and Libya and some other enemies of the United States, and Morocco was very close to the United States.”⁸² By invoking classic ‘rogue states’ that received support from the Soviet Union, policymakers tarred the Polisario with the same brush as other generally recognized U.S. enemies. Lumping the Polisario with Libya and Cuba helped to close the gap between an obscure local conflict and a threat to the global superpower.

There were moments when the black and white binary simplicity of the Cold War lens was recognized and challenged by some officials, but their resistance to this way of thinking was overshadowed by security concerns. In a 1981 hearing on U.S. policy, former

⁸¹ U.S. House 1980

⁸² Baker, James. Interview with Mishal Husain. “Former U.S. Secretary of State and former Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General to Western Sahara, James A. Baker III discusses the protracted conflict in Western Sahara with host Mishal Husain.” Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). August 2004. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/sahara-marathon/interview-james-a-baker-iii/873/>

Ambassador to Algeria, Ulrich Haynes, expressed his concern about viewing the conflict through this frame:

I am terribly concerned that we not get involved in yet another exercise of self-deception. We seem prone to do that, particularly in foreign policy, because it is easy to think in simplistic terms. And the Libyans are the bad guys these days. If we could prove that there was a Libyan connection, it would make it very much easier for us to adopt a negative, very strongly negative posture toward the Polisario.⁸³

Haynes astutely recognized and called out the tendency to put places and people into clearly defined boxes of good and evil. Haynes expressed his concern that the lens of the Cold War was coloring policymakers' interpretations of the conflict, and instead recommended instead a strict policy of neutrality. However, his voice was an anomaly in a sea of official voices urging support for our 'friend' Morocco.

The securitization of the region was not limited to a particular administration, but carried over, in different forms, from one to another. Despite the fact that the Carter administration made a point of stressing human rights in foreign policy, the conflict was never painted as a threat to individual or normative human rights by U.S. officials during this period. Instead, it was under Carter that the restriction on arms sales was originally dropped to allow sales of offensive weapons to Morocco, ignoring issues of human rights violations.

Under the Reagan administration, the characterization of the Western Sahara conflict as a 'security risk' was enhanced. In their 1982 report, congressional staff members identified "shifts in U.S. perceptions of its security interests" as contributing to the change in indirect American involvement in the conflict.⁸⁴ After the 1982 congressional staff delegation, the Reagan administration came out with a new justification for their arms policy. According to Kamil, "the U.S. has agreed to provide assistance specifically designed to counter the 'new threat' from the Polisario in the Western Sahara, and that the assistance will help reestablish

⁸³ U.S. House 1981.

⁸⁴ Report of the Staff Study Mission 1982.

a so-called ‘military equilibrium’ in the Sahara war.”⁸⁵ The nature of a security interest is determined by a perception of threat, which were constructed and imagined to varying degrees. These congressional staff observers and critics of Reagan’s policy note that he “has sometimes tended to view the issue as an East-West Struggle, a view generally disputed by regional specialists.” With this acknowledgement of the role of threat *perception* in the development of policy, these observers touched upon the inherent constructed nature of the concept of security. Constructing the Western Sahara as a security threat enabled the U.S. to ‘manage’ the region in a patriarchal manner.

Apart from a perceived threat to the economic and political power of the United States and its allies, the fear of Soviet infiltration also played a role in the ideological characterization of the threat that the Polisario posed. Speaking in 1983, Congressman Simon asserted that “Their terminology is Marxist, there is a Marxist leaning on the part of the Polisario leadership.”⁸⁶ However as Yahia Zoubir has examined in detail in his article on Soviet policy towards the Western Sahara conflict, the Soviet Union provided no direct support to the Polisario (the only liberation movement on the African continent that did not receive direct Soviet support).⁸⁷ The fear of communism continues to be consistently referenced as a means of demonizing the Polisario.

Another indication of the perception that the Western Sahara conflict posed a security threat to the U.S. is that much information about U.S. policy remains classified, including sections of these congressional hearings that were closed to the public. In 1979, the State Department official called to testify before the congressional hearing insisted upon holding some of the discussion on Western Sahara and Morocco in a closed executive

⁸⁵ Kamil, 73.

⁸⁶ U.S. House 1983.

⁸⁷ Zoubir, Yahia H. and Daniel Volman. *International Dimensions of the Western Sahara Conflict*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993.

session. In response to this request, the chair of the committee, Congressman Solarz, responded, “Generally, when we go into executive session, it involves highly classified materials which relate to national security or other developments which would not be to the advantage of the Nation to become public. And I am not quite sure that applies here.”⁸⁸ Despite Congressional pushback, the State Department representatives had their way. On several occasions they made statements at the public hearings and insisted on a private, and still classified, sessions to discuss policy options. The State Department had determined that the Western Sahara conflict was a threat to national security and reinforced that characterization as time went on.

The form of security that U.S. Cold Warriors were concerned with was limited to ideas of military power and economic development, security for them could not be understood outside of military and economic interests. Leo Kamil, writing in 1987, recognized that the U.S. prioritization of military security was at the expense of other considerations of human security. He noted, “despite the steady deterioration of the Moroccan economy as a result of the war costs and a severe drought, United States development and food aid for Morocco remained meager because the priority was given to the improvement of the Moroccan army’s performance in Western Sahara.”⁸⁹ Kamil was adamant that the ongoing military aid and uncritical support from the United States was actually contributing to destabilizing an already insecure region.

A recently declassified National Security Directive produced by the Reagan administration in 1985 outlines U.S. policy towards North Africa with an emphasis on the

⁸⁸ U.S. House 1979.

⁸⁹ Kamil, 85.

Western Sahara conflict and its “risks for American interests.”⁹⁰ The security directive is concerned about the conflict’s effect on the balance of power in the region, particularly in the context of “the region’s geo-strategic position opposite NATO’s southern flank, the potential for increased Soviet regional influence and the dangers of Libyan adventurism.” With these risks in mind, the policy directives in the document include strengthening the joint economic and military relationships with Morocco, but also explicitly require that this assistance have low visibility. One of the policy objectives with respect to Morocco remains entirely redacted in the declassified document, maintaining the secrecy of U.S. policy actions towards this region. The directive does call for public statements of support for political settlement of the issue, though it notes that “if necessary, veto SADR membership in the UN Security Council.” Such a veto never became necessary, but the directive indicates the policy intention to manage the region in accordance with U.S. interests.

The effect of securitizing the Western Sahara during this period had material and discursive components. Materially, characterizing the territory as a potential danger meant that the military assistance in the form of aid, arms sales, advisors and joint exercises, was politically justified. Securitizing the region allowed the United States to project military power and influence into the North African region that it determined to be of strategic importance. In the minds of policymakers and observers of this conflict, the discursive securitization of the Sahara compressed space, bringing a regional conflict closer to the superpower. Painting the events in the territory as a potential threat to the United States reduced the physical space between the local conflict and the United States. Performing statecraft in response to threat expanded and solidified the boundaries of American power, and contributed to the America’s self-understanding as superpower. The discourse of

⁹⁰ The White House. “U.S. Policy Towards North Africa.” *National Security Decision Directive 168*. (declassified June 20, 2013). April 30, 1985.

security threats in the Sahara also shored up an idea of the United States as the guarantor of security in the world.

U.S. policymakers understood the Western Sahara conflict from a primarily realist perspective, enacting policy in accordance with the perceived interests of the United States. The key is that the language and lenses used to look at this conflict were limited by policymakers conceptions of what those interests are and how to achieve them. The predominant perceptions of national interest, including stability, security, economic, and power-balancing, delimited the choices available to policymakers. Viewing the conflict through a regional, geopolitical lens required policymakers to make decisions based on their narrow perceptions of U.S. interest, and obscured the narrative of self-determination-seeking Sahrawi people. Policymakers performed this perspective through their practices of representation and policy decisions to aid the Government of Morocco.

As historian Andrew Bacevich points out in *American Empire*, the realist idea that United States foreign policy is governed by perceptions of its national interest is not new. Historian Charles Beard wrote in 1935, “nations are governed by their interests as their statesmen conceive these interests.”⁹¹ The interests that statesmen perceive as essential to the nation are rooted in a desire for the self-perpetuation of power. That is to say, U.S. national interests are defined in order to aggrandize and maintain the political and economic power of state institutions and powerful individuals who make, or benefit from, policy. This is no less true in the case of U.S. policy towards the Western Sahara conflict, despite the small scale and relative obscurity of the conflict. As a place peripheral to Washington, the Western Sahara was a site where U.S. imperial power was produced, and contested, and aided by Morocco acting in the role of colonial administrator.

⁹¹ Charles A. Beard, *The Open Door at Home*. (New York, 1935), p. 301. quoted in Bacevich p. 17.

As we have seen, the discourse of statesmen and policymakers produced perceptions, characterizations and realities that shaped the relationship of the U.S. to the world. The idea that the discourse of statesmen produced of power and knowledge became even more important as ideas about international political order were questioned, transitioned and were rearticulated. In the next chapter, I explore how the discourses on the Western Sahara changed and remained consistent after the end of the Cold War in a period of reorienting and reshaping global politics. As Zunes and Mundy note, “U.S. support for Morocco’s conquest outlasted and transcends Cold War rationale.”⁹² In other words, the modes of thought that produced U.S. policy toward the region were rooted in larger assumptions about power and statecraft than simply the Cold War lens.

⁹² Zunes and Mundy, 72.

Chapter Three: A New World Order?

“Our eyes have witnessed dramatic marches toward freedom and democracy on the world stage in recent history. We have seen the birth of new nations in Eastern Europe, the crumbling of the wall in Germany, the preservation of sovereignty in Kuwait, and the creation of multiparty systems and national conferences all through Africa. There are now a people in North Africa living in Western Sahara named the Saharawis. They are not known to many Americans. They are struggling for the right to vote on their future, as to whether they will have their own country or be part of Morocco and it is a matter for them to decide.”

~Congressman Mervyn Dymally, 1991 Hearing on the U.N. Peace Plan and Referendum on the Western Sahara

The end of the Cold War enabled a moment of reflection for political leaders, policymakers, intellectuals, media and citizens to reevaluate the role of the United States in the world, its self-characterizations and the nature of the state itself. The questions of traditional policy thinkers centered on how to maintain global order and American power in a fundamentally changing world. Would the new global world be dominated by the unipolar American hegemon? Would collective security, moderated by international institutions be the best way to serve U.S. interests? During the first decade after the end of the Cold War new ways of thinking about the U.S and the world were pursued and old frameworks were recycled and reformulated. This chapter explores the changes and consistencies across this period shaped the questions and policy imperatives for U.S. statemakers and how their decisions affected the development of the Western Sahara conflict. I ask, what new approaches to resolving the conflict were made possible during this period, and what ways of thinking about the conflict were foreclosed by the discourses of this period? In this analysis, conceptualizations of security and the state, as well as the ideas about American interests that accompanied them, are central.

While the end of the Cold War supposedly ushered forth a new era of global politics and U.S. foreign policy, the years that followed retained many of the political assumptions, categories, and modes of thinking that had shaped earlier periods. The geopolitical lens through which policymakers viewed the Western Sahara was affected by their perceptions of what the new global political context meant for U.S. statemaking. The reorganization and

reframing of U.S. policy interests and goals were part of the process of performing an increasingly hegemonic and imperial American State. James Baker III, Secretary of State from 1989 to 1992, understood his tenure as the period in which “the very nature of the international system was transformed.”⁹³ According to Baker, political leaders and government officials of this period saw their job to “harness, shape and manage those seismic geopolitical changes in the strategic interests of our country.”⁹⁴ With the decline of its superpower rival assured, the United States set its sights on growing and maintaining its powerful position as global hegemon.

The discourse of newness, seen in statements about the “end of history”⁹⁵ and the “New World Order”⁹⁶ reinforced the sense of the exceptionality of the current moment and encouraged the perception that there had been a firm break with the past. This mode of thought blinded policymakers from acknowledging the continuities and similarities between their policies before and after the Cold War. The newness discourse promoted the perception that fundamental change had occurred in the world, and that it left the United States as both the victor in a global power struggle and morally vindicated by the triumph of capitalism in the ideological battle. U.S. policymakers imagined the United States as the uniquely powerful leader of this new world, promoter of democracy and free market capitalism, with the imperative to secure its power and position. The meanings of security in this new era took on new forms as the U.S. sought to secure its economic, military and political interests and identified new kinds of threats. The shift towards prioritizing the

⁹³ Baker, James Addison and Thomas M. DeFrank. *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 672.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ixv.

⁹⁵ The concept of the ‘end of history’ refers to the idea that liberal democracy and free market ideology is the end stage of human society. See: Fukuyama, Francis, and Allan Bloom. *The End of History?* Vol. 16. National Affairs, Incorporated, 1989.

⁹⁶ Bush, George H.W. Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit. September 11, 1990.

rhetoric of democracy and collective security, efforts to dominate international institutions, and to open economic barriers to U.S. trade produced neo-imperial relationships and required imperial practices to perform and secure American power.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War coincided with a major turning point in the conflict over the Western Sahara. After several years of negotiations, the United Nations implemented a ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario in September 1991. The second part of the UN peace plan proved to be far more difficult to accomplish; a referendum for the people of Western Sahara to exercise self-determination. The long-promised referendum has yet to take place, after over 20 years of feeble efforts from the UN peacekeeping mission in the Western Sahara (known as MINURSO). Over the course of the period examined in this chapter (1991-2000), the United States was closely engaged with the UN peace process. The resolution process for this already long-standing conflict was initially framed within the hopeful rhetoric of a new, and more peaceful, democratic world order. The 1991 hearing on the UN Peace Plan opened with an impassioned statement from Chairman Dymally, who scripted the Sahrawi case into the context of contemporaneous struggles for democracy and freedom in the former East Bloc countries.⁹⁷ The resolution of the Western Sahara conflict should have been a triumphant first step for post-Cold War cooperative diplomacy through the UN, but U.S. support for Morocco's intransience prevented the successful resolution of a conflict that continues to this day.

This chapter explores changes in the geographical imaginations of U.S. policymakers after the end of the Cold War, and identifies new lenses and new modes of performing the

⁹⁷ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. *An Examination of the U.N. Peace Plan and Referendum on the Western Sahara: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, First Session, October 8 and 30, 1991*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1991. (quoted in chapter header).

U.S. state through the discourses that policymakers deployed to script the Western Sahara in the new global order. While much policy debate and prescription from this period was private or remains classified, some insights can be gleaned by looking at what was made public through official statements, speeches, records and declassified documents. The first part of the chapter chronologically traces the representations of the region expressed in congressional hearings, resolutions, and State Department statements in 1991, 1992, 1997, 1998 and 2000. The second section of this chapter uses a detailed analysis of the language of the State Department Human Rights reports on the Western Sahara from 1991 to 2000 to identify key shifts and conflicting representations of this conflict. The third part of this chapter explores the process of securitizing the Western Sahara region in U.S. discourse and the changing meanings and usages of the concept of security in the performance of American state power. I argue that new modes of securitization were deployed to impose particular geopolitical imaginations of world order than maintained American dominance, and in the process denied the Sahrawi people the right to self-determination.

Representations in Congressional hearings

As the first post-Cold War decade unfolded state identities, mechanisms of global power, and ideas about the organization of international political space were reconsidered and performed in different ways. U.S. policymakers debated and rethought some of their Cold War assumptions about exercising power in the international system, while retaining other deeply engrained frameworks. In the post-Cold War realignment of U.S. priorities, conflicts were no longer seen as opportunities to advance interests (as proxy wars and regional conflicts had served during the Cold War), but as blockades to interest. The U.S. approach to the conflict thus shifted away from providing military support for Morocco to

win the war towards political efforts to resolve the conflict in the United Nations. This did not mean, however, that the U.S. stopped favoring (and materially supporting) Morocco, nor that the U.S. accorded more political legitimacy to the Sahrawi people. Policymakers paid more rhetorical tribute to ideas of human rights and international cooperation, yet retained imperial understandings of power and interest. The concepts of security and stability remained central to statemaking, but those concepts underwent shifts in meaning and produced new imperatives and relationships. While new approaches to global politics were debated in academic and political circles, officials steeped in realist Cold War international relations theory continued to perform and reproduce those frameworks in the emerging global arena. The practice of realist assumptions about power, interest and statehood foreclosed more complex and insightful ways of reading and responding to events in the world.

The realist assumptions maintained by Bush administration officials are nowhere more frank or unapologetic than the leaked draft Defense Planning Guidance from 1992.⁹⁸ This document, though later retracted and denied by the administration due to public criticism, clearly articulates the realist assumptions about power and interest that prevailed through the post Cold War transition.⁹⁹ Drafted primarily by Defense Department official Paul Wolfowitz, the document lays out a strategy for maintaining American superpower status. The document advocates for a unipolar world of American dominance secured through collective security agreements, and, when necessary, unilateral action. The exercise of American hegemony played out in its role in the United Nations, where the U.S. aided and excused Morocco's obstructions of the peace process. The United States worked to

⁹⁸ Wolfowitz, Paul. Draft of Defense Planning Guidance. February, 1992.

Tyler, Patrick E. "US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop a One-Superpower World." *New York Times*. March 8, 1992.

⁹⁹ Tyler, Patrick E. "Pentagon drops goal of blocking new superpowers." *New York Times*. March 23, 1992.

ensure that the efforts of the UN corresponded with U.S. interests in the region, and employed the international body in its imperial power practices.

Congressional leaders, outside experts and State Department officials gathered to discuss the UN peace plan for Western Sahara and the role that the United States should play in its implementation in a 1991 congressional hearing. The hearing squarely located the Western Sahara conflict in the context of global political transformations. As one expert testified, “We have seen now that the Berlin Wall is down, the Iron Curtain is down, but tragically, I think, one wall does remain besides the Great Wall of China, and that is the wall in Western Sahara.”¹⁰⁰ Despite the rhetorical hope for a globalized and borderless New World Order, the wall in the Western Sahara remained equally, if not increasingly, militarized, entrenched and defended, a violent symbol of the continued intractability of the conflict.¹⁰¹

This intractability was encouraged by the discrepancy between the U.S. official position of neutrality and its failure to press for the conflict to be resolved in accordance with international law. In the 1991 hearing, State Department official John Wolf articulated the official U.S. position on the conflict: “The United States fully supports the concept of a UN referendum as the best means to resolve the status of the Western Sahara and the United States is committed to the conduct of a free and fair referendum.”¹⁰² This articulation provided the theme for official statements of U.S. policy towards the conflict for the next decade. Despite the articulated support for the referendum, the U.S. bias in favor of Morocco came through in Wolf’s testimony. He reported that the U.S. was in constant dialogue with Moroccan officials, but had limited contact with Polisario because, as they

¹⁰⁰ Smith de Cherif, Teresa. Statement to the House, Foreign Relations Committee. Congressional Hearing “An Examination of the U.N. Peace Plan and Referendum on the Western Sahara.” Hearing, October 8, 1991.

¹⁰¹ Still today, the wall is mined, surveilled electronically and policed by thousands of Moroccan soldiers.

¹⁰² U.S. House, 1991.

were not recognized as rulers of a sovereign state, they could not engage with U.S. officials on an equal playing field.¹⁰³ Statehood, which required territorial sovereignty, was the only way for these U.S. policymakers to imagine political legitimacy. The U.S. recognition of Morocco's administrative control over the territory precluded them from taking seriously the political claims made by Saharawi groups, especially the militant Polisario.

In a moment of tension between Congressional leaders and the State Department, representatives expressed their concern that State Department policy towards the Western Sahara was not sufficiently independent from the influence of other foreign policy considerations. In the 1991 hearing, Congressman Faleomavaega pressured State official John Wolf to assure Congress that the policy of the United States toward the referendum and UN peace plan was "in no way" connected to the fact that King Hassan had sent Moroccan troops to fight with the U.S. in the Persian Gulf War.¹⁰⁴ The cagey State Department official replied that "our bilateral relationship with Morocco is a discrete area," but that to the best of his knowledge, the issues were separate in both public and private performances of policy.

The 1992 hearing on the status of the UN peace plan begins with an important illustration of the American national interests perceived to be at stake in the process to resolve the Western Sahara conflict. Chairman Dymally begins the session by claiming that the peace plan is important, first, because the United States was paying for it, second, because U.S. troops were involved in MINURSO, third, because the role of the United States as a defender of freedom was at stake, and fourth, because the credibility of the

¹⁰³ "We have contacts with the Polisario, as opposed to recognition along the lines of statehood...we only recognize states as opposed to groups...we have 'contact' as opposed to recognition of their sovereignty and statehood." Wolf, John. Statement to the House, Foreign Relations Committee. Congressional Hearing "An Examination of the U.N. Peace Plan and Referendum on the Western Sahara." Hearing. October 8, 1991.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. House, 1991.

United Nations and commitment to international norms were also on the line. Dymally thus expressed a widely held consensus of the hierarchy of U.S. interests: defense of economic investments, military security, principled international reputation, and the stability of the status quo world order that served its interests. These interests would crop up again and again as the U.S. sought to preserve its global dominance.

This global predominance of power meant that the U.S. had a deciding role to play in the practices of international institutions such as the UN. How the U.S. chose to wield that power was indicative of its self-conception and perception of interests. In the unfolding drama of the MINURSO peacekeeping mission's efforts to resolve the Western Sahara conflict, the U.S. essentially refused to assert this power to move the process along towards resolution. Testifying in 1992, Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton asserted that he was simply following the example of the Secretary General in trying to not apportion blame to one side or another for stalling the referendum process.¹⁰⁵ However, it was clear at the time that Morocco bore most of the blame for the delays in the referendum's implementation. It held MINURSO supplies hostage at customs for several months, incentivized tens of thousands of Moroccans to move to the territory (using tax incentives, employment opportunities and subsidies), and added 120,000 new names to the list of people to be considered for voting in the referendum. As is clear in Bolton's statement, and subsequent ones made by other officials, the United States was reluctant to point a finger at Morocco for obstructing the peace process, and continued its public policy of neutrality as the peace process stalled.

¹⁰⁵ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Africa. *Status of the United Nations Peace Plan and the Status of the Referendum in Western Sabara: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, Second Session, February 26, 1992*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1993.

In an effort to follow through on its commitments to resolving the conflict through the auspices of the United Nations, the United States initiated the formation of a Security Council “Group of Friends of the Western Sahara” in 1993. As Teresa Whitfield demonstrates, this group has done very little to pressure the parties to resolve the conflict. Whitfield attributes this ineffectiveness to a lack of coherence between the national interests of the core members (France, Spain, Russia, the UK and the United States) and between those interests and the goals of the United Nations.¹⁰⁶ More than simply ineffective, the members of the Group of Friends have exercised their power within the Security Council to obstruct progress on the resolution of the conflict, and to dominate other voices on the issue, in accordance with their own perceived national interests.

By 1995, the efforts at resolution had come to a halt and the United Nations called the referendum dead. In 1997, in an attempt to throw political weight behind the peace process in order to maintain the UN’s own credibility, the Security Council appointed a U.S. policymaker of significant stature. James Baker III, a Cold Warrior who had served in the Ford administration, as President Reagan’s Chief of Staff, and as Secretary of State under President Bush, was chosen to restart political negotiation between the parties. Baker served as Special Envoy from 1997 to 2004, when he resigned in frustration over the irresolution of the conflict and the intransience of the parties. During his tenure, Morocco and the Polisario attended direct talks for the first time and signed the Houston Accords, which recommitted them to the UN settlement plan. The death of King Hassan II in 1999 was first seen as potential opportunity for a softening of Morocco’s position, but little changed

¹⁰⁶ Whitfield, Teresa. *Friends Indeed?: The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict*. (US Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 166.

under his son King Mohammed VI.¹⁰⁷ In 2000, the United States increased military aid to Morocco, which had fallen after the Cold War ended and the ceasefire initiated.¹⁰⁸

The special role that U.S. policymakers envisioned for the U.S. in the resolution of this conflict was fueled by belief in American Exceptionalism, and in the dominance of the United States in a post-Cold War world. This is seen in the rhetoric of Congressman Dymally, in 1991, when he stated, “U.S. diplomacy is essential in ensuring that a true expression of self-determination takes place in the Western Sahara. Our continued strong advocacy of the peace plan is also important in reinforcing the stability of the region and advancing democracy in Africa.”¹⁰⁹ Congressman Payne, speaking at the 1992 hearing on the UN peace plan, also articulated an exceptionalist conception of the United States. He asserted, “I believe that the United States as the world champion, the heavy-weight champion of democracy worldwide, has a moral responsibility to see that efforts toward self-determination for the people of Western Sahara continue to move forward.”¹¹⁰ His optimistic expression of American exceptionalism was based on a self-narrative of democracy and morality.

In practice, however, American actions were far less admirable. United States policymakers expressed their support for a principled adherence to international law and the work of the international body, yet did not exercise the leverage they possessed over Morocco to ensure that the referendum was implemented. *Not* using the power it possessed for this purpose was a deliberate choice on the part of U.S. policymakers, who prioritized the

¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, as Jacob Mundy noted in a 2012 personal interview, it is less likely that Morocco would ever allow the possibility of a true referendum with the option of self-determination under the new King Mohammed IV because only his father Hassan II was a strong enough leader to have seized the Sahara and be able to give it up without destroying the credibility and power of the monarchy.

¹⁰⁸ Kozaryn, Linda. “U.S./Morocco Training, Cooperation to Expand.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. Washington, DC. February 14, 2000. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=44553>

¹⁰⁹ U.S. House, 1991.

¹¹⁰ U.S. House, 1992.

interests at stake in their relationship with Morocco over adherence to international norms or support for the marginalized Sahrawis.

The U.S. self-narrative as promoter of democracy, human rights and self-determination is demonstrated by the practice of releasing annual, country-specific, human rights reports. The gradual shifts in perceptions of the Sahrawi people and of the interests and meanings at stake in this conflict can be seen in a close reading of the State Department reports on human rights in the Western Sahara over the course of this post-Cold War decade.

State Department Human Rights Reports

The State Department releases Human Rights Reports on every country in the world, *and* the Western Sahara. Though the United States recognizes Moroccan administrative control over the Western Sahara and has been adamant that it does not take a position on the eventual outcome of a referendum for self-determination, this disputed region is the only non-self-governing territory that is accorded a separate “Country Report” on human rights from the State Department.¹¹¹ It is unclear why this is done, as in all other respects the U.S. has been very careful to deny the right of Western Sahara to exist as a separate state. Putting this interesting discrepancy aside, a look at the evolution of the language in the Western Sahara human rights reports reveals significant shifts in American perceptions and representations of the region during this period.

The general template for the human rights reports remained constant, while tweaks in the wording reveal a more complicated picture of shifting and contested State Department perceptions of the region and the conflict. In the reports from the years 1993 to 1999,

¹¹¹ For example, Palestine is absent from the list of countries, listed instead as “Israel and the Occupied Territories.”

important changes were made in the way that the initiation of the conflict was described and in the way that Polisario was depicted. This period also saw the release of more detailed information regarding Moroccan repression, disappearances of dissenters and a rise in civil society resistance to Morocco, which had been relatively absent from earlier reports.

In 1993, the report noted that Morocco had “assumed administration” over the region, and used the Moroccan rhetoric of “unifying” the territory. It identified the Polisario as “Algerian-backed,” rather than as an indigenous independence movement.¹¹² This language dates back to the Cold War framework of seeing the conflict as a regional power struggle that threatened the stability of the global power balance. An investigation into political bias in State Department Human Rights Reports determined, “The results indicate that the State Department’s reports, in comparison to those of Amnesty International, have at times favored US friends and trading partners while discriminating against its (perceived) leftist foes.”¹¹³ With respect the Western Sahara, Congress was also vocally concerned about the potential for political bias in favor of Morocco against the perceived ‘leftist’ group Polisario. In the 1992 hearing on the UN peace plan, Congressman Dymally pressed State Department official John Bolton to deny Congressional suspicions that the human rights report is biased.

The Clinton administration embraced the rhetoric of human rights as integral to its foreign policy doctrine, an approach which may have influenced the shifts in the language used in human rights reports. By 1996, the Western Sahara report recognized that Morocco had claimed the territory forcefully using troops and settlers, and identified the Polisario as an “organization seeking independence for the region,” dropping the association with

¹¹² U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Western Sahara 1993

¹¹³ Poe, Carey and Vasquez, “How are These Pictures Different? A Quantitative Comparison of the US State Department and Amnesty International Human Rights Reports, 1976-1995.” *Human Rights Quarterly*, Volume 23, Number 3, August 2001, pp. 650-677

Algeria as the defining characteristic of the rebel group.¹¹⁴ The evolution of the language in the human rights reports demonstrates a shift away from an uncritical acceptance of the Moroccan narrative on the subject, and the beginning of a recognition that multiple narratives existed.

The reports accord more agency and legitimacy to both Polisario and to civil society resisters and human rights defenders (who began organizing in larger numbers during this period). Despite this shift, the reports shy away from apportioning blame for the delay of the referendum, citing “operational considerations.”¹¹⁵ While they recognize that human rights violations were perpetrated by Morocco, including forced disappearances, abrogation of due process, torture and repression of dissent, the reports fail to issue strong language condemning these abuses. Despite the fact that Congress had tied foreign aid to respect for human rights during the Carter administration, at no time was aid to Morocco restricted because of these reports of human rights violations.

The practice of producing a report card on all other countries and conditioning foreign aid (or at least claiming the power to do so, though not implemented in this case) reinforces the self-perceived exceptionalism of the United States. This practice both asserts the authority of the U.S. to measure the human rights records of other countries, and assumes that human rights abuses are things that *other* governments do elsewhere. As political scientist Roxanne Doty notes, “promoting human rights became a practice whereby the US re-represented itself as a global hegemonic subject.”¹¹⁶ State officials and policymakers represented the US as a benevolent, paternalistic, and humanitarian power

¹¹⁴ U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Western Sahara 1996

¹¹⁵ U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Western Sahara 1999

¹¹⁶ Doty, Roxanne Lynn, *Imperial Encounters : The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137.

innocent of any of the potentially violent and oppressive implications of its support for Morocco.

The Clinton administration policy sought to frame the United States as a benevolent superpower. Rhetorically, at least, the U.S. demanded democracy, freedom and human rights for peoples around the world, and pledged to work towards achieving these principles in other places. The embrace of human rights and democracy both augmented America's understanding of its own power, and legitimated its exercise of that power (whether or not the exercise of power was truly in the interest of human rights). The United States understood its 'self' as democratic, freedom-loving, and humanitarian. Doty writes that when these qualities were called into question by policies that went against principles, the rhetoric of human rights was intensified and hegemonic practices accelerated.¹¹⁷ When the policy did not match the principle, rather than a reevaluation of the policy, the effort went into reframing policy within the appropriate rhetoric of principles.

The discourse of human rights is one of a set of interrelated discourses that U.S. statemakers circulate to perform and produce American power. U.S. self-representation as a defender of human rights must be seen in the context of its pursuit of national interests. While the Clinton period saw a renewed rhetorical emphasis on human rights, it also saw rearticulations of national interest and efforts to exert American power in complex and multidimensional ways. The concept of security, broadly understood, was a central thread that carried through articulations of interest, pursuit of policy and articulations of American values. In the realm of human rights, American national security also became the standard of measurement when it came to identifying issues of concern. Roxanne Doty asserts, "US security interests served as the nodal point around which the meaning of human rights was

¹¹⁷ Doty, 137.

constructed and that enabled the US to ignore violations (and even participate at least indirectly in violations) and still be capable of exercising international moral leadership.”¹¹⁸

Doty’s hermeneutical argument claims that the meaning of what constituted a violation of human rights was understood through the lens of security-centric thinking. This tendency of U.S. policymakers to identify human rights violations only when it is in their perceived security interest to do so is seen in the way that these human rights reports shift their representations of the Polisario in accordance with the new security environment, while continuing to gloss over Moroccan repression of Sahrawi political activists and other ongoing violence in the region.

Securitizing the Sahara

The end of the Cold War gave rise to new ways of thinking about the concept of security. The direct threat of mutual destruction and constant anti-Soviet posturing was suddenly off the table, and security had to be redefined and expanded to encompass contemporary threats. In thinking about the concept of security and the process of securitization, two dimensions must be considered. First, who or what group is being identified as deserving of protection, and second, who or what must they be protected from. During the Cold War, the divisions between the protected and the dangerous were fairly clear-cut. The ambiguously defined ‘free world’ was under threat and had to be protected. The Soviet Union and communist ideology were the ultimate enemies. The designation of an ideology as the threat served as a means of categorizing individuals, group, and states as enemies (a practice that would be redeployed in the fight against the ideologies of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism later on). But for the most part, during the Cold War threats

¹¹⁸ Doty, 142.

were military in nature and consisted of one national group threatening another national group. The threats were existential, because the outcome of the escalation of a U.S./USSR confrontation would be nuclear annihilation.

In the context of discussions on the Western Sahara conflict, the concept of security was continually invoked, with overlapping meanings. The end of the Cold War instituted a shift away from perceiving national security primarily in terms of military security from direct, existential, threats. However, security remained a powerful governing concept for statemaking. The concept of security shifted to apply more broadly to the protection, growth and maintenance of American power. Defining security in terms of protecting American power meant that the concept could be applied to efforts at preserving the stability of the international order in which the United States dominated. The concept of security was also applied to efforts to preserve or promote American economic interests. The need to preserve the status quo of American dominance was branded as the need to protect and promote security and stability worldwide. The expansion of American power through neo-imperial and hegemonic practices gave rise to new types of security threats.

While the congressional hearings on the subject of the Western Sahara conflict throughout the 1990s focused on the progress of the UN peace plan, it was also clear that the United States was still thinking about the conflict in terms of its own security interests, broadly understood. The second half of the 1992 hearing on the status of the peace plan went into a closed executive session in order for Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton to express himself candidly to the congressional committee. Congressmen in the session note that this procedure is generally reserved for discussing issues directly related to national security, but it is unclear specifically what was redacted from the public record and how it affected ideas of national security. Bolton, representing a reticent State Department, also

prevented a U.S. officer serving with the MINURSO mission from testifying in the hearing, citing a UN policy. In response, the congressmen criticized Bolton for expressing mixed messages and saw him as unnecessarily obstructionist.¹¹⁹ The reluctance of State Department officials to provide satisfactory answers to congressional questioning is a demonstration of the bureaucratic culture of security and secrecy that had continued into the post-Cold War context.

The conflict in the Western Sahara was re-represented as a threat in multiple ways. The three main security concerns that policymakers discussed with respect to this conflict were: economic security threatened by instability, military security affected by threats to American military prerogatives in Morocco, and the fact that the political security of the international order was put to the test by the irresolution of this conflict. The idea of ‘security,’ as opposed to that of defense, formed a blanket concept that could be applied to a wide range of threats to US interests.¹²⁰ During this period, policymakers moved away from the idea that the nation-state needed to be ‘secure’ against threats to its people and its very existence. Instead, the increasingly hegemonic and neo-imperial practices of the United States created interests, places, and peoples who needed to be secured in order to protect and define the identity and power of the American State.

¹¹⁹ Bolton, John. Resolving the Western Sahara Conflict. Speech given at the United States 1998 Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum, Washington, D.C., March 23, 1998.

Bolton, testifying six years later at another Congressional hearing on the subject, explained that at the time there had been intense discussions within the State Department about the words he would use to express a position on the subject. Addressing the current congressmen, he noted, “Many of you probably think that the diplomatic training that our foreign service officers and others at the State Department receive is to enable them better to deal with foreign diplomats. Actually, as I can reveal to you now, it is to better prepared people like me to come up here to testify before Congress and escape without being indicted for perjury.” This admission is demonstrative of the real attention that policymakers paid to the significance of the wording and frameworks they used to talk about policy issues. It also helps to illuminate the tensions in the relationship between the State Department and Congress over foreign policy decision-making and the fragmented and disunified nature of this process of statemaking.

¹²⁰ See Bacevich (2002) for an outline of the process by which the concept of security replaced the more limited concept of defense during the Cold War.

Instead of seeing the conflict over the Western Sahara as a potential site of proxy war between a Western (U.S.)-backed Morocco and a USSR-supported Algeria, policymakers began to emphasize a representation of the conflict as a threat to the model of collective security and peacekeeping embodied by the United Nations. One commentator noted, “At stake in this issue is not only the Sahrawi people's survival, but also the ability of the UN to resolve conflictual situations.”¹²¹ The continued intractability of the conflict became a sign of the failure of the United Nations and the international community to come through on the hopeful promises of liberal internationalism that policymakers had rhetorically embraced at the beginning of the decade. The (ir)resolution of the Western Sahara conflict became a measure of the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations, its fate a symbol of the flawed new international order lauded by political leaders. As one observer noted, “The apparent double standard and the failure to resolve the Western Sahara situation constitutes a serious and long-lasting blow to the Security Council as a credible force in upholding international law and resolving regional conflicts.”¹²² Thus the Western Sahara conflict itself, and its intractability, came to be seen as a threat to the U.S.-dominated United Nations institution, and an aberration in the international legal system.¹²³

The ongoing stalemate in the Western Sahara and the tension that it maintained between Morocco and other states of the Maghreb and Northern Africa was seen to pose a threat to the U.S. interest in economic openness. In Congressional discussions of the

¹²¹ Labella, Jennifer. "The Western Sahara Conflict: A Case Study of UN Peacekeeping in the Post Cold War World." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* Vol.29, no. 2-3. (2003):96.

¹²² Ohaegbulam, Festus Ugboaja. "Ethical Issues in US Policy on the Western Sahara Conflict." *Mediterranean Quarterly* Vol.13, no. 4. (2002): 99.

In an even more pessimistic analysis: “Without US support, the UN proves to be virtually powerless. And while the New World Order theory suggests that conflicts should be resolved in isolation from outside interests, the reality of the Western Sahara dispute demonstrates that the end of the Cold War has not brought an end to the political maneuvering which was a feature of superpower rivalry.” (LaBella, 95)

¹²³ See Gunter (1979), Seddon (1987), Anghie (2005), Arts et al (2007), Spector (2009), and Simpson (2012).

Western Sahara, it was often portrayed as valuable for its “resource-rich” character.¹²⁴ As a place in imperial geopolitical imaginations, the Western Sahara was a site of potential resources. However, the neoliberal vision of open borders open to the flow of capital was jeopardized by the irresolution of the conflict. The regional rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, which is rendered intractable by their respective positions on the Western Sahara region, impeded regional development and precluded the possibility of a regional economic integration. The border between Algeria and Morocco is closed and the regional institution of economic and political cooperation, the Arab Maghreb Union, has remained largely defunct as a result of this ongoing conflict. The strategic importance of this region, the resources it controls and its location on the southern Mediterranean make the economic roadblocks unacceptable to U.S. and European interests.

Historian Andrew Bacevich argues that the idea of economic openness and its central role in the preservation of American imperial power is not at all new, but rather a longstanding central tradition of United States foreign policy. Bacevich takes issue with the idea that the end of the Cold War constituted a true shift in U.S. foreign policy aims and practices. According to Bacevich, “By stipulating that American well-being depended not simply on developments at home but on the functioning of a global economy and on global adherence to certain norms, the architects of US policy expanded the scope of concerns falling under the rubric of security.”¹²⁵ The governing concept of security was thus translated from a Cold War context into the policy imperatives of the “New World Order.”

Bacevich argues that while U.S. foreign policy is often presented as ad hoc and in response to individual crises, the purpose of American policy is to preserve and, where

¹²⁴ Royce, Edward. Statement to the House, Foreign Relations Committee. Congressional Hearing. “*UN Referendum for Western Sahara: 9 Years and Counting*.” Hearing. September 13, 2000.

¹²⁵ Bacevich, 121.

possible and conducive to U.S. interests, to expand the American Imperium by instituting a global order of democratic capitalism with the U.S. as its ultimate guarantor. While it is important to identify the deeper roots of the goals of economic openness and expansionist power, these imperatives were not dictated by a unitary state, but by the performance of discourses of power that produced the state as an effect. The Western Sahara, as an impediment to development and to regional economic integration, fell under the rubric of threat to a globalizing economic system concerned with the movement of capital across borders. The expansion of American imperial imperatives in the context of globalization meant that the threat the conflict posed to potential economic interests became an issue of ‘security.’

The concept of security is often paired with that of stability in discussions of the Western Sahara threat. In 1997, the House of Representatives passed Resolution 245 Concerning Self-Determination for the People of Western Sahara. The resolution was intended to express U.S. support for the negotiation process recently initiated by former Secretary of State James Baker. The resolution emphasized that, “continued turmoil in the region is contrary to U.S. interest.”¹²⁶ Turmoil, instability and unrest were all characteristics that represented the Western Sahara as a danger. This characterization was reinforced in the 1998 hearing in which State Department official Ronald Neumann testified that the conflict “has constituted an element of real and continuing potential instability, as well as a financial drain on the countries and peoples involved.”¹²⁷ Neumann’s concern was with the effect of political instability on economic development and growth. The concerns expressed by

¹²⁶ United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. Subcommittee on Africa. *H. Res. 245, Concerning Self-Determination for the People of Western Sabara: Markup before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fifth Congress, First Session, October 8, 1997.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1997.

The language of the bill was amended to remove reference to the decision of the International Court of Justice and to remove criticisms of Morocco’s obstruction of the peace process.

¹²⁷ U.S. House, 1998.

Neumann demonstrate that ideas about the political stability of friendly regimes and the goals economic progress and development were strongly linked in the minds of policymakers. In his words on the conflict, Neumann is clear that “we would like to avoid risk to stability and to our interest.”¹²⁸ The drive to secure ‘stability’ was inextricably linked to ideas of economic development and trade.

Speaking in a 2000 Congressional hearing on the subject of the Western Sahara, State Department official Allen Keiswetter relied heavily on the concept of stability to argue that a peaceful resolution of the conflict was in the interest of the United States. He noted that continued conflict posed constraints on the development of opportunities in the region and its potential to threaten economic liberalizing trends, suggesting that a resolution would offer the “prospect of strengthening political, economic, and commercial cooperation for the betterment of all concerned.”¹²⁹ By his invocation, the United States, Morocco, Algeria, the Sahrawi, and Southern Europe were all implicated in the category of those ‘concerned’ with the development of the region. Rather than advocating for adherence to international law (which required an act of self-determination), the use of the concept of stability enabled policymakers to maintain a status quo approach that advocated peaceful resolution through negotiation.

As the momentum for the referendum diminished in the late 1990s, policymakers in the United States began to shift away from the emphasis on the referendum process as the only means of resolving the conflict. After failing to implement the long stalled referendum, Special Envoy Baker turned to the discourse of autonomy as a third option for resolving the mutually exclusive positions of Morocco and Polisario. This approach reflects the desire of

¹²⁸ U.S. House, 1998.

¹²⁹ U.S. House, 2000.

the United States and the United Nations to maintain the stability of the region, at the cost of the human rights of the Sahrawi people, particularly that of self-determination.

The inconsistency between the professed commitment of the United States to human rights, democracy, and self-determination and its selective application of those principles can be better understood through a critical analysis of the process of statecraft. These discrepancies are not simply a matter of the tendency of policymakers to express one policy publically and conduct another. It was not merely a clash between the interests of realism and the idealism of liberalism. It is more helpful to first interrogate the meanings of the conceptual assumptions that govern the practice of policymaking to understand how certain discourses informed and shaped the thinking processes and material actions, or inactions, of U.S. policymakers. This chapter has attempted to follow Roxanne Doty's prescription to think about the categories and terms that policymakers used, to see how these categories were constituted and how they excluded alternative interpretations or practices.¹³⁰ This approach made clear the limitations of foreign policy thinking about the Western Sahara conflict. By imagining the conflict as embedded at the margins of a global political order, policymakers were able to prioritize their perceived concerns about stability and security and to overlook the self-determination struggles of the Sahrawi. Imagining the Western Sahara as a source of danger to U.S. interests allowed policymakers to pursue policies that enabled Morocco's continued occupation.

The geopolitical lens that U.S. policymakers applied to the Western Sahara enabled the erasure and obfuscation of the Sahrawi narrative of their struggle for independence, as well as the narrative of their pacification through the invasive and oppressive actions of the Moroccan state. Michael Shapiro noted in 1990 that, "what is not registered in the modern

¹³⁰ Doty, Roxanne Lynn. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines." *International Studies Quarterly* (1993): 297-320.

geopolitical discourse is the historical process of struggle in which areas and peoples have been pacified, named, homogenized, and fixed in modern international space.”¹³¹ The Sahrawi people have been characterized as dangerous to the geopolitical order, including the stability and economic development of the region, and the credibility of the United Nations legal system. Constrained by these representations, the Western Sahara and the Sahrawi people are an example of a place and a people whose process of struggle was overtaken by a geopolitical and imperial process of naming and fixing people in the contemporary world order. U.S. policymakers understood the end of the Cold War to signify the emergence of a world order dependent on cooperation through U.S.-dominated international organizations. In this new world order, the Western Sahara was a potential danger, a place whose deviance from the established order of nation-states was perceived as a threat to the hegemon from the distant periphery.

As will emerge in the following chapter, the Western Sahara and the broader Sahara-Sahel region was increasingly scripted as a place of insecurity and threat as the fight against terrorism took on a central role in American foreign policy. In a 1996 speech titled “American Security in a Changing World,” President Bill Clinton articulated a vision of American power and of its threats that foreshadowed the discourses of the War on Terror.¹³² Painting the United States as the “indispensable nation,” he called upon the U.S. to lead where its “interests and values” demand it. In addition to his rhetorical display of confidence in American exceptionalism and imperialistic right to rule, Clinton emphasizes the immediacy and the constancy of threats to America and the American people. While

¹³¹ Shapiro, Michael J. "Strategic Discourse/Discursive Strategy: The Representation of "Security Policy" in the Video Age." *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3, Special Issue: Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissidence in International Studies (Sep., 1990): 331

¹³² Clinton, William J. “American Security in a Changing World.” Address at George Washington University, Washington, DC. August 5, 1996.

simultaneously advocating for breaking down the walls between domestic and foreign policy, Clinton articulates a strong distinction between the ‘America’ that must be protected and the deviant ‘Other’ that it must be protected from. Threats to security, which he identified as terrorism, international crime and drug trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and closed markets, are constant and seek to undermine the very idea of America. Clinton’s depiction is not unique, though the rhetoric is fitted to suit the times. This speech plays into a larger history of discursive practices through which leaders of the state articulate, and thus construct, the identity of the state through the practice of scripting narrative of insecurity onto other places.¹³³

Over the course of the next decade, accelerated by the events of 9/11 and new security imperatives, U.S. policy became intertwined with increasingly imperialistic efforts to control international spaces. In the new security environment, Morocco became an ‘essential ally’ in the fight against terrorism, a shift that further relegated the Western Sahara to the status of potential threat. The chapter that follows will examine how the new security imperatives in the discourse of the War on Terror affected the scripting of the Western Sahara as a place in American geopolitical imaginations.

¹³³ See: Campbell, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Chapter Four: The War on Terror

“Since 2012, a coup in Mali, and the 2011 overthrow of Ghaddafi in Libya, the security in the Sabel has gotten worse, not better. At a time when the United States, as it is said by the administration, pivots to the East, we cannot leave behind our obligation to the continent of Africa. Some might think that this is not a problem for the United States, but they are wrong...what happens in the Sabel is directly related to our regional interests and security here at home. The prevention of an attack on our homeland and on our Western allies by radical Islamic extremists is a challenge and will be for the foreseeable future... they seek to destroy us and kill us indiscriminately. This is the real world. This is not a fiction story.”

~Congressman Ted Poe, 2013 Congressional Hearing on the Growing Crisis in the Sabel Region

The conflict over the Western Sahara has progressed little over the last decade. The stalemated status quo is in large part due to the intransigence of the negotiating parties and the refusal of their allies to pressure them to make compromises. The United States has the power to pressure its ally Morocco to make concessions and to push for stronger action from the UN Security Council to implement a referendum on the status of the territory. Rather than use its power to advance a just resolution to this conflict in accordance with international law, the United States has instead expanded its own role in efforts to secure this region from perceived threats. These efforts, which combine imperialistic mechanisms of exerting U.S. power in economic, military and diplomatic realms, are facilitated by the discourse of terrorism and the specific forms of securitization that these discourses justify and require. The Western Sahara conflict, at the margins of global power politics, is once again being brought into broader discourses of security and mapped as a place of concern for the United States. The representations of the Western Sahara conflict within U.S. policy circles became increasingly subject to and embedded within the prevailing discourses of terrorism, criminality and insecurity in the decade following September 11th, 2001. Since 9/11, the Western Sahara region, conflict and peoples have been scripted into a cartography of potential violence represented by the ‘arc of instability.’ Coined by the Bush administration, the ‘arc of instability’ mapped a broad region stretching from central Asia to

the Atlantic Coast of Africa.¹³⁴ The discursive location of the Western Sahara within this emerging narrative of potential sites of terrorism has helped to facilitate the acceleration of U.S. military activity and securitization of the Sahara-Sahel region.

Over the course of the decade, the U.S./Morocco economic and military relationships have strengthened, former Secretary of State James Baker resigned his role as negotiator in 2004, and U.S. officials have embraced the 2007 Moroccan Autonomy plan (which denies the right of self-determination to the Sahrawi people) as the best path towards resolution. No actual progress has been made in negotiation efforts to resolve the conflict, despite the efforts of the current Special Envoy, former U.S. official Christopher Ross. Civil society resistance within the Moroccan-controlled territory has grown significantly, as has Moroccan repression of dissent. Large-scale nonviolent protests were met by brutal repression in 1999, 2005 and 2010, yet MINURSO, the UN peacekeeping mission established in the Western Sahara nearly 25 years ago, still lacks the power to monitor and report on human rights violations. Within the United States, the conflict is nearly invisible, except upon the rare occasion that it comes up for debate in a congressional hearing or attracts the fleeting attention of American media. When it is discussed, the Western Sahara conflict is embedded in the context of broader conversations about insecurity, instability and counterterrorism in the Sahara-Sahel region. A close look at these conversations reveals both new and recycled representations of the Western Sahara articulated by U.S. policymakers. Often, these representations recall Cold War era fears about the region's susceptibility to anti-American ideology, though the emphasis is now on terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism rather than the fear of communism.

¹³⁴ Note that the arrows on the map of the 'arc of instability,' see Appendix, point directly to the Western Sahara as the edge of this 'arc' that traverses the Middle East and North Africa.

James Baker III, who as Secretary of State presided over the end of the Cold War and as the UN Special Envoy to the Western Sahara saw the beginnings of the War on Terror, spoke to a question on the effect of post-9/11 terrorism in a 2004 interview after his resignation as Special Envoy. Baker noted that the “problem the United States has here is because it has two countries that are cooperating with it in the war on terror with which it wants to stay on good relations — both Algeria and Morocco” and continued on to say “So that’s why the 101st airborne isn’t going to go in and require self-determination in the Western Sahara.”¹³⁵ In essence, Baker’s assertion indicates two central, and usually unquestioned, principles of conventional foreign policymaking. First, that the United States privileges the interests of state and state actors above the needs and interests of peoples. This statist bias helped to inform a view of this conflict as one between Morocco and Algeria, a common representation that delegitimizes and obscures narratives of the Sahrawi people’s struggle for self-determination. And second, that intervention, military or otherwise, by the United States to secure human rights is contingent on the U.S. perceived security interests in specific region rather than a desire to protect rights. While it may seem obvious that foreign policy making is primarily concerned protecting the interests of the State, it is important to understand how specific place, events and peoples are scripted by the perceived interests of the United States and how these representations foreclose other modes of interpretation and action.

This chapter will trace the emergence of new discursive themes and the recurrence of earlier themes in the representational practices seen in congressional hearings, State

¹³⁵ Baker, James. Interview with Mishal Husain. “Former U.S. Secretary of State and former Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General to Western Sahara, James A. Baker III discusses the protracted conflict in Western Sahara with host Mishal Husain.” Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). August 2004. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/sahara-marathon/interview-james-a-baker-iii/873/>

Department statements and human rights reports on the Western Sahara conflict. I emphasize the effort to locate the Western Sahara within a securitized region increasingly subject to the imperialistic expansion of American military power. While I argue that the Western Sahara has been scripted into the emerging discourse of terrorism, I try not to lose sight of the voices within U.S. policy circles and on the ground in the Western Sahara territory that resisted this characterization. Certain discursive conditions of possibility enabled the construction of the Western Sahara as a place of concern for the United States. Recurrent themes include implicating the Western Sahara conflict in narratives of the potential for terrorism in the region, accusations of criminal activity (mainly smuggling) and irregular migration facilitated by the ‘ungoverned [and empty] spaces’ and ‘porous borders’ of the region, and complaints about the conflict as an impediment to regional economic cooperation. I begin with a brief outline of the representations of this conflict in Congressional hearings between 2001 and 2014, and proceed to a discussion of the themes that emerge in them. A close reading of the State Department human rights reports on the region helps to reveal continuities and inconsistencies with earlier representations of the conflict. I conclude the chapter with an exploration of the material effects of these discursive practices evident in the neo-imperial encroachment of American economic and military power in the broader region of the Sahara-Sahel.

The writers of an introduction to a new journal *Critical Studies on Security* argue that the Cold War era thinking about security as military and state-centric has continued to inform alternative conceptions of security that have been developed to try to explain the needs of a new world order. They assert that the initiation of the Global War on Terror “dramatically reinforced the significance of security, which had been seemingly on the wane since 1989, but the notion of security that came with it was quite different from that which had come

before.”¹³⁶ The new form of security, according to these scholars, is a much more “expansive, fluid and uncertain concept.” New modes of thinking about security are being implemented to maintain the distinctions between the state and its threats, and are deployed to justify new modes of power. As much as these new modes of security and power claim to be new and modern, they are still rooted in militarized and state-centric discourses.

In the years since the initiation of the so-called “War on Terror,” U.S. policymakers have focused their geopolitical gaze on the broader Middle East and North African (MENA) region. The geopolitical gaze of policymakers was colored by racialized fears of Islamic fundamentalism and the discourse of terrorism, which contributed to the scripting of the MENA region as a site as a site of instability and danger. The events of September 11, 2001 showed that the U.S. ‘homeland’ was susceptible to global threats. The concept of the homeland enabled the drive to secure neo-imperial interests to be rebranded as a national security concern. Suddenly, the nation-state itself once again came under attack from infiltrating outside forces that had to be secured against. In the global drama performed by U.S. statemakers, the binaries of domestic and foreign implied by the concept of the homeland delineated the boundaries of an American State.¹³⁷ American Studies scholar Amy Kaplan, in her text *Homeland Insecurities*, is attentive to the relationship between securing the homeland against the encroachment of foreign terrorists and enforcing national power abroad. Kaplan characterizes this relationship as part of the process of producing the modern American Empire, in which discourses of security dominated by the concept of

¹³⁶ Mutimer, David, Kyle Grayson, and J. M. Beier. "Critical Studies on Security: An Introduction." *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 1 (04/01; 2014/01, 2013): 1-12.

¹³⁷ Kaplan, Amy. “Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space.” *Radical History Review* Vol. 85 (2003): 82-93.

terrorism are deployed to justify assertions of American power in the margins of global political space.

In the era of the War on Terror, American power produced by the performative discourses of statemakers is rooted in the identification of external threats. The State that is produced and sustained by these new and recycled discourses of security is one that is simultaneously bounded and expansive. The Homeland Security State expanded conceptions of who and what presented a danger to the United States, as well as who and what needed to be secured. Within the emerging narratives of the homeland security era, U.S. policymakers valued Morocco as a moderate Islamic ally and partner in counterterrorism efforts. It was within this context that the Western Sahara conflict was discussed by U.S. policymakers.

Congressional Hearings

In the first decade of the 21st century, only one congressional hearing was held on specifically to explore the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. In 2005 the House Committee on International Relations held a hearing called “Getting to Yes: Resolving the 30-year conflict over the Western Sahara.” However the issue of the Western Sahara conflict also arose in a 2004 hearing on the proposed U.S./Morocco Free Trade Act, in a 2007 hearing on U.S. policy challenges in North Africa, in a 2009 hearing on counterterrorism in the Sahel, in a 2013 hearing on terrorism in the Sahel after the U.S. intervention in Benghazi, Libya, in another 2013 hearing called “Growing Crisis in the Sahel,” and an April 2014 hearing on U.S. policy towards Morocco. As is clear from this list, the Western Sahara conflict was viewed as a contributing factor to a perceived increase in crises and terrorist dangers emerging from a broad region of northwest Africa. In these hearings, a variety of

outside experts, State Department representatives and congressional leaders expressed differing, and sometimes conflicting, representations of the Western Sahara conflict.

In the 2004 debate on the congressional floor regarding the U.S. Morocco Free Trade Agreement several pro-Sahrawi Congressmen brought the conversation around to how this agreement would affect U.S. policy towards the Western Sahara conflict. Led by Congressman Joe Pitts, these voices sought to clarify that the trade agreement would not apply to any goods or resources produced in the Western Sahara. The U.S. Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a product of several years of negotiation and intense involvement of Morocco's cohort of Washington lobbyists, eliminated trade barriers for exports to the United States and strengthened economic ties between the two countries. The FTA was perceived as an important means of integrating into the global economy a region that was of "critical concern" to the United States.¹³⁸ The language of the bill was extremely supportive of Morocco, emphasizing its efforts at modernization and moderateness, and its text did not make any distinction about the Western Sahara until Congressman McDermott, Pitts, Towns and Crane raised objections. As a result, official letters from the Ways and Means Committee and the US Office of the Trade Representative to the House of Representatives were entered into the record to explicitly state that the FTA does not apply to Western Sahara as the U.S. does not recognize Moroccan sovereignty over it. They explained, "The FTA will cover trade and investment in the territory of Morocco as recognized internationally, and will not include Western Sahara." The concern of pro-Saharawi Congressmen was that the trade

¹³⁸ United States. Congress. House. *Congressional Record, Debate on the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement. Vol. 150, No. 103, Book II. One-Hundred and Eighth Congress, Second Session. July 22, 2004.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2004.

agreement would help Morocco benefit from the resources extracted in the illegally-occupied Western Sahara territory.¹³⁹

The small cohort of pro-Sahrawi Congressmen were combating an emerging representation of the Western Sahara as a site of terrorism. Congressman Joe Pitts was particularly concerned about this representation. He took the floor to state, “I just want to clarify the statement about the people of Western Sahara. Earlier today someone said that the Sahrawis are terrorists. I take exception to this remark, as the people of Western Sahara, and like many others in North Africa and the Middle East, have actually tried to peacefully solve the conflict. The State Department does not consider the people of Western Sahara to be terrorists. It is a misstatement. It is wrong. It is unproductive in our fight against terrorism to suggest that they are, and our own State Department does not believe the people of Western Sahara are terrorists.”¹⁴⁰ To further debunk this misleading representation, Pitts submitted several documents to the Congressional Record on the subject, including the 1974 ICJ opinion, the text of the failed Baker plan, and a set of sympathetic newspaper articles.

While this challenge to the prevailing narrative was exceedingly important, it did not change the course of the Free Trade Agreement and its effect on the region. Trade between the U.S. and Morocco has expanded exponentially since the adoption of the FTA.¹⁴¹ The FTA did not stop Morocco from profiting from the phosphate mines and commercial

¹³⁹ Congressman McDermott: “The issue is this: If you drill oil in the Western Sahara and the Moroccans take it into Morocco, is it then eligible for tariff-free dealings with the United States? And the answer should be no, and there should really never have been a trade agreement until that legal claim was relinquished or we had some sort of agreement on all of this.” U.S. House 2004.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. House 2004.

¹⁴¹ Since the adoption of the FTA, the U.S. goods trade surplus with Morocco has risen to \$1.8 billion, up from \$79 million in 2005. U.S. goods exports in 2011 were \$2.8 billion, up 45 percent from the previous year. Corresponding U.S. imports from Morocco were \$996 million, also up 45 percent. Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, *Morocco Free Trade Agreement* (Washington: U.S., 2012). <http://www.ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/morocco-fta>

fishing of Western Sahara, and has not prevented the Moroccan government from issuing contracts to U.S. and French companies for oil exploration in the region.¹⁴² Instead, the FTA laid the foundation for increased economic cooperation between the United States and Morocco, at the expense of the Sahrawi people's rights to land and resources.

In subsequent congressional hearings, the divisions between those sympathetic to the Sahrawi cause and those closely tied to Moroccan lobbyists became starkly apparent. Congressional voices on both sides of the conflict imposed U.S.-centric representational tropes onto this region and its people. Representations of the Sahrawi people and their cause were fueled by and helped to further American narratives of the region, which allowed little room for the expression of Sahrawi voices. On the one hand, the Sahrawi are represented using the language of Western ideals of peace and democracy. For example, Congressman Pitts is careful to present the Saharawi in the terms that appeal to US policymakers. He calls them "peaceful, pro-Western, pro-democracy people." This deliberate usage of the language of democracy reflects his awareness that this form of representation was necessary to gain political sympathy and support from U.S. policymakers.

¹⁴² Speculation about the possibility of discovering oil in the Western Sahara or offshore in its territorial waters has long been a specter haunting U.S. interest in the region. In the early years of this conflict the possibility of oil was discussed, likely heightened by the oil crises of the 1970s. In the last decade, Morocco has issued licenses to French energy company Total and American companies Kerr McGee and Kosmos to explore for oil in the Western Sahara. However, according to a 2002 legal opinion by the United Nations counsel Hans Corell, any attempt to exploit the resources of the region must be done in accordance with the will of the Sahrawi people and international law. Led by a Norwegian solidarity group, the Western Sahara Resource Watch, activists have attempted to resist the exploitation of resources, and succeeded in convincing U.S. company Kerr McGee to let its permit expire in 2006. However, U.S. company Kosmos is going ahead with plans to explore for offshore oil in the Western Sahara, bolstered by a dubious claim that the discovery of oil in the region will push forward the negotiation process. Invoking a comment made by James Baker upon his resignation from the role of Special Envoy, the company claims that the discovery of oil in this region "might even make it easier" to resolve the conflict. In the 2004 PBS interview cited by Kosmos, Baker vehemently denied that oil was a reason he had been personally interested in the conflict, and was reluctant to admit that the possibility of oil was one reason the United States was interested in the conflict. He does suggest, however, that the discovery of oil and the presence of terrorist activity might reenergize and reprioritize efforts to resolve the conflict in the U.S. and in the Security Council.

Being democratic and peaceful (as measured by a U.S.-centric standard) was required for the Sahrawi cause to be recognized as politically legitimate. Supportive policymakers and human rights groups make a consistent effort to use this language, and to emphasize nonviolence and the democratic nature of Sahrawi society both in the occupied territory and in the refugee camps. This strategy is also seen in the language of the Robert F. Kennedy Center, which advocates for Sahrawi human rights and lobbies Congressmen and officials. In 2012, a statement in the Congressional Record submitted by Congressman Frank Wolf emphasizes the language of civil society, independence, free speech and defense of human rights.¹⁴³ While the attempt to script the Sahrawi struggle into a Western narrative of democracy strips independent agency and local specificity from the cause of Sahrawi people, it is far less violent and detrimental than the competing narrative emerging in U.S. discourse.

At the other end of the spectrum, Congressmen with close ties to Moroccan lobbying groups, such as Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, used the language of guerrillas, criminals, and terrorists to represent the Sahrawi people. Often, their representations drew on Cold War-era characterizations to delegitimize the Sahrawi cause while deploying the discourse of terrorism to demonize the Sahrawi people. Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart's statement in the 2005 hearing on the resolution of the conflict dwells on the Polisario's association with Cuba and Libya, asserting, "Polisario counts among its closest friends tyrants such as Castro and Ghadafi...Sahrawi young people who have been taken by the Polisario from their families at a young age and shipped off for decades-long indoctrination in Libya or Cuba...Thousands of young people are in indoctrination schools in Cuba at this very moment, separated from their families and subjected to vile forms of

¹⁴³ United States. Congress. House. *Congressional Record Statement of Congressman Frank Wolf. One-Hundred and Twelfth Congress, Second Session. September 21, 2012.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2004.

anti-American indoctrination.”¹⁴⁴ The association of the Polisario with villainized enemies of the United States helps to locate the group firmly within the category of dangerous enemy. The supposed abduction of Sahrawi children for the purposes of anti-American indoctrination has been discredited by scholars of the region, yet is a recurring concern of pro-Moroccan congressmen.¹⁴⁵ This kind of rhetoric brings to light the connections between the Cold War lens and the lens of the War on Terror in the discourses that emerged during this period.

Congressman Diaz-Balart (who has close contact with the Moroccan American Center for Policy and several other lobby firms paid by the Moroccan government)¹⁴⁶ linked together the conflict over the Western Sahara and ideas of U.S. security. He asserted, “I believe that Morocco’s insistence upon its territorial integrity in the Western Sahara is critically important, not only for the national security of Morocco, but also for the security of the United States and of our European allies.” An interesting point to note is that while Diaz-Balart classified the type of threat that the Western Sahara presented as a *national* security threat to Morocco, the type of threat that the Western Sahara posed to the United States is less clear. The conflict in the Western Sahara was certainly perceived as a threat to the U.S., but the type of threat that it posed was not necessarily national in nature. As the texts examined over the course of this chapter demonstrate, the form of threat posed by the

¹⁴⁴ United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations. *Getting to "Yes": Resolving the 30-Year Conflict Over the Status of Western Sahara: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session, November 17, 2005*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2006.

¹⁴⁵ To clarify, some Sahrawi children are sent to Cuba for education and military training opportunities, but are not forcibly taken for “anti-American indoctrination.”

¹⁴⁶ For example, according to Foreign Lobbying Influence Tracker, Diaz Balart received \$5,950 from the Moroccan American Center for Policy between 2008 and 2009. See: <http://foreignlobbying.org/legislator/Diaz-Balart%2C%20Lincoln/>

Western Sahara conflict was more ambiguous and relied on more abstract concepts of security.

In a later statement in the Congressional Record in 2010, Diaz-Balart's rhetorical display of Cold War fears embellished with the discourse of terrorism reached an apex. He stated:

Let us never forget that a make-believe, an illusory, a fake microstate in Northern Africa would be led by a Castro-Cuban-formed political class which would constitute a minority of the population even within the fake microstate, but would control it through Castro-style repression. Let us never forget that such a microstate would serve as a focal point of regional instability and destabilization, as well as an exporter of terrorism.¹⁴⁷

The threat, then, that the conflict posed was not to the nation, but to the ideas of stability, to the security of the homeland from terrorism, and to traditional ideas about political legitimacy, informed by an anti-Cuban framework reminiscent of the Cold War era

In reference to Diaz-Balart's narrative of the Western Sahara conflict, Congressman Sherman reinforced the imperatives of security that the conflict supposedly posed for the United States in the 2005 hearing. He asserted, "the Polisario has allied itself with those who have sought to kill Americans, who have sought to wage war against our country and have sought to disrupt the world... it is a choice between a group that espouses terrorism and allies itself with those who wage war on America versus a country that has sought to ally itself with America."¹⁴⁸ In accordance with the Bush administration's line that "you are either with us or against us" in the fight against terrorism, this narrative presents a binary choice for U.S. policy on the Western Sahara conflict. In this presentation, there is no choice to be made; the United States must exert its influence in favor of its counterterrorism ally Morocco.

¹⁴⁷ Diaz-Balart, Congressional Record Statement, 2010.

¹⁴⁸ U.S. House 2005.

It is important not to overlook the role that Morocco played in helping to represent itself as a staunch U.S. ally in the War on Terror and to frame the Western Sahara conflict within the discourse of terrorism. Morocco promoted allegations about the involvement of disaffected Sahrawis in instances of terrorism and political conflict in Algeria, Mali and Libya during this decade, and actively promulgated the idea that the irresolution of the Western Sahara conflict made the region susceptible to infiltration by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Morocco's official narrative and well-paid lobbying efforts in Washington encouraged the dual narrative that the Western Sahara conflict was spilling over into the rest of the Sahara-Sahel region and that the conflicts within the region were spilling over into the Western Sahara. The lobbying done on behalf of the Moroccan government has been substantial. Since 2007, for example, the kingdom has spent roughly \$20 million on lobbying U.S. policymakers.¹⁴⁹ The role of Moroccan lobbying is not to be underestimated in thinking about how U.S. policymakers see the conflict.

A major effect of the successful lobbying work of agents representing the Moroccan government was the gradual shift away from any real commitment on the part of the U.S. to the self-determination of the Sahrawi people. Enabled by discourses of security and the allegations of threat encouraged by Moroccan agents, U.S. policymakers moved away from the possibility the Western Sahara could ever become independent through an act of self-determination, and instead threw their weight behind the Morocco-proposed autonomy plan. In part, this shift was also enabled by the ambiguity of the concept of self-determination and its place in the international legal system.¹⁵⁰ Testifying in a 2005 hearing on the subject, State Department official Gordon Gray articulated this ambiguity and the

¹⁴⁹ Barclay, Eliza, and Kristin Chick. "The \$20 Million Dollar Case for Morocco." *Foreign Policy*, February 25, 2014. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/25/the_20_million_case_for_morocco_lobbying

¹⁵⁰ See: Gunter (1979), Seddon (1987), Payne (1993) Spector (2009), Joffe (2010), and Simpson (2012).

incipient shift in US policy. Rather than repeat the strategy of earlier State Department officials who rhetorically affirmed the principle of self-determination and skirted around its application in practice, Gray's comment attempted to redefine the concept of self-determination to fit U.S. policy. He noted, "Self-determination is a very loaded phrase. I view self-determination as a process and that is why it is so important for the Government of Morocco to present an autonomy plan so that we can have more specifics on how the Sahrawi people will be able to have more control over their future than they have now."¹⁵¹ This formulation of the concept of self-determination did not allow for the possibility of independence. Instead, policymakers framed the Moroccan Autonomy proposal as sufficient enough to satisfy the legal obligation to an act of expression of the people's will.

In the year 2007, several events converged with respect to the Western Sahara conflict that enabled policymakers to elevate the status of the conflict to a counterterrorism concern and to reorient the discourse away from any mention of the possibility of independence for the Sahrawi people. In 2007, Morocco proposed an Autonomy Plan for the Western Sahara as the starting point for any further negotiations and which did not include the possibility of independence. A group of former U.S. policymakers led by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright submitted a letter to President Bush expressing support for the Autonomy Plan. The letter asserted that, "Recent terrorist attacks in Morocco and Algeria show that we cannot afford to continue to ignore the problems of this region. Failure to resolve this conflict jeopardizes international stability, our fight against terrorism, and economic integration efforts in the region."¹⁵² Autonomy was thus substituted for the right to self-determination or independence of the Sahrawi people.

¹⁵¹ U.S. House 2005.

¹⁵² Albright, Madeline. Letter to President Bush. June 6, 2007.
<http://moroccoonthemove.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/wsaharainfopacket2012.pdf>

Speaking in the 2007 hearing, State Department representative David Welch called the Autonomy Plan “serious and credible,” using the language that would be used to express the official U.S. line over the next 6 years. Welch went on to say that “Unresolved, the crisis leaves approximately 90,000 Sahrawi people languishing in refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria and the territory a potentially attractive safehaven for terrorist planning or activity.”¹⁵³ The ‘potential’ of terrorism was excuse enough for the U.S. to designate the Western Sahara as a zone of threat, and for it to play a part in the increased militarization of the region through programs such as AFRICOM (established in 2007) and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (which replaced the Pan Sahel Initiative in 2007).

These programs, which will be explored further in this chapter, identify the main terrorist threat in the Sahara-Sahel region as the group now known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The Algerian organization *Groupe salafiste pour la predication et le combat* (GSPC) rebranded itself as AQIM in 2007. Following these events, the 2007 House Hearing on U.S. Policy Challenges in North Africa centered on the role that the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict could play in helping to achieve U.S. counterterrorism goals in the region. Chairman Tom Lantos set the stage for this connection in his opening statement, where he asserted: “The United States has a major stake in the stability of North Africa. Al-Qaeda and other terror groups are expanding rapidly their presence in the region. It is imperative that we settle the Western Saharan issue as part of the effort to assure that the region does not become a major terrorism breeding ground.”¹⁵⁴ According to the views expressed by many congressmen, there is a direct connection between the threat of AQIM, and the irresolution of the Western Sahara conflict.

¹⁵³ U.S. House 2007.

Welch left the State Department shortly thereafter to direct the corporation Bechtel’s North Africa operations, a good example of the diplomacy-industrial complex that gave corporations stakes and voices in foreign policy.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. House 2007.

The phrase security and stability fueled by the discourse on terrorism in the region became the recurring trope used to deflect attention away from the issues of self-determination and human rights. The geopolitical gaze of U.S. policymakers charted the Western Sahara as empty space that needed to be stabilized and secured. Representations of the region perpetuated by U.S. policymakers centered on the vulnerability of this territory, both in the sense of the potential threats that it might produce or harbor and in the sense of its potential as a site of resource extraction. The Western Sahara region was located by the discourse of policymakers within a region characterized by its potential threat to stability as an “ungoverned space.” The discourse of un- or under- governed spaces emerged in the post-9/11 context as a way to characterize the region as dangerous, and to produce it as a liminal site suited for the exercise of imperial and colonial power.

Policymakers located the Western Sahara conflict within the discourses of failed states, porous borders, and empty space in the broader Sahara-Sahel region. These characterizations were seen as features that facilitated the infiltration and growth of terrorist activity. In the 2009 hearing on Counterterrorism in the Sahel, Earl Gast of USAID expressed a widely held concern that challenges to state power “facilitates the emergence of ‘ungoverned,’ ‘undergoverned,’ ‘misgoverned,’ or ‘poorly governed’ spaces, which, in turn may provide opportunities for violent extremist groups.”¹⁵⁵ The small per capita population of the region, its desert topography, and the discounting of nomadic ways of life in Western geopolitical discourse contributed to the scripting of the territory as empty. The Western Sahara conflict was then narrated as an improperly governed space, replete with the potential for terrorism.

¹⁵⁵ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Relations. Subcommittee on African Affairs. *Examining U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Strategy across Africa’s Sahel Region. One-Hundred and Eleventh Congress, First Session. November 17, 2009.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010.

A PBS interviewer in 2004 asked James Baker if the terrorist activity in southern Sahara could spill over into Western Sahara, “because the U.S. army was talking in April this year about Muslim extremists moving into these massive open spaces saying that they are as elusive there as if they were out at sea.”¹⁵⁶ Here we see the surfacing of the fear of ungoverned space. To the interviewer, Baker responded, “It’s conceivable... There are great vast, vacant open spaces in very, very harsh environments.”¹⁵⁷ This affirmation gave credence to policymakers’ fears about the supposedly ‘empty’ region, fears which enabled (and demanded) the acceleration of the securitization of the Sahara-Sahel region over the next few years.

For U.S. policymakers, ungoverned space became an identifier of potential threats to national, or homeland, security. Why are policymakers afraid of ungoverned space? In a world of nation-states, land or space which is not territorialized (subject to state power) is a threat to the defining characteristic of the state as sovereign within its borders. What are the linkages between ungoverned space, porous borders and terrorism? The physical, legal, and social borders of the nation-state are defined primarily by that which is excluded by the process of delineation. The state is constituted by bordering practices, that define who/what is included and who/what is seen as a threat to the state. U.S. policymakers use the concept of terrorism to refer to definitively anti-state threats to the homeland. Terrorism, as it is used by U.S. policymakers, refers to “politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups.”¹⁵⁸ The state sees non-state actors, or ‘subnational’ groups who deploy violence for their political aims, as existential threats to the

¹⁵⁶ Baker, James. Interview with Mishal Husain. “Former U.S. Secretary of State and former Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General to Western Sahara, James A. Baker III discusses the protracted conflict in Western Sahara with host Mishal Husain.” Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). August 2004.
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/sahara-marathon/interview-james-a-baker-iii/873/>

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ From *U.S. Code Title 22, Ch.38, Para. 2656f(d)*. This definition of terrorism excludes the possibility of state terrorism.

state. The problem that terrorism poses for the state is not the possibility of destruction of the state but, rather, a challenge to the state's monopoly on violence.

Terrorism is not the only threat posed by ungoverned space that U.S. policymakers are concerned about in the Sahara region. Policymakers fear that porous borders lend themselves to criminal activity, specifically the smuggling of goods and people.¹⁵⁹ They are concerned about both the drug and cigarette smuggling industry in the Sahel and the illegal migration of sub-Saharan northwards. The U.S. and the European Union are concerned about drugs and sub-Saharan migrants entering the European Union through the Sahara. Morocco functions as a gateway to the EU and thus is employed as an administrator of EU migration policy. From this perspective, the vast ungoverned spaces of the Western Sahara are seen as amenable to the movement of illegal goods such as drugs and weapons, as well as the illegal movement of humans.

Polisario has been discursively tied to a ring of smuggling activity, though little concrete proof has been reported. In a 2013 hearing, former Georgetown professor Nii Akuetteh asserted that “In the triangle between Mauritania, Mali, and Algeria, Sahrawi networks—often with the direct involvement of officials in the Polisario movement, which seeks independence for Western Sahara—trade subsidized Algerian goods and humanitarian aid southward and cigarettes northward to Algeria and Morocco.”¹⁶⁰ However, these allegations are disputed. Some of the smuggling activity in the region is conducted by individuals who may have links to Polisario, but the organization itself has no involvement.

The threat of ungoverned space is narrated using specific security-related buzzwords—namely drugs, arms, migrants and terrorism. These terms contribute to a

¹⁵⁹ See Figure 4 in Appendix.

¹⁶⁰ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Growing Crisis in Africa's Sahel Region. One-hundred and thirteenth Congress. First Session. May 21, 2013.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 2013.

particular view of the region that has influenced the way that policymakers respond to the ongoing conflict over the Western Sahara. The use of these terms to represent events in the Western Sahara and the surrounding region reflect the way that, as political scientist David Campbell writes, certain modes of representation “crystallize around referents marked as dangers.”¹⁶¹ These terms, regarded as referents of danger, produce a demand for a state security response that takes the form of international policing.

The fear of ungoverned space and the absence of authoritative state power reflect the statist bias of the lens that US policymakers use to view the world. Congressmen express fears about the vast spaces of the Sahara-Sahel becoming a “terrorist Wild West,”¹⁶² and support policies that seek to enhance the capacity of state actors to control the space. AFRICOM’s website states that its “core mission of assisting African states and regional organizations to strengthen their defense capabilities better enables Africans to address their security threats and reduces threats to U.S. interests.”¹⁶³ The emphasis on securing existing states, rather than people, communities, or citizens, demonstrates the statist and militarist focus of the U.S.’s engagement with Africa. For example, in a 2013 hearing, Representative Sherman asked experts at a congressional hearing “what are the links between AQIM and the Polisario? What are we doing to disrupt those links, and what should we be doing to help allies like Morocco deal with AQIM-aided organizations?”¹⁶⁴ The immediate emphasis was on supporting state actors in opposition to non-state and potentially destabilizing actors.

This statist bias is concerning because of the way that it silences the legitimate political aims of non-state actors and marginalized communities within or outside the state. The

¹⁶¹ Campbell, 2.

¹⁶² Boukhars, Anouar., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace., *Simmering Discontent in the Western Sahara*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012.

¹⁶³ African Affairs. “What We Do.” AFRICOM. 2014. <http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do>

¹⁶⁴ U.S. House 2013.

tendency for policymakers to express faith in state actors over their political opponents is seen in the way that policymakers like Chairman Tom Lantos who, despite years of evidence to the contrary, blamed Polisario for obstructing the resolution of the conflict.¹⁶⁵ Lantos, for whom the Congressional Human Rights Caucus was named after his death in 2008, resolutely declared in the 2007 hearing, “peace has been summarily rejected by the rebel Polisario Front in favor of arid refugee camps and guerilla ambushes.”¹⁶⁶ In this statement, the term ‘guerilla’ dismissed the Polisario as a non-state actor whose use of force for political aims is delegitimized.

While U.S. Congressmen and State Department officials expressed a range of representations of the Western Sahara conflict, nearly all of these representations silenced or misconstrued the narrative of the Sahrawi people. Between those who represented the Sahrawi struggle as a pursuit of Western-style liberal democracy, human rights and self-determination within the nation-state system and those who represented them as potential terrorists, the local specificity of the needs, desires and modes of life of the Sahrawi people were rendered invisible. The attempts to script the Sahrawi people within these differing narratives left little room for them to express their own narratives or to be recognized as having identities outside the U.S. geopolitical lenses and policy imperatives. We turn next to the human rights reports produced by the U.S. State Department on the situation in the Western Sahara to look for more nuanced representations of the Western Sahara conflict. While the State Department human rights reports on the region were less polemic than congressional commentary, they too impose certain narratives of the conflict and the people

¹⁶⁵ However it was Morocco, not the Polisario who rejected the Baker Plan. Lantos unquestioningly places his faith in the state actors, asking, “what we, our Government, are doing to help all the countries of North Africa to realize their full potential in terms of democracy, economic development.” This orientation towards the state as the main political actor belies a realist worldview that the liberal Congressman was did not escape. For Lantos, and many others, the Moroccan Autonomy Plan appealed to their perceived need for stability within the existing borders of nation-states in North Africa.

¹⁶⁶ U.S. House 2007.

and obscure other understandings. The reports demonstrate the evolution of the representations of this conflict, which both complicate the Congressional representations and offer their own limited and problematic representations.

Human Rights Reports

The State Department Human Rights Reports present an opportunity for the United States to transcend its statist bias to address the abuses suffered by individuals and groups targeted by the Moroccan state. The human rights reports do criticize Morocco, but they also mimic the Moroccan narrative of events in the region. The shifts in the language of the Human Rights Reports released by the State Department regarding Western Sahara are helpful for looking at changes in the way that representations of the region were imagined and contested over time. The human rights reports during the period from 2001 to 2013 reflect the rise in civil society organizing in the Moroccan-occupied territory, and the increased repression that accompanied it. The reports continue to use the same basic template, but small changes in the wording and reports of specific events reflect shifting discourses around this region.

From 2000 until 2004, the opening sentence of the Country Report for Western Sahara read: “Morocco claims the Western Sahara and administers Moroccan law and regulation in the approximately 85 percent of the territory which it controls; however, sovereignty remains disputed between the Government of Morocco and the Polisario Front . . . an organization seeking independence for the region.”¹⁶⁷ However, in 2004 the sentence was revised to identify Polisario as “*an organization seeking a U.N.-supervised referendum on self-*

¹⁶⁷ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2001.

determination for the territory.” (*emphasis added*).¹⁶⁸ This change in the language indicates a shift away from the independence as a possible outcome of the referendum. It is possible that the change reflects a sense of the failure of the Baker Plan in 2004, and the shift towards a negotiated political solution to the conflict that did not allow the possibility of independence.

The following year however, the sentence was changed again to reincorporate the word independence and to add the population figure for the territory, “Morocco claims the Western Sahara territory, with a population of approximately 267 thousand, and administers Moroccan law and regulation in the approximately 85 percent of the territory it controls; however, Morocco and the Polisario Front...*an organization seeking independence for the region, dispute its sovereignty.*”¹⁶⁹ The borders of what constituted the ‘Western Sahara territory’ are left ambiguous in this description, and it is unclear if the population number refers to the people in the Western Sahara territory within or beyond the current bounds of Moroccan control. Over the next several years, the human rights reports over the next several years update this population figure, which rose in 2007 to 383,000.

In 2009 the opening sentence changed again, indicating several important sites of contestation. The report now read: “Morocco claims the Western Sahara territory and administers Moroccan law through Moroccan institutions in the estimated 85 percent of the territory it controls. However, Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario), an organization *that has sought* independence for the formerly Spanish territory since 1973, disputes Morocco's sovereignty. *The population of the territory was approximately 405,000, an estimated 100,000 of whom were attributable to Moroccan immigration.*” (*my emphasis*).¹⁷⁰ The past tense of the description of the Polisario’s goal of

¹⁶⁸ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2004.

¹⁶⁹ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2009.

independence signifies a shift away from the possibility of independence. This language reflects the change in state policy, as the United States repeatedly affirmed its support for the Moroccan Autonomy plan beginning in 2007. The revised introduction also makes note of the Moroccan role in producing the rising population through the use of economic incentives for settlers from Morocco proper.

Other changes in the human rights reports in this period reflect complications to the securitizing narrative expressed by policymakers. The reports note that prevailing view of the national human rights council set up by the Moroccan government at the beginning of the decade as flawed, biased, administratively slow and inadequately independent from the government. The Council Nationale de Droits de L'Homme (CNDH) initiated a flawed and criticized Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) in 2003 to make reparations for human rights abuses committed under King Hassan II. The IER held public commission hearings in Morocco in beginning in 2005, but, according to the human rights report that year, the hearings planned for the Western Sahara territory were not held “due to internal IER time constraints compounded by demonstrations in the territory.”¹⁷¹ According to Sahrawi human rights defenders, alternative hearings were organized by Saharawi civil society groups to reflect the frustration against their exclusion from the national process.¹⁷² The year 2005 saw large-scale civil society protests, termed a nonviolent *intifada* by Sahrawi human rights defenders, accompanied by brutal repression from the Moroccan security forces.¹⁷³

Another significant change in the human rights reports during this period was the de-centering of statements about the economic development achieved by Morocco in the

¹⁷¹ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2005.

¹⁷² Personal Interview with Elghalia Djimi, ASVDH vice president, November, 2012.

¹⁷³ Personal Interview with Rahal Boubrik, CNDH member and head of the Center for Saharan Studies at Mohammed V University, November 2012.

Sahara. Where previously the opening paragraph commented on the economic development achieved by Morocco in the region, by 2004, this comment had moved to much later in the document and now read, “The Moroccan Government has undertaken a sizable economic development program in the Western Sahara as part of its long-term efforts to strengthen Moroccan claims to the territory, although incomes and standards of living are substantially below Moroccan levels.”¹⁷⁴ These subtle additions to the report serve as pushback against the narrative promoted elsewhere of Morocco’s modernization and development of the region (efforts which benefit the Moroccan government and settlers, but do little for the marginalized Sahrawi people).

A useful measure of the pro-Moroccan bias of the reports is the treatment of the tent camp protest known as Gdeim Izik that ended in violence in November 2010. There are two glaring discrepancies between the State Department’s narrative of events and the narrative that emerged out of my research on the events of Gdeim Izik. First, the State Department seems to accept the Moroccan line that the killing of 14-year-old Nayem Elghari at a checkpoint outside the camp occurred because “known criminals were riding in the vehicle and that they fired on the gendarmes who had attempted to detain them.”¹⁷⁵ However, as reported by Amnesty International, the brother of the boy who was killed testified that they and several other boys were bringing supplies to their families living in the camp and that the authorities opened fire on the unarmed boys at the police checkpoint set up around the perimeter of the camp.¹⁷⁶ The intense restriction for media access to the

¹⁷⁴ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2004.

¹⁷⁵ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2010.

¹⁷⁶ “Rights Trampled: Protests, Violence and Repression in the Western Sahara.” *Amnesty International Publications*. December 2010, 1-28.

region contributed to the conflicting narratives of the events of Gdeim Izik, a situation which one human rights group termed a “war of rumors.”¹⁷⁷

The other glaring difference in the narration by the State Department is the assertion that “after negotiations between Interior Ministry officials and camp organizers failed to result in a peaceful dismantling of the camp, authorities moved on November 8 to dismantle it using water cannons and truncheons.”¹⁷⁸ The Moroccan narrative of events asserts that Polisario had infiltrated the camp and held the participants hostage, a narrative repudiated by participants.¹⁷⁹ As I have written elsewhere, the negotiations were still underway and compromises were being made at the time the Moroccan security forces conducted their surprise attack on the camp on the morning of November 8, 2010.¹⁸⁰

The State Department human rights reports do not mention the fact that the U.N. mission in the Western Sahara (MINURSO) is the only peacekeeping mission that does not have a mandate to monitor human rights abuses. Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights actively lobby the United States and the United Nations to include a human rights monitoring mechanism in the MINURSO mandate, which is renewed in April each year. In 2013, the United States introduced a proposal for a human rights monitoring mechanism to the draft of the mandate under discussion among the Group of Friends of Western Sahara before the Security Council votes on the mandate. This small step forward resulted in backlash from Morocco, who cancelled the annual African Lion joint-military exercises with the U.S. troops. Under pressure from France and Morocco, the U.S. withdrew

¹⁷⁷ “Sahara Occidental: Les Affrontements du 8 novembre 2010 à Laâyoune: Escalade dans un conflit qui s’éternise.” *Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme*. March 2011, 1-28.

¹⁷⁸ State Department Human Rights Report on Western Sahara, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Personal Interviews, November 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Dann, Naomi. “Non-Violence in the Western Sahara.” *Peace Review*. March 10th, 2014

the proposal, and the MINURSO mandate was again approved without the human rights monitoring mechanism. Large-scale protests in the Moroccan-occupied territory in response to this move resulted in brutal repression from the Moroccan government.¹⁸¹ In this case, as in many others, the U.S. sacrificed its commitment to promote human rights in favor of retaining its political and military relationships.

U.S. involvement in the Sahara-Sabel

The political and military relationships between the United States and Morocco were greatly strengthened over the course of the last decade by several complementary initiatives. In 2002, the U.S./Morocco Defense Consultative Committee was established, a preliminary step towards an enhanced military partnership that grew closer over the course of the decade.¹⁸² Despite the fact that terrorists of Moroccan origin participated in the September 11 attacks, Morocco succeeded in asserting itself as a U.S. ally in the war on terrorism. The 2003 bombing of the Casablanca train station helped to cement Morocco's status as a fellow target, rather than source, of terrorism. Morocco was eager to represent itself to the United States as a 'moderate Islamic ally,' a characterization continually referenced by U.S. policymakers. Morocco was designated as a major non-NATO ally in 2004, giving it unique status as a strong partner in counterterrorism efforts. Moroccan efforts to represent the Polisario as a terrorist group and the Polisario-controlled refugee camps as sites of Al-Qaeda recruitment contributed to its self-representation as a fellow target of terrorism, and fueled the scripting of the Western Sahara within a volatile region of potential terrorism.

While the focus of the so-called 'War on Terror' remained on Afghanistan, Iraq, and

¹⁸¹ Urban, Cate. "RFK Center Condemns Moroccan Police Brutality against Western Sahara Demonstrators." *Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights*. May 7, 2013. <http://rfkcenter.org/western-sahara-may-2013>

¹⁸² Zoubir, Yahia H. and Louisa Dris-Aït-Hamadouche. *Global Security Watch--the Maghreb: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013): 137.

to an extent Pakistan, U.S. policymakers did not limit their concern about al-Qaeda-style terrorism to central Asia. A Joint Chiefs of Staff statement from 2004 asserted that “There exists an ‘arc of instability’ stretching from the Western Hemisphere, through Africa and the Middle East and extending to Asia. There are areas in this arc that serve as breeding grounds for threats to our interests. Within these areas rogue states provide sanctuary to terrorists, protecting them from surveillance and attack.”¹⁸³ Policymakers were concerned about the spread of terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel region and speculation about the possibility of terrorist activity emerging from the Western Sahara became a central theme in the congressional hearings.

In 2002, the State Department initiated a program known as the Pan-Sahel Initiative. The stated goals of the Pan-Sahel Initiative were to wage the war on terrorism and develop regional peace and security in Africa. The program, which focused on Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Chad, aimed to develop military and political partnerships to “protect borders, track movement of people, combat terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation and stability.”¹⁸⁴ Congressional leaders, defense experts brought in for testimony, and media voices criticized the PSI for not addressing the underlying economic issues of the region and for producing “enemies where none were before.”¹⁸⁵ In 2007, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership replaced and expanded the PSI in order to address some of the concerns. A partnership between the State Department, USAID and the Defense Department enabled the TSCTP to present itself as addressing the three ‘D’s of diplomacy, development and defense.

¹⁸³ Myers, Richard B. National Military Strategy. *Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff Report*. 2004. <http://www.defense.gov/news/mar2005/d20050318nms.pdf>. See Figure 3 in Appendix.

¹⁸⁴ “Pan Sahel Initiative.” *Department of State*. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/14987.htm>

¹⁸⁵ Gutelius, David. “US creates African enemies where there were none before.” *Christian Science Monitor*. July, 11 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0711/p11s01-coop.html>

The triad of diplomacy, development and defense formed the new face of American power in the Sahara-Sahel region. Policymakers were conscious of the fact that traditional power, specifically the use or threat of military force, was not appropriate in the context of this turbulent region. Rather, the United States¹⁸⁶ sought to exert its power through low-profile partnerships and a development “face.” The State Department officials who testified before the 2009 hearing on counterterrorism in the Sahel emphasized the fact that the role of the United States in this sensitive region must be quieter and less visible. Daniel Benjamin of the State Department Counterterrorism Bureau was clear about this reasoning in his testimony: “We have been, if you will, leading from the side. These partners have shown the will to take on terrorists in the past, and we expect that that will continue... These countries have made it clear that they do not want the United States to take a more direct or visible operational role, but welcome assistance from the United States and other third countries.”¹⁸⁷ After a decade of US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, it seems that U.S. officials have realized the need to intervene in more surreptitious and low-profile ways. Policymakers were explicitly aware of the nature of the TSCTP as a multidimensional form of exerting power in this region. Senator Isakson called it “soft power,” a concept developed by international relations scholar Joseph Nye to describe the exertion of a form of power that attracts participation and support rather than coercion and force.

Despite the low-profile approach, the TSCTP and the engagement of AFRICOM in the region constituted a new exertion of US military, economic, and diplomatic power in the region. Experts who testified in Congressional hearings recognized the possible resentment that the new military partnerships might cause. Lianne Kennedy-Boudali, a West Point

¹⁸⁶ As I warned in the introduction, occasionally this text may read as though the United States is a centralized actor with a unified ideology, however this is not my intention. The policymaking of the United States was a product of and produced a variety of discourses of power circulated by various actors.

¹⁸⁷ U.S. House 2009.

counterterrorism expert and RAND corporation researcher who testified in a 2009 hearing, asserted the need to put a “U.S. face on development activities” in order to “contribute to a reduction of anti-American sentiment” through programs such as USAID and the Peace Corps. She testified that the TSCTP signified a shift away from limited peacekeeping operations to more offensive military capabilities. Slowly and quietly, the U.S. military has expanded its power in the Sahara-Sahel region, a development that represents an imperial form of control over the region.

Jacob Mundy points out that the map of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership conveniently skirts around the disputed Western Sahara, while touching every other country in the region.¹⁸⁸ The scope of the TSCTP does, however, include the region of Algeria where the Polisario-run refugee camps are located. These camps have become sites of suspicion as potential terrorist ‘safe havens’ and recruiting grounds. Full of disaffected and frustrated young men who may be susceptible to terrorism, the Tindouf camps have been scripted as site of threat for the United States. Until 2011, the speculative rhetoric about terrorists in the Sahara and threats to the United States was just that, speculative.¹⁸⁹ However, in 2011 three aid workers were kidnapped from the Polisario camps in Tindouf, Algeria. The alleged AQIM kidnapping of three aid workers in the camps has helped to promulgate the narrative of insecurity in the region. An Aljazeera article reporting on the incident asserts “AQIM has not been known to target the camps for Western Sahara

¹⁸⁸ Mundy, Jacob. "How the 'War on Terror' Undermined Peace in Northwest Africa: The Western Sahara Conflict After 9/11." *Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin* no. 77 (2007): 1-19. See: Figure 3 in Appendix.

¹⁸⁹ Lianne Kennedy-Boudali countered the speculation at the 2009 hearing, stating: “There has been some speculation that AQIM could join forces with other militant Muslims living in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically extremist groups in Northern Nigeria and the Polisario in Western Sahara. As for the Polisario—an armed group seeking an independent state for the Sahrawi people in the Western Sahara—while Salafi and Salafi-jihadist ideologies may be making inroads within the Polisario camps, the Polisario does not share AQIM’s goal of establishing an Islamic state, and the Polisario itself has denied any association with al-Qaeda. As such, the likelihood of AQIM absorbing or affiliating with the Polisario is remote, although it is possible that the groups may cooperate on the movement of people or materiel.”

refugees in the past. The attack goes against Moroccan suggestions that AQIM and the Polisario work together to target Moroccan interests.”¹⁹⁰ Despite the fact that Polisario reported the AQIM infiltration of the camps, the incident has provided fuel for the narrative that Polisario is working in partnership with AQIM.

More recently, conflict in Mali has helped to propel the narrative of insecurity applied to the Sahara region as a whole and discussions of the conflict in Mali have specifically implicated the Polisario.¹⁹¹ In January 2012, several Tuareg groups began a campaign against the Malian government for independence or greater autonomy for an area of northern Mali known as Azawad. The civil war/rebellion that ensued involved Islamist groups with ties to AQIM. The Malian and Moroccan governments alleged that Polisario members were involved in the conflict, leading to allegations that the “problems in the Western Sahara are spilling over into Mali.”¹⁹² At a 2013 hearing on terrorism in the Sahel following the events in Benghazi, Libya, Representative Sherman turned the conversation towards Polisario. He stated, “I am concerned that the AQIM, the al-Qaeda and Islamic Maghreb, has reportedly established ties with the Polisario militants in Algeria. Algeria provides material support and land for the Polisario, and some of the members seem to have been involved in the terrorist operations in northern Mali.”¹⁹³ In this statement several allegations of connection are made which paint a particular view of the Polisario and help to

¹⁹⁰ “Aid workers abducted in Western Sahara.” *Al Jazeera*. October 24, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/10/20111023185250930756.html>

¹⁹¹ It is important to note that the series of uprisings, popular revolutions, coups and general instability of regimes in the Arab world since the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 have also shaped views of the Western Sahara. As I noted earlier, the events of Gdeim Izik were identified by Noam Chomsky as the beginning of the Arab Spring. For the most part, however, this wave of change had little impact on the conflict. King Mohammed VI successfully weathered the ‘Spring’ storm with constitutional reforms that pacified much of the unrest in Morocco proper. The Arab Spring definitely contributed to U.S. perceptions of instability in North Africa, and complicated U.S. relationships with friendly authoritarian regimes. See: U.S. House 2014.

¹⁹² U.S. House 2013.

¹⁹³ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. *The Terrorist Threat in North Africa: Before and After Benghazi*. One-hundred and thirteenth Congress. First Session. July 10, 2013. Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 2013.

delegitimize its political goals. An expert from the Washington Institute for Near East policy responded to this statement in the hearing noting that “it appears that there is a lot of rumors related to potential connections but there is no hard evidence as of now, at least based off the open source reporting.”¹⁹⁴ The damage was already done; connections between the Polisario, AQIM and the rebellion in Mali were already circulating in the geographical imaginations of policymakers.

Anthropologist Stephen Harmon’s detailed genealogy of AQIM suggests that the United States exaggerated the seriousness of the threat to justify its securitization initiatives in the region, specifically the PSI, TSCTP and AFRICOM.¹⁹⁵ Citing a report from the International Crisis Group published in 2005, Harmon, Mundy, and others have suggested that the actual threat posed by AQIM to Western interests is quite limited.¹⁹⁶ Jacob Mundy situates this exaggeration of the terrorist threat in the Sahara-Sahel in the context of the securitization and militarization of the region. Drawing on the concerns of securitization theory, he worries about the effect of security discourse on the militarization of development discourse and practice. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, with its goals of diplomacy, development and defense, is the primary example of the merging of military security with human security and promoting development through militarization.

Anthropologist Konstantina Isidoros sees these allegations of Polisario’s connection with terrorism in the Sahara as part of the production of Orientalist and militarist discourses that have been transplanted onto the Saharan context. She asserts that the refusal of the Polisario, and the Saharawi population, to give up on their nationalist claims has prompted

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Harmon, Stephen. "From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region." *Concerned Africa Scholars* 85, (2010): 12-29. <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85.pdf>

¹⁹⁶ Mundy, Jacob. "Introduction: Securitization in the Sahel." *Concerned Africa Scholars* 85, (2010): 4. <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85.pdf>

the US to “reconstruct them into terrorists and weave another story of fear about al-Qaeda conveniently popping up like a jack-in-the-box in the Sahara.”¹⁹⁷ The terrorism script imposed onto the Sahara enables the United States to delegitimize the actions of the Polisario and the Sahrawi people while presenting itself as a legitimate state actor with interests that justify its militarization of the region. As Isidoros claims, it is “in the U.S. interest to script-write a mythology of terror onto a Saharan landscape.”¹⁹⁸ As she and others have suggested, the U.S. desire to securitize this region is connected to the protection of economic interests of the United States, which range from specific investments, the potential for oil discovery off the coast of Western Sahara and the broader interest in economic integration and open borders to the flow of capital.

The scripting of insecurity onto place in the geographical imaginations of policymakers has a dual effect on the Western Sahara and the broader Sahara-Sahel region. The use of discourses of security in discussions of the Western Sahara conflict is simultaneously symptomatic and productive of the policymakers conceptions of the Sahara-Sahel region. Describing the Western Sahara as a place of potential danger reinforces and contributes to fears about the potential dangers lurking in the vast (empty) Sahara region. Concomitantly, events that occur elsewhere in the Sahara-Sahel have sometimes implicated the Western Sahara, and have contributed to perceptions of the conflict. The geopolitical gaze colored by the lens of terrorism through which policymakers saw the Western Sahara scripted it as a site that needed to be secured by performances of U.S. power.

¹⁹⁷ Isidoros, Konstantina. “Western Sahara and the United States’ Geographical Imaginations. *Concerned Africa Scholars* 85, (2010): 66. <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85.pdf>

¹⁹⁸ Isidoros, 67.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The geographical imaginations of American statemakers have had a profoundly impact on the conflict over the Western Sahara. Over the duration of this conflict, the shape and structure of global politics changed in some significant ways, and remained consistent in others. While historical events made possible, and often demanded, new geographical imaginaries, the geopolitical gazes that U.S. policymakers used to spatialize, order, and know the world reveal continuities in the hegemonic, expansionist and imperialist practices of U.S. policymaking. The introduction, contestation and reiteration of modes of exercising power and practices of naming, locating and representing places and peoples can be seen in the relationship of the United States to the forty years of conflict over the Western Sahara.

Discourses of security were central, though not the only, sets of practices that made possible neo-imperial performances of American power. U.S. foreign policymakers performed the state through the process of naming, representing and mapping the Western Sahara conflict. This thesis project sought to identify how and why certain discourses on this region gained political currency and how they foreclosed other ways of seeing, and thus crafting policy toward, the Western Sahara conflict. What has remained consistent across various historicized narratives was the representation of Western Sahara as a site that needed to be secured. This theme is characteristic of the imperial state's imperative to expand its power by policing the periphery.

The process of statemaking requires a relentlessly constant iteration of discourses of power, security and sovereignty, which shape the meaning and identity of the state as an effect of this performance. The process of scripting the Western Sahara region reveals this constant struggle to assert meaning within U.S. policymaking circles, a process that produced real material effects on the lives of people in the region. The scripting of the Western Sahara

region as a place of potential danger created the conditions of possibility for exertions of U.S. power in the broader Sahara-Sahel region through programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and AFRICOM. Throughout this performance of statecraft there were moments of possibility when the narratives were contested, when individual voices dissented from the securitization of the region, and when alternative ways of representing the region were foreclosed by discourses of security.

The first of such moments was the period during the Carter administration when the U.S. placed tight restrictions against sales of arms to Morocco that might be used in the Western Sahara war. This moment of opportunity for change was foreclosed when the combined pressures of the collapse of friendly regimes in Iran and Nicaragua prompted U.S. policymakers to return to a policy of providing unrestricted security assistance to political friends. The second, and perhaps most significant moment of opportunity to reconsider policy toward this conflict was the period in the early 1990s when the Cold War ended, the ceasefire between Morocco and Polisario was implemented, and the UN initiated the referendum process. This period, which shook up the international order, provided an opportunity to challenge existing political approaches and develop new foreign policies. Traditional concepts of political power, and state-centric ideas of sovereignty, self-determination and security could have been fundamentally reimagined during this period. However, hegemonic practices to secure the Western Sahara, justified through discourses of security (as well as U.S.-centric discourses of democracy promotion and free trade), only accelerated during this period.

The 'War on Terror' that emerged in the wake of the events of 9/11 called into being securitization measures both reminiscent of, and different from, securitization in the Cold War era. The scripting of the Western Sahara region as a site of potential threat produced the

conditions of possibility for the rise of U.S. military activity in the Sahara region. The creation of AFRICOM and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism partnership demonstrate a new fusion of American military, political, and economic power in North Africa. The quiet construction of a drone base in Niger from which to survey and police the Sahara-Sahel region is one example of this new exertion of U.S. power.¹⁹⁹ This use of diffuse and multifaceted power is part of a larger imperial project of expanding American power in North Africa.

The logic of the imperial state requires the subjection of marginal spaces in the periphery to securitization and control. The United States supports Morocco's administration of the territory and seeks to legitimize it by supporting the Moroccan autonomy plan for the Western Sahara. This serves both the interests of the Moroccan state and that of the United States. The autonomy plan would legalize Morocco's control over the disputed territory, a victory for Moroccan nationalism and state power. It would open up the territory to further exploitation of resources without legal constraints and would enable the U.S. to expand its new military and development initiatives into the region. These initiatives indicate that it is no longer enough for the U.S. to rely on proxy states to secure this region,

¹⁹⁹ The drone is a powerful symbol of the United State's exercise of modern imperial power, as well as the possessive and destructive capacity of the geopolitical gaze. It is likely that drone technology will be used in the next 10 years, either by Morocco or the United States directly, to secure and police the Western Sahara territory. Currently, a large majority of the mostly clandestine drone attacks take place in Waziristan, a 'Federally Administered Tribal Area.' The Western Sahara territory bears interesting parallels to this region of Pakistan in the imaginary geographies of policymakers. Like Waziristan, the Western Sahara is a non-self-governing, federally (or colonially) administered territory inhabited by traditionally nomadic tribes. Both regions are subjected to a statist disavowal of indigenous rights to self-determination and political legitimacy. Those characteristics contribute to the rationalization of drone attacks in Waziristan, which could conceivably translate to the Western Sahara case. The geopolitical gaze produces the rhetoric of drones as 'surgical,' 'precise,' and 'targeted,' terms that erase and disguise the violence of drone attacks. The United States, via AFRICOM, is currently building a drone base in Niger from which to fight the war on terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel region (see: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/drone-base-in-niger-gives-us-a-strategic-foothold-in-west-africa/2013/03/21/700ee8d0-9170-11e2-9c4d-798c073d7ec8_story.html and see Nick Turse on the U.S. covert war budding in Africa: <http://www.thenation.com/article/179324/us-military-has-been-war-africa-sly-years>). Morocco has already begun to buy drones from Israel and France (see: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/africa/9356-morocco-buys-israeli-designed-weapons>).

but that direct U.S. military involvement is considered necessary to sustain hegemonic stability over this region in accordance with U.S. interests.

Why is there a need or desire to secure this territory? Several conventional foreign policy imperatives overlap to create this perception. In economic terms, the Western Sahara is a site of potential resource extraction, in military terms it is strategically located to serve the ongoing war against terrorism, and in political terms it expands the U.S. sphere of influence. Beyond these perceptions of interest, securitization is an imperative of the spatializing practices of the imperial state. As a modern imperial state, the discursive and material practices of the U.S. map space into territories to be controlled and secured, either directly and indirectly by imperial or neo-imperial practices. As we have seen however, the logics of the state are vulnerable and contestable. They can be challenged by practices of resistance within the territory, in the debates between policymakers, at the level of the Security Council, and by new representations and alternative modes of narration that intervene in prevailing discourses.

In the most recent congressional hearing on U.S. policy toward Morocco, which took place on April 9, 2014, we can see recurring themes as well as glimmers of resistance that suggest the possibility of challenging the hegemonic securitization of the region.²⁰⁰ The majority of congressional leaders in this hearing performed a pro-Morocco script. Led by Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a long-time friend of Morocco, the congressional speakers emphasized Morocco's status as a strong partner and U.S. ally. The language of U.S. responsibility, the references to interest and the drive to secure and securitize the region, as well as the acknowledgment that the new trade relationship was more far more beneficial to

²⁰⁰ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. *Hearing on U.S. Policy towards Morocco. One-hundred and thirteenth Congress. April 9, 2014.* <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-us-policy-towards-morocco>

the U.S. than to Morocco, revealed that the nature of the relationship was less than 'bilateral,' and carried undertones of paternalism and neo-imperialism. Policymakers emphasized the 'potential' for extremism, radicalism, fundamentalism and terrorism. They brought up concerns over vulnerability and porous borders, and identified the 'empty' and 'open' space as a vague danger to U.S. interests.

William Roebuck, the official representing the State Department, however, resisted Congressional attempts to quantify and characterize the threat posed by Polisario. When asked about concerns that the Western Sahara was becoming a breeding ground for terrorists, he asserted that, to his knowledge, there is no significant terrorist activity in the region and no firm links between the Polisario and AQIM. Yet, while he refused to embrace this terrorist characterization as state policy, he did not challenge the idea that the space of the Western Sahara was empty and needed to be secured. He noted, "Our general assessment of the WS is as follows: It is a large space, we don't think that it is good for a space that big to be an ungoverned space, that's why we support the UN being there." Ungoverned, or empty space, which is seen to defy modern norms of territoriality and sovereignty, is perceived as dangerous to the modern state and thus requires securitization and control, exerted either directly or indirectly.

In the face of Congressional pressure to embrace the Moroccan Autonomy Plan as the only possible solution to the conflict, Roebuck called it 'serious' and 'credible,' but only a *potential* approach, leaving room for other possibilities. So while these congressional leaders (many of whom are members of the Congressional Morocco Caucus) are firm in their support for Morocco's legitimization of its occupation through a negotiated autonomy agreement, the State Department (or at least this official) seems to have not yet foreclosed all other options. However, the U.S. continues to exert inordinate power over the region.

Indeed, Roebuck was clear on the fact that the State Department understands itself to have the power to decide the fate of this region, even if they do not choose to exert it.

Congressman Connolly asked Roebuck, “What is wrong with the US saying (in our humble opinion) that the Western Sahara would never be able to exist as a sovereign state viably?

Why can’t we make that decision?” Roebuck’s response was to say, “I suppose we could, but we haven’t.” He did not challenge the assumption that the United States does and should have the power to decide the fate of other peoples who are owed the right to self-

determination. He simply said that it has not, yet, been the U.S. policy to do so in this case.

For the Sahrawi people, for international principles of law and human rights, for democracy, and for political subjects, there is a lot ‘wrong’ with that imperial assumption of power.

Absent from the entire hearing was an acknowledgement of the right to choose Sahrawi independence. The possibility that a referendum for self-determination that would include the possibility for independence would take place seems to be entirely off the table.

Also absent from the hearing was a discussion of the possibility of giving the MINURSO peacekeeping mission the power to monitor human rights when its mandate is renewed at the end of April 2014, a long contested demand of Sahrawis in the occupied territory and international human rights organizations.²⁰¹ Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen was the only one to

mention the ongoing issue of human rights violations. In the context of praising Morocco’s weak democratic reforms, she simply noted, “when it comes to human rights, certainly more can be done.” Of course, this is far from condemning the arbitrary arrests, brutal repression

²⁰¹ The vote to renew the MINURSO mandate was supposed to take place April 23rd, but was postponed until next week to give the countries time to review the draft mandate proposed by the United States. In 2013 the U.S. included the long-demanded human rights monitoring mechanism in the draft, but withdrew it under pressure from Morocco and France. This year, the draft calls on both parties to respect human rights, but does not include a mandate to monitor violations. The annual renewal of the MINURSO mandate presents an opportunity to make this small improvement in daily life for the Sahrawi people, but has been repeatedly foreclosed. The U.S. bows to Moroccan pressure in order to maintain their beneficial relationship, seen in the reconciliatory joint statement issued by President Obama and King Mohammed IV in November 2013.

of nonviolent demonstrations, constant police surveillance, educational and economic discrimination, corrupt justice system, and lack of free speech that plague the occupied territory. More *can* be done, certainly. Though I am wary of promoting any further intervention of the United States in this region, the first steps would be to authorize human rights monitoring in the MINURSO mandate, and to use the leverage of the U.S. to pressure Morocco into complying with the referendum process. Instead of advocating these steps, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen's comment falls into an all-to-common pattern of paying rhetorical tribute to human rights discourse without any intention of follow-through.

The rhetoric of the last several decades, particularly the Carter and Clinton administrations, has sought to brand the United States as a democracy-loving, freedom-seeking, and human rights-protecting global superpower. The discursive commitment to these values and principles enabled the United States to represent itself as a hegemonic, yet benevolent global power. The discourses of rights and freedoms contribute to the U.S. concept of its self, while the discourse of security is deployed to delimit who is, and who is not, deserving of protection and rights. This process privileges the rights of those deemed 'Americans' over other peoples who seek rights, freedoms, and security. Seen through this geopolitical gaze, the needs and desires of a small, nomadic, Muslim, Arab population on the edge of the Sahara are consistently excluded and erased.

Overshadowed by the geopolitical power posturing and securitization of the region are people whose voices, political agency and identities are being silenced. The process of securitizing the Sahara excludes Sahrawis from the category of people deserving of protection, and instead made them potential enemies undeserving of the basic human right to collective self-determination. This effect of the discourse of policymakers obfuscated and devalued the histories, identities and narratives of the Sahrawi people. However, in recent

years, several civil society organizations have emerged in both the occupied territory and the refugee camps to give voice to these narratives. Large-scale, sustained, nonviolent protests occurred in 1999, 2005 and 2010, while small protests occur daily in the cities of the occupied territory. Access to the Internet has provided an outlet for Sahrawi voices through innumerable blogs, photos and Youtube videos that document Moroccan repression and human rights abuses. Strong civil society leaders have emerged in the territory, including Aminatou Haidar, a human rights activist and former political prisoner, whose 2009 hunger strike garnered international attention. Haidar's organization, Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) and the Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Abuses (ASVDH) are both active in organizing demonstrations and monitoring and reporting ongoing human rights abuses. ASVDH vice president, Elghalia Djimi, is building a community of politically active young women, many of whom have already been imprisoned for their human rights and pro-independence activism. The work of people like Aminatou and Elghalia, events like the Gdeim Izik encampment, and the constant protests in the streets of Western Saharan cities demonstrate the existence of a vibrant civil society of Sahrawis striving for political independence and validation after nearly a century and a half of successive colonizations.²⁰²

The consequences of ignoring these alternative narratives come home to define the American citizen-subject. Reading the discourses of policymakers as performative practices of the state is necessary in order to understand how we (all) are interpellated as subjects within these discourses. Washington's view of the Western Sahara is important not only because of the violence that the geopolitical gaze has allowed and encouraged against the Saharawi people, but also because of what this process of scripting the Western Sahara says

²⁰² Dann, Naomi. "Nonviolent Resistance in the Western Sahara." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*. Vol. 26 (March 2014): 46-53.

about statemakers and us as citizens of an imperial state. Our political identities and self-knowledges are subject to discourses of security and the performances of the state. Security discourses shape the way we receive and understand experiences, how we conceive of other places and peoples, and enable the state to exert ever more intrusive practices of power and securitization abroad and at home.

The discourses of security reach deep into domestic political life, producing a culture of fear that former National Security Adviser to President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has called a “self-inflicted wound.”²⁰³ For Brzezinski, the culture of fear undermines American democracy, America’s psyche and U.S. standing in the world. The culture of fear and the discourses of security help to produce and maintain a state of emergency, a mode of politics that gives the state nearly unlimited power. As Walter Benjamin writes, the state of emergency has become the norm, rather than an exception. As citizens of an imperial power governed by discourses of security, we are constantly subject to the sovereign power of a state operating under the logics of exclusion and exception. We participate in and reproduce the discourses of exclusion and exception regularly, helping to perform state power that we too are subject to and policed by. These discourses trap us within violent, exclusive and othering practices of representation and violent cartographies through which we categorize, interpellate and fix the identities of other places and peoples.

Michael Shapiro describes geographic processes of mapping otherness and danger as violent cartographies that produce ‘architectures of enmity.’ He posits that “Geography is inextricably linked to the architecture of enmity” because it is centrally implicated “in how territorially elaborated collectivities locate themselves in the world and thus how they

²⁰³ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. "Terrorized by 'war on Terror': How a Three-Word Mantra has Undermined America." *The Washington Post* 25, (2007).
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/03/23/AR2007032301613.html>

practice the meanings of the Self and Other that provide the conditions of possibility for regarding others as threats or antagonists.”²⁰⁴ Not only policymakers, but the people themselves, American citizens in this case, are shaped by geographic imaginations of security, power and danger that map otherness as threatening. As Derek Gregory notes, “these imaginative geographies lodge many more of us in the same architectures of enmity. It is important not to allow the spectacular violence of September 11, or the wars in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, to blind us to the *banality* of the colonial present and to our complicity in its horrors.”²⁰⁵ The conflict over the Western Sahara is not spectacular, for the most part it is invisible to most Americans. This invisibility and erasability renders its colonial present and the struggles of the people affected all the more banal. As citizen-subjects of an imperial power, we are complicit in this colonial present, and have power to change its practices and realities.

The moments of contestation and resistance to imperial/geopolitical practices of representation revealed in this project are meant to demonstrate the incoherence and the vulnerability of the state. The practices and discourses that constitute the state must be constantly reiterated and performed to sustain its power. The foreclosures of alternative representations and ways of seeing the Western Sahara were not permanent, but had to be sustained by securitizing discourses. Gregory posits that the scripting of performances of power does not make outcomes fully determined, but instead provides a space for possible intervention and change.²⁰⁶ This project has focused on places where the state discourse on the Western Sahara was vulnerable to change, and where alternatives were foreclosed. These foreclosures, often justified by discourses of security lead me to wonder whether the concept

²⁰⁴ Shapiro, Michael. *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): xi.

²⁰⁵ Gregory, Derek. *The Colonial Present*. (Malden: MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 16.

²⁰⁶ Gregory, 19.

of security can be reimagined to allow for more just practices of foreign policy and resistance to the violent practices of the imperial state.

To escape repeating and reiterating violent practices, we must begin to think alternative theories of security. Security has long been understood as a zero-sum game, in which one group's insecurity produces the conditions of possibility for another's security. Only when we can begin to think and practice alternative securities that are not predicated on the insecurity of others, can we begin to move towards just resolutions of conflict and frameworks for cohabitation. This paradigm shift requires new practices of representation, and new modes of relating to otherness.

Judith Butler's work in *Precarious Lives* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2009) can help us to begin to work out possibilities for thinking differently. Her work *Frames of War*, is concerned with the political and moral implications of the frames or lenses through which we apprehend, or fail to apprehend, certain lives, characterized by their precarity, as grievable.²⁰⁷ Butler's idea that policy must understand the precariousness of life as a shared condition suggests a path for rethinking security by recognizing and embracing shared vulnerability. She writes, "the subject that I am is bound to is the subject I am not, that we each have the power to destroy and to be destroyed, and that we are bound to one another in this power and this precariousness. In this sense, we are all precarious lives."²⁰⁸ A radically new conceptualization of security on the basis of shared vulnerability provides jumping off point for continued investigation into new possibilities for performing security in the context of foreign policy and statemaking.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Butler differentiates between precariousness and precarity of life to emphasize the politically induced nature of precarity and the vulnerability to state power that it produces.

²⁰⁸ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is life grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009): 43.

²⁰⁹ What might anti-imperial or anti-national security look like? An avenue to explore further.

Looking forward, there are many routes for further investigation into the concepts and relationships explored in this thesis project.²¹⁰ In order to theorize new modes of performing security with the goal of practicing a more just foreign policy, there are two directions that need further development. First, types of security and types of threats need to be differentiated, and their specific practices examined. How is imperial security different from national security? Have the practices of security moved from spatial containment to spatial administration?²¹¹ What does that look like, either in spaces like the Western Sahara or in inner-city neighborhoods? Can we imagine a security based on the idea of shared vulnerability? Security without violence? And second, more work is needed on the relationship between the principle of self-determination and territorial sovereignty. What kind of threat does self-determination pose to the territorial integrity of the modern state? What is the relationship between sovereignty and security? Can true self-determination be realized outside of the confines of the statist imaginary? What could multiple overlapping sovereignties look like? How could reconceptualizing sovereignty lead to cohabitation and conflict resolution? Asking and attempting to answer these questions can help to deconstruct violent cartographies of peoples and places, and to begin to imagine new ways of living that are more peaceful and more just.

²¹⁰ The process of researching, thinking and reading about the ideas and events explored in this thesis project has been extremely challenging and rewarding. The project evolved significantly, starting from a political interest in the Western Sahara conflict and turning towards U.S. foreign policy as a site where I, as an American citizen, felt a sense of responsibility and could conceive of possibilities for change. During the research process, I was attracted to a (new-to-me) body of thought that I struggled to articulate with respect to my case study. It often felt that one or the other (theory or research) was getting lost or left behind. My biggest struggles have been to narrow down thoughts, to string ideas together in a sequence that a reader can follow, and to write concisely.

²¹¹ As Katharyne Mitchell suggests in “Ungoverned Space: Global security and the geopolitics of broken windows.” *Political Geography* 01/2010; 29(5):289-297.

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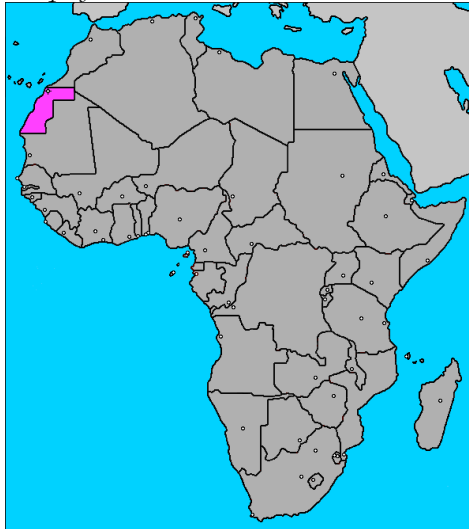
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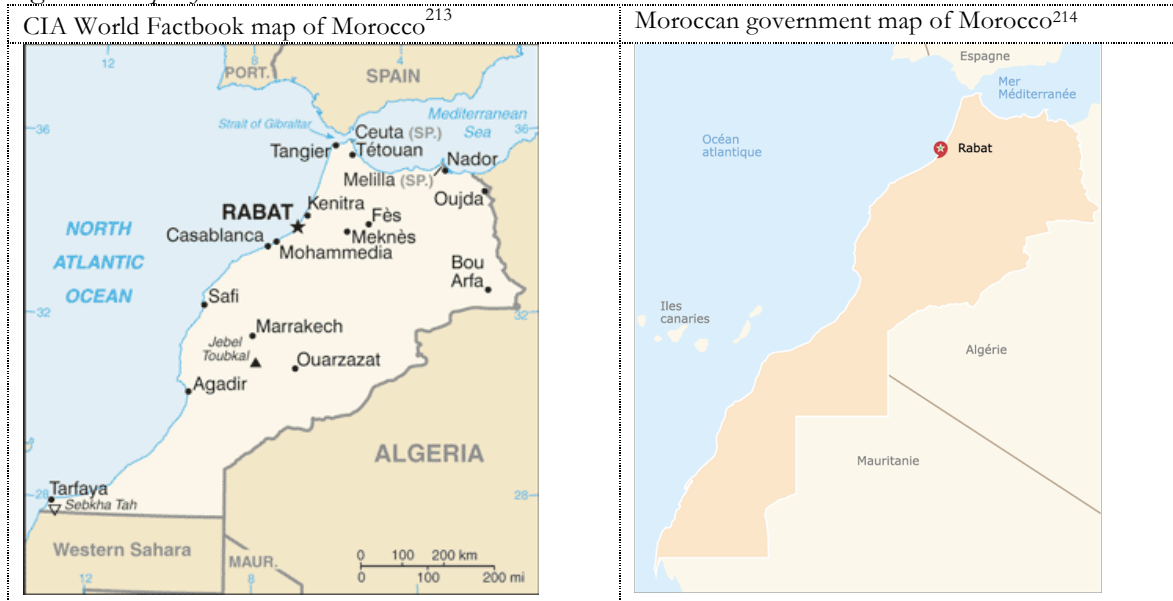
Appendix:
Maps of the Western Sahara region

Figure 1. CIA World Factbook map of the Western Sahara in the context of the African continent²¹²



Note: The CIA World Factbook includes the Western Sahara in their dropdown list of countries, but notes that its sovereignty is unresolved.

Figure 2. Maps of Morocco



Note: The Western Sahara is not delimited as a separate territory in the map produced by the Moroccan government. It is illegal to produce maps in Morocco that show delineate the separation between the “Southern Provinces” and Morocco ‘proper.’

²¹² Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. Map of Western Sahara. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wi.html>

²¹³ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. Map of Morocco. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>

²¹⁴ Royaume du Maroc. Carte du Maroc. <https://www.maroc.ma/fr/content/carte-du-maroc>.

Figure 3. United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) map²¹⁵



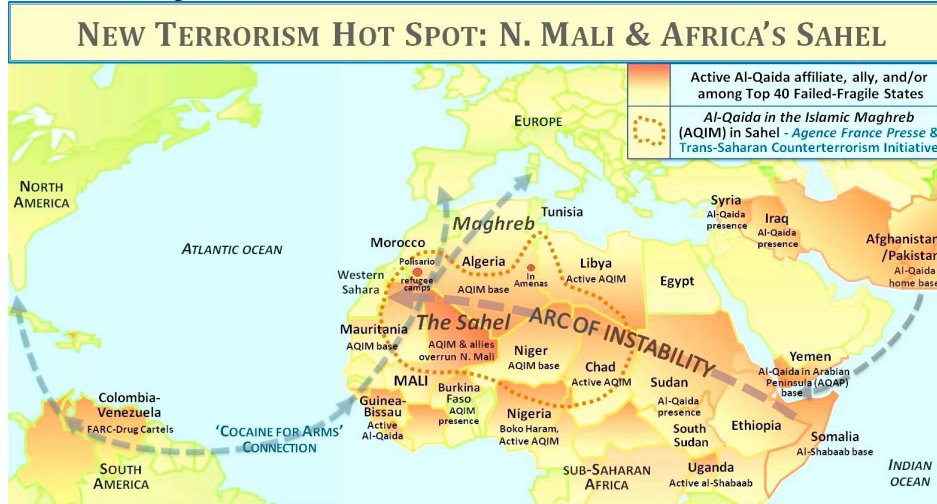
Map No. 3691 Rev. 73 UNITED NATIONS
April 2014 (Colour)

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Note: See the delineation of the berm (in red), and the location of the Tindouf refugee camps.

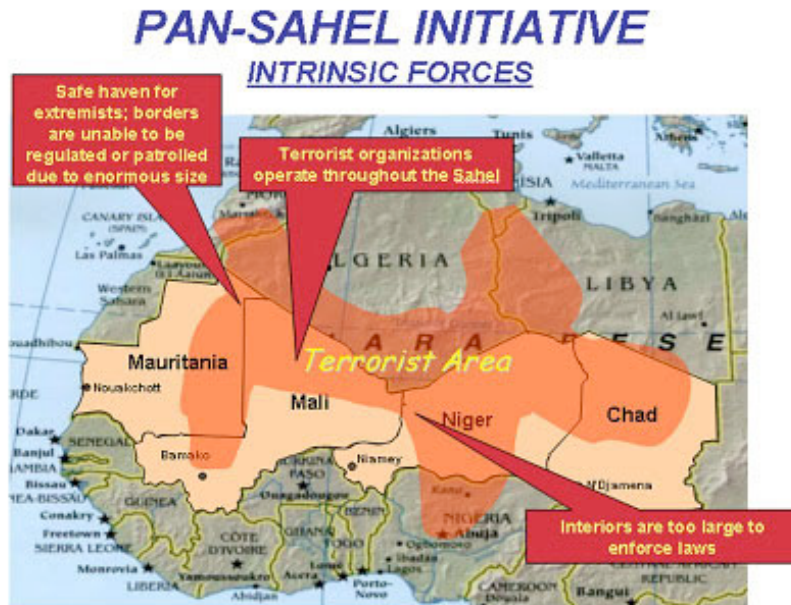
²¹⁵ United Nations. MINURSO. Map no. 3691 Rev. 73. Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section. April 2014. <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/minurso.pdf>

Figure 4. Counterterrorism in the Sahel
 New Terrorism Hot Spot: N. Mali & Africa's Sahel²¹⁶



Note: The arrow of the Arc of Instability points directly at the Western Sahara, and intersects an arrow denoting drug trade that reaches to the United States. This map was posted on the blog Morocco On The Move, a Moroccan government propaganda blog.

The Pan-Sahel Initiative Map²¹⁷

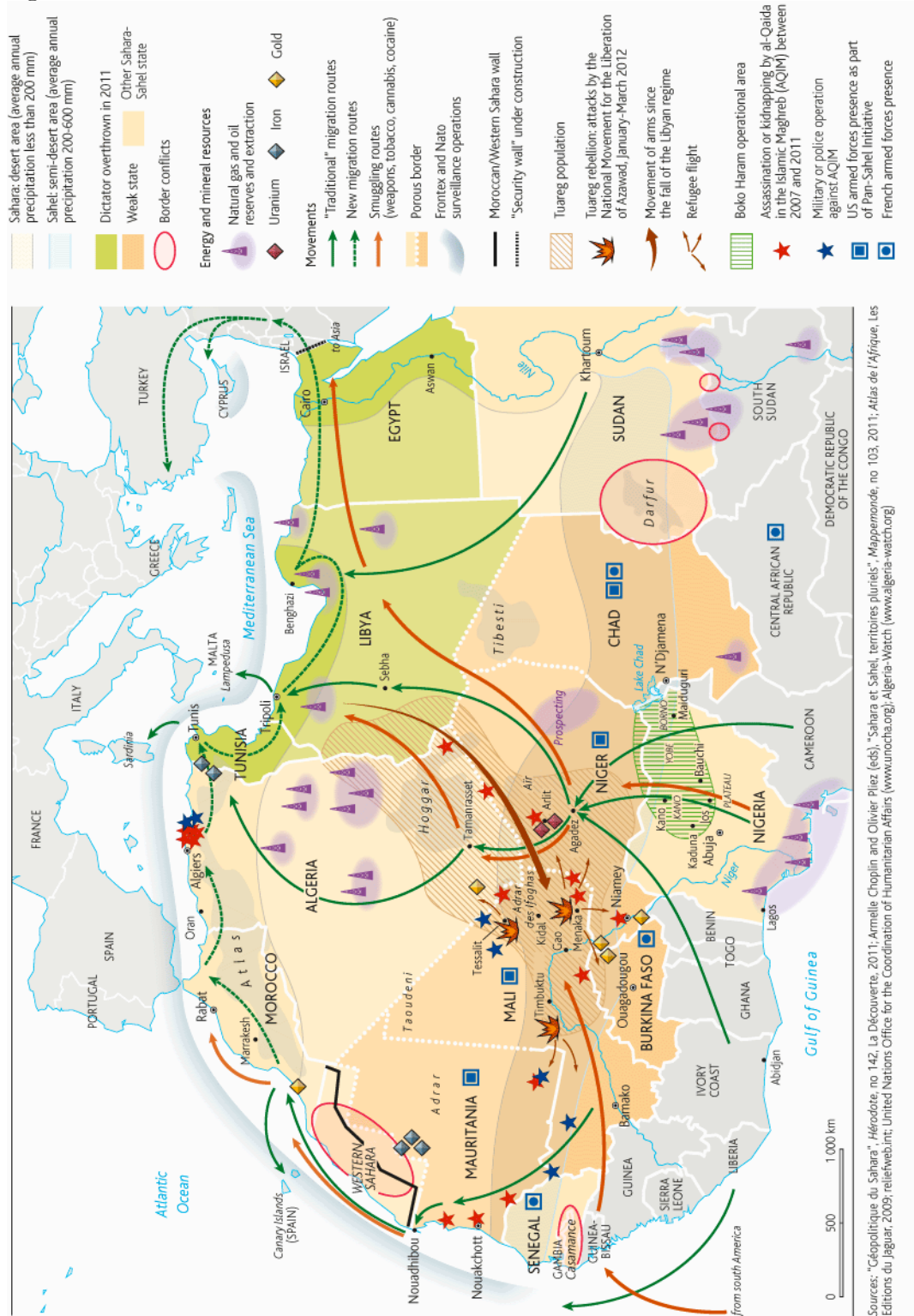


Note: Jacob Mundy points out that the region described as terrorist conveniently touches all the relevant countries in the region who have control over valuable resources. As legal sovereignty over the Western Sahara has not been determined, this area is not visibly included in the map, but is wrapped up in a securitized region.

²¹⁶ Alexander, Yonah. "Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2012: Global Reach and Implications." *International Center for Terrorism Studies, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington* (February, 2013).

²¹⁷ Mundy, Jacob. "How the 'War on Terror' Undermined Peace in Northwest Africa: The Western Sahara Conflict After 9/11." *Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin* no. 77 (2007): 1-19.

Figure 4. Sahara-Sahel: Movements and Routes²¹⁸



²¹⁸ Le Monde Diplomatique, *Sahara-Sahel: Movements And Routes*, image, 2012, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://mondediplo.com/maps/saharasahel>