

## Morocco Looking Increasingly to China in Western Sahara Dispute with Algeria

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

Arabic-language media analyses increasingly see northwest Africa, specifically Morocco, Algeria, and the Western Sahara, as an emerging arena of U.S.-China competition. The accompanying article from the Saudi-funded Independent Arabia, for instance, argues that Algiers has already become a virtual “battlefield” following two Twitter spats over the Uighur issue, involving the U.S. and Chinese diplomatic missions in Algeria. The article cites an Algerian academic who sees the United States as seeking to drag China into a “war of statements” regarding Uighur rights, though he does not believe this approach will gain much traction, at least not in Algeria.

Uighur rights are likely to be even less popular in Morocco, given local sensitivities regarding external criticism of its policies vis-à-vis the Western Sahara, which Morocco considers an integral part of its sovereign state. China has sought to remain neutral regarding Moroccan-Algerian disagreements over the status of the Western Sahara, notwithstanding its strong ties with Algeria, which supports the Western Saharan independence movement (The Polisario Front). China has in recent years deepened its diplomatic and economic relations with Morocco and appears interested in investing in the Western Sahara, according to the accompanying excerpt from the Abu Dhabi-based news outlet SkyNews Arabia. In early May, several news outlets, including the Moroccan news website Ayam 24, reported that Morocco had purchased Wing Loong II drones from China, potentially for use in the Western Sahara.

According to an article published last September in the Moroccan daily al-Estiklal, Moroccan diplomats are intent on convincing China to officially recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara.

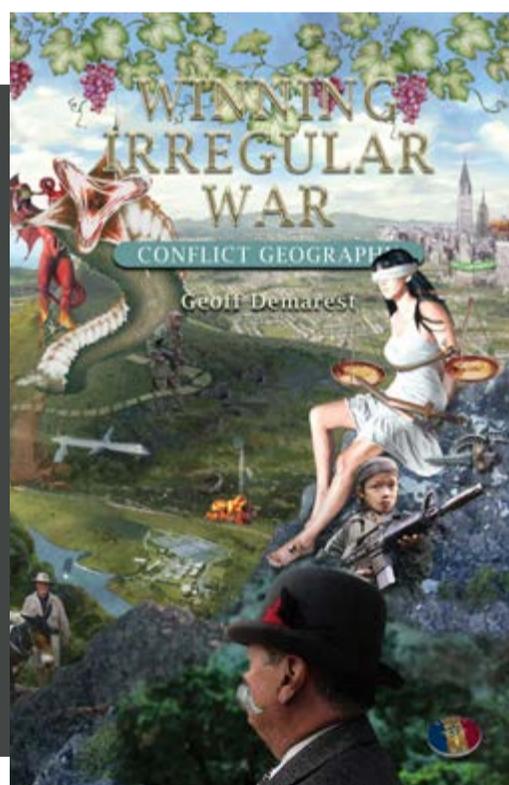


*No Man's Land - Western Sahara / Mauritania border in Guarguarate (2013).*

Source: jbdodane, Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jbdodane/8590893326>, Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>

A human rights activist from northern Morocco, writing in the pro-Hezbollah independent Lebanese news outlet al-Mayadeen, argues that Morocco should follow Algeria’s lead and forge a strategic alliance with China, which will “strengthen the possibility of resolving the Moroccan Sahara problem.” Per a researcher cited in the SkyNews Arabia article, both Morocco and China consider economic development as a key tool for resolving the dispute.

“...Chinese investments in Morocco have nearly doubled in recent years...”



**Geoff Demarest’s *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just ‘insurgency.’ In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: “I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious.”**

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195392/download>

## Continued: Morocco Looking Increasingly to China in Western Sahara Dispute with Algeria

**Source:**

“لماذا اتخذت واشنطن وبكين من الجزائر ساحة لمعركتهما؟

(Why have Washington and Beijing made Algeria their battlefield?), *Independent Arabia* (Saudi-funded daily), 31 March 2021.<https://tinyurl.com/y5juhsvr>

*Commenting on Washington and Beijing turning Algeria into their battlefield, the professor of political science and international relations, Mabrouk Kahe, told Independent Arabia that... the “war of statements” is evidence of the United States’ attempt to influence this axis by fabricating a human rights issue related to Uighur Muslims, despite the fact that Algeria’s position is clear and based on respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs. Kahi added that America wants to restrain China in Algeria by trying to influence and drag it into a game of declarations...*

**Source:**

“بعد شمال المغرب.. هل تتجه الاستثمارات الصينية نحو الصحراء؟

(After North Africa... Will Chinese investments move toward the Sahara?), *SkyNews Arabic* (Abu Dhabi-based news outlet), 28 February 2021.<https://tinyurl.com/xh56rv7s>

*Chinese investments in Morocco have nearly doubled in recent years... The city of Dakhla has opened China’s appetite for investments in the renewable energy sector, in addition to other potential. Due to its maritime location and its geographical nature, the city provides dense wind masses and major ingredients for the production of solar energy, which according to analysts qualifies it to be the preferred destination for wind and energy companies... On the Chinese investment trend towards the Moroccan Sahara, which may be the prelude to a hoped-for Chinese recognition of Moroccan sovereignty, Jad Raad, a researcher on Chinese affairs, told Sky News Arabia in a special statement that... “China believes that extending the hand of aid and development will inevitably lead to the elimination of disputes,” referring to the congruence of views between Morocco and China regarding development as an entry point to end fabricated conflicts.*

**Source:**

“الصينية Wing Loong المغرب يعزز قدراته العسكرية بالنسخة الثانية من طائرات

(Morocco strengthens its military power with the second-generation Chinese Wing Loong plane), *al-Ayam 24* (Moroccan news website),12 May 2021. <https://www.alayam24.com/articles-322244.html>

*Morocco signed a new deal with China to acquire Wing Loong 2 drones... This deal comes within the framework of Morocco’s endeavor to create a huge fleet of drones, and diversify the squadron of unmanned aircraft to counter the movements of the Polisario forces, which rely on hit and run tactics, without the complications of mobilizing on the field and taking risks...*

**Source:**

“المغرب يقترب من الصين ويعطي ظهره لأميركا.. ما علاقة ملف الصحراء؟

(Morocco is moving closer to China and turning its back on America... What does the Sahara file have to do with it?), *al-Estiklal* (independent Moroccan daily), 16 September 2020. <https://www.alestiklal.net/ar/view/5949/dep-news-1600004740>

*In an analytical article published in the Moroccan newspaper Al-Osboa, in the first week of September 2020, the author considered that “the royal approach to China is a safety valve for the present stage”... The “safety” that the analysis discussed relates to Morocco’s key issue, the Western Sahara, which is disputed with the Algerian-backed “Polisario Front” and for which Morocco seeks to mobilize international support to enhance its legitimacy over the territory. China is one of the most important countries whose position the Moroccan diplomatic machine is keen to shift from neutrality to alignment. Has Morocco really succeeded in getting China to take its side?*

**Source:**

“المغرب والجزائر نموذجاً.. أيّ اختيارات استراتيجية للدول النامية؟

(Morocco and Algeria as a model... What strategic choices for developing countries?), *al-Mayadeen* (pro-Hezbollah independent Lebanese news outlet), 6 April 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/ymy356uy>

*Algeria’s move toward China has recently infuriated France and the European Union...*

*the Moroccan state must benefit from these transformations and direct its strategic relations in a way that serves Morocco’s interest in development by agreeing to permanent partnerships with China, which will constitute the new center of global power, rather than betting on the losing side. This will strengthen the possibility of resolving the Moroccan Sahara problem, through arbitration by the shared Chinese partner, through joint economic projects in the general interest of the two peoples.*