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Pakistan's Position on Western Sahara conflict:Determinants and Significance

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Abstract:

This study examines Pakistan's abstention from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 2797 (2025) concerning the Western Sahara conflict. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on official documents, UN records, and foreign policy literature. The paper investigates the determinants and analytical significance of Islamabad's position. The findings show that Pakistan's abstention did not reflect hostility toward Morocco or support for rival actors. Rather, it represented a pragmatic balancing strategy rooted in strategic autonomy, diplomatic caution, and adherence to multilateral legitimacy. The study concludes that Pakistan's position is consistent with its broader multidirectional foreign policy and its tendency to avoid costly alignments in peripheral disputes.

Keywords: UN Security Council Resolution 2797; Moroccan–Pakistani relations; abstention; balancing strategy; Western Sahara conflict; Pakistan's foreign policy.

Introduction:

Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict has remained largely stable since its inception. This holds true despite major transformations at the level of recommendations issued by the United Nations General Assembly and resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council, culminating in Pakistan's abstention from voting in favor of the Moroccan Autonomy Proposal, which was endorsed by the most recent Security Council Resolution No. 2797 of 31 October 2025. Accordingly, this study deliberately refrains from dividing Pakistan's foreign policy toward this dispute into distinct chronological phases, as its core orientation has remained stable, notwithstanding shifting regional and international contexts. Conversely, examining the determinants and justifications of Pakistan's position remains essential in order to explain Islamabad's continued adherence to this approach to date, despite its good and steadily developing relations with the Kingdom of Morocco.

Within the hierarchy of Pakistan's foreign policy priorities, the Western Sahara conflict is perceived as geographically distant from its core strategic sphere and as having no direct impact on its national security. This perception has led Pakistan to adopt a general, cautious, and principled approach based on minimal commitment, without deep engagement or explicit alignment. Amid the structural transformations affecting the international system and the decline of unipolarity, Pakistan, as a middle power, has increasingly embraced a multidirectional balancing strategy. This approach grants it greater decision-making autonomy and spares it from alignment in conflicts that do not touch upon its vital interests. Within this framework, abstention emerges as a calculated diplomatic option aimed at preserving balanced relations with all concerned parties while minimizing the costs associated with rigid positioning.

This study aims to analyze the determinants of Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict, with particular focus on its abstention from voting on UN Security Council Resolution No. 2797, and to assess whether this stance reflects a shift in its foreign policy or a continuation of established strategic patterns. It hypothesizes that Pakistan's abstention does not indicate hostility toward Morocco or alignment with opposing actors, but rather constitutes a practical expression of multidirectional balancing aimed at preserving strategic autonomy and diplomatic flexibility.

To address these objectives, the research employs a multi-method qualitative interpretive approach, integrating historical analysis, to situate the evolution of Moroccan–Pakistani relations within their broader diplomatic context and to account for the background shaping Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict. Discourse analysis is applied to Pakistan's explanation of vote in the Security Council as delivered by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, in order to examine the framing, justifications, and policy signals embedded in the diplomatic statement. Comparative analysis is employed to identify patterns of convergence and divergence between Pakistan's position on Western Sahara and Morocco's positions on the secession of Bangladesh and the Kashmir dispute. This comparative lens is intended to clarify how both states articulate principles of territorial integrity, respond to secessionist claims, and position themselves within multilateral diplomatic settings.

The empirical material is drawn primarily from official United Nations documentation, including the text of Security Council Resolution 2797, voting records, meeting transcripts, and the explanation of vote delivered by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. These sources are supplemented by official communications from Pakistan's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and its Permanent Mission to the United Nations, alongside selected scholarly literature on Pakistani foreign policy and the Western Sahara conflict.

Nevertheless, the study is subject to several limitations. It does not address all dimensions of Moroccan–Pakistani bilateral relations in their entirety, but rather confines itself to highlighting the most important historical milestones that formed the general framework of relations between the two states. In addition, reliance on official and publicly available sources may not fully capture internal policy deliberations. Finally, the limited scholarly literature on Pakistan's position regarding the Western Sahara conflict constrains broader comparative depth. To date, there is a notable absence of academic literature specifically addressing the determinants of Pakistan's stance on this issue, with existing references largely confined to journalistic commentary and general analyses of Pakistan's foreign policy. In this context, the present study constitutes one of the first systematic academic attempts to examine this case.

Pakistan's Abstention on UNSC Resolution 2797: Context and Significance

Non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council constitutes one of the most prominent instruments employed by states in their efforts to enhance their presence within the United Nations system, particularly through effective participation in decision-making mechanisms, foremost among which is the voting process. Voting represents the primary institutional expression of states' positions on international security issues. In this regard, voting modalities within the Security Council (namely approval, rejection, absence, non-participation, and abstention), each carry distinct legal and political significance, and constitute a decisive factor in assessing the level of engagement of member states and their ability to influence the trajectory of adopted resolutions.

On this basis, Pakistan's non-permanent membership in the Security Council[1], falls within its broader diplomatic strategy aimed at consolidating its position as a middle power, seeking to expand its margin of influence within the structure of the international system. Specialized literature indicates that middle powers often leverage such membership to enhance their political influence, build networks of alliances, and manage delicate balances with major powers, benefiting from the centrality of voting as a tool for expressing positions and shaping alignments within multilateral institutions. In this context, Pakistan's non-permanent membership in the Security Council represented a pivotal moment in the formulation of its stance on Western Sahara conflict, as it became required to articulate a clear official position through its participation in the vote on the historic Security Council resolution that recognized Moroccan sovereignty over its southern provinces within the framework of autonomy.

Non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council is widely regarded as a key mechanism through which states seek to enhance their visibility and participation within the UN system, particularly in relation to decision-making processes. Voting constitutes the primary institutional expression of state positions on international security issues. Within the Security Council, voting outcomes—including approval, rejection, abstention, non-participation, and absence—carry distinct legal and political implications, and serve as important indicators of member states' levels of engagement and influence over resolution outcomes.

In this context, Pakistan's non-permanent membership in the Security Council reflects a broader diplomatic orientation aimed at consolidating its role as a middle power and expanding its

[1] United Nations Security Council, "Countries Elected Members of the Security Council", *United Nations Security Council*, accessed January 9, 2026, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/countries-elected-members.

influence within the international system. The literature on middle powers suggests that such states often leverage Security Council membership to strengthen diplomatic networks, navigate power asymmetries, and manage relations with major powers, with voting behavior serving as a key instrument of foreign policy signaling in multilateral settings.

Against this background, Pakistan's tenure in the Security Council represented a significant moment in the articulation of its position on the Western Sahara conflict. It required Islamabad to formulate an explicit diplomatic stance through its participation in the vote on Security Council Resolution 2797 (October 2025), which addressed the question of Western Sahara within the broader framework of proposed autonomy arrangements.

Pakistan's Abstention on UNSC Resolution 2797: Context and Significance

Non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council constitutes one of the most prominent key instruments through which states seek to enhance their presence within the United Nations system, particularly through effective participation in decision-making mechanisms, most notably voting. Voting represents the primary institutional expression of states' positions on international security issues. In this regard, voting modalities within the Security Council (namely approval, rejection, absence, non-participation, and abstention) each carry distinct legal and political significance, and constitute a decisive factor in assessing the level of engagement of member states and their ability to influence the trajectory of adopted resolutions.

On this basis, Pakistan's non-permanent membership in the Security Council forms part of its broader diplomatic strategy aimed at consolidating its position as a middle power, seeking to expand its margin of influence within the structure of the international system. Specialized

literature indicates that middle powers often use Security Council membership to enhance their political influence, build networks of alliances, and manage delicate balances with major powers, benefiting from the centrality of voting as a tool for expressing positions and shaping alignments within multilateral institutions.

In this context, Pakistan's tenure on the Council represented a pivotal moment in the formulation of its stance, as it became required to formulate an explicit official stance through its participation in the vote on the United Nations Security Council resolution that recognized Moroccan sovereignty over its southern provinces within the framework of autonomy.

Abstention from Voting: Between Procedural Norms and Political Function:

Scholarly analyses of Security Council practice, notably that of Sydney D. Bailey, emphasize that abstention from voting represents a fundamental procedural mechanism within the Council's decision-making system. It represents a means by which states express a reserved position toward proposed or adopted resolutions. The significance of this voting pattern lies in its dual nature: a procedural dimension that allows the decision-making process to continue, and a political dimension that enables states to articulate nuanced or ambiguous positions in contexts marked by political tension and competing legal interpretations. Consequently, analyzing abstention from voting allows for a more precise understanding of voting behavior within the Security Council, as a procedural mechanism used to reconcile the requirements of adopting resolutions and ensuring the continuity of the Council's work, on the one hand, with the need to express national political positions of member states, on the other[2].

[2] Sydney D. Bailey, "New Light on Abstentions in the UN Security Council", *International Affairs* 50, no. 4 (October 1974): 554–573, https://doi.org/10.2307/2615923

From a legal perspective, abstention from voting within the Security Council is a recognized procedural practice. It is not counted as a negative vote against a draft resolution and does not prevent its adoption unless an explicit objection is expressed by one of the permanent members. This is grounded in Article 27 of the Charter, which confines the blocking effect on substantive resolutions to the exercise of veto power. Accordingly, abstention is understood as a procedurally neutral position in terms of legal effect, reflecting a reluctance to record explicit approval or rejection, without affecting the binding force of the adopted resolution or its entry into force within the UN system. This practice also illustrates the flexibility of the Council's procedural framework, allowing it to maintain effectiveness and continuity in fulfilling its primary function of maintaining international peace and security, despite the absence of full consensus among its members[3].

In this connection, it is important to note that abstention in the Security Council may take different forms. Article 27(3) of the UN Charter establishes an obligatory abstention rule for members that are parties to a dispute under Chapter VI, the case examined in this study falls outside this legal framework. Pakistan's abstention does not stem from a formal legal obligation, but rather from a discretionary diplomatic choice, highlighting the political and strategic dimensions of abstention as an instrument for managing balance[4].

However, limiting the analysis to the legal-procedural dimension is insufficient to grasp the full meaning of abstention from voting. In diplomatic practice, this behavior acquires political dimensions that go beyond its immediate legal effects. It is often employed as a diplomatic tactic that allows states to avoid the costs of alignment in sensitive or conflictual issues, particularly

[3] James E. Todd, "An Analysis of Security Council Voting Behavior", *The Western Political Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (March 1969): 65–77. https://doi.org/10.2307/446147

[4] Akira Kato, "Revitalizing the Obligatory Abstention Rule in the UN Security Council: An Interpretation of the Proviso in Article 27(3) of the UN Charter", *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 30, no. 1 (2025): 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcsl/kraf002

when their interests are tied to complex relations with multiple parties, or when they fear that a "yes" or "no" vote might be interpreted as alignment with a specific state or international bloc. In this way, abstention becomes a tool for managing delicate balances, maintaining channels of communication with all parties, and avoiding damage to bilateral or regional relations. Abstention may also convey a political message to the sponsor and supporters of the resolution, indicating that the abstaining state has reservations or observations regarding the content of the resolution but does not wish to block it entirely. Diplomatic studies often describe this practice as constructive abstention, especially in cases where legal principles intersect with geopolitical calculations[5].

Statement of Abstention: Between Normative Commitment and Diplomatic Courtesy

The statement delivered by Pakistan's Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmed before the Security Council, during its 10030th meeting held on 31 October 2025, in the course of deliberations on Resolution No. 2797 concerning the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara, addressed a set of principled and legal considerations that constitute the established reference framework of Pakistan's position on the conflict.

In this context, the statement affirmed that the right to self-determination represents the cornerstone of Pakistan's position, describing it as a "sacred and protected right" and as one of the foundational principles of international law in the post–Second World War era[6]. It further emphasized that Pakistan has, for decades, relied on previous Security Council resolutions as the primary reference for any settlement. It also expressed reservations regarding what it described as substantive modifications in the wording of the new resolution compared to earlier ones, changes

[5] M. Eugenia Bartoloni, "Simple Abstention and Constructive Abstention in the Context of International Economic Sanctions: Two Too Similar Sides of the Same Coin?" *European Papers – European Forum* (2017), https://www.europeanpapers.eu/europeanforum/simple-abstention-and-constructive-abstention-in-context-of-international-economic-sanctions.

[6] United Nations Security Council, Provisional Verbatim Record of the 10030th Meeting, Statement by Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmed (Pakistan), October 31, 2025, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4020385.

that Pakistan viewed as undermining the balance of the text and departing from the Council's historical approach. It stressed that any solution to the dispute must be "just, lasting, and mutually acceptable", and must take place within the framework of "a comprehensive negotiating process involving all concerned parties", in line with the essence of the UN-sponsored political process. Accordingly, Pakistan's statement does not reflect support for the Moroccan autonomy proposal, nor does it contain an explicit rejection thereof[7].

In parallel, the Ambassador underscored the strength of Pakistan's historical and fraternal relations with the parties concerned by the dispute, particularly the Kingdom of Morocco, emphasizing the importance of resolving this issue at the earliest opportunity in a spirit of mutual trust and respect, in a manner that preserves bilateral relations and reflects Islamabad's diplomatic tradition of refraining from actions that could undermine its partners [8].

Beyond its substantive content, the linguistic formulation of the statement reveals a carefully calibrated use of diplomatic restraint within a UN environment that requires a delicate balance between clarity and ambiguity. The Pakistani Ambassador employed a legal-political language rich in connotations, allowing for the expression of a reserved position without sliding into explicit rejection or direct confrontation. This was achieved through a gradual progression in discourse, from reaffirming the established reference framework of previous Security Council resolutions, to drawing attention to what were considered substantive changes in the wording of the resolution, and finally to emphasizing the centrality of the right to self-determination as a governing principle of the political process. This diplomatic phrasing reflects an indirect objection to what Pakistan

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] United Nations Security Council, "10030th Meeting: Western Sahara", Statement by Asim Iftikhar Ahmad (Pakistan), Verbatim Record S/PV.10030, October 31, 2025, https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1nmlpq6eb.

perceives as an implicit privileging of the autonomy proposal within the resolution, while avoiding escalation and preserving diplomatic balance within the Security Council.

Determinants of Pakistan's Consistent Position amid Changing Contexts

Despite the transformations witnessed in the international environment, and the notable expansion of bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Morocco across political, economic, and military spheres of cooperation, Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict has remained marked by a high degree of consistency and continuity. This persistence warrants an examination of the structural determinants shaping Pakistan's foreign policy, which extend beyond the influence of short-term bilateral dynamics. In this regard, understanding Pakistan's position requires an analysis of a set of interrelated factors that shape Islamabad's policy choices within international forums, particularly the Security Council.

On this basis, the present study focuses on three main determinants that explain the stability and continuity of Pakistan's position. These include: the normative determinant linked to its commitment to the right of self-determination as a governing reference for its external behavior; the historical determinant connected to the specific nature of Moroccan–Pakistani relations, which are based on solidarity and political support without leading to automatic alignment; and the geopolitical determinant related to domestic secessionist movements and the Kashmir issue**,** which together constitute a central framework shaping Pakistan's perceptions of international legitimacy and the limits of its engagement in territorial disputes.

The Normative Determinant of Pakistan's Position: Anti-Colonialism and the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination

The right of peoples to self-determination constitutes one of the most firmly entrenched normative pillars of Pakistan's foreign policy. Since the 1970s, Pakistan has maintained a legal–political discourse that links the peaceful settlement of regional disputes through negotiation to respect for the obligations enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. This approach has been reflected in its regular participation in the deliberations of the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization).

Within this normative framework, Pakistan has approached the Western Sahara conflict as a decolonization case to be addressed through a UN-led process under Security Council resolutions, without recognizing the "Polisario Front" or the "Sahrawi Republic," and without aligning with Algeria's position. This stance manifests itself at two principal levels:

Annual Sponsorship of the Resolution "Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination" within the Third Committee

The institutional nature of Pakistan's commitment to the right of peoples to self-determination is manifested in its assumption of the role of the principal and recurrent sponsor of the draft resolution entitled *"Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination"*[9], which is discussed annually within the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly[10] prior to its adoption in plenary session. This resolution is considered one of the firmly established

[9] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, "Pakistan's Resolution on the Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination Adopted by Consensus at the United Nations General Assembly", Press Release No. 378/2025, Islamabad, December 19, 2025, accessed January 7, 2026.

[10] United Nations General Assembly, "Third Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)", United Nations General Assembly, accessed December 9, 2025, https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/.

normative resolutions that enjoys broad consensus, given its direct linkage to the foundational principles of contemporary international law and the decolonization process[11].

Official documents and statements issued by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that, since the mid-1980s, Islamabad has consistently submitted this draft resolution or participated in its sponsorship, based on a deeply rooted conviction that the right to self-determination constitutes a central normative pillar of the international system and a collective responsibility of the international community toward territories subject to occupation or foreign domination. This role has continued with little interruption over subsequent decades, as the General Assembly has adopted the resolution annually, either by consensus or by unanimity, including during the 2023[12], 2024[13], and 2025[14] sessions.

From this leadership position, which has strengthened Islamabad's image as a supporter of self-determination as a universal legal principle not subject to selectivity, Pakistan's abstention on the Security Council resolution concerning Western Sahara appears consistent with this role rather than a deviation from it. In this context, abstention should not be interpreted as an ambiguous position or a retreat from the UN process, but rather as an expression of normative caution intended to avoid granting implicit legitimacy to formulations that could be understood as limiting the essence of self-determination.

[11] United Nations General Assembly, "Importance of the Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination and of the Speedy Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for the Effective Guarantee and Observance of Human Rights", Resolution 40/25, UN Doc. A/RES/40/25, November 29, 1985, accessed January 7, 2026, https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1985/en/19174.

[12] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, "Pakistan Leads Adoption of UN Resolution on Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination", Press Release, November 21, 2023.

[13] Arab News, "UN Adopts Pakistan-Sponsored Resolution on Self-Determination", December 2024, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2583586/pakistan.

[14] Radio Pakistan, "UNGA Adopts Pakistan's Resolution Reaffirming People's Right to Self-Determination", November 19, 2025, https://www.radio.gov.pk/19-11-2025/unga-adopts-pakistans-resolution-reaffirming-peoples-right-to-self-determination.

Accordingly, the combination of Pakistan's annual sponsorship of this normative resolution and its calibrated abstention in the Security Council reveals internal consistency in its diplomatic behavior, grounded in defending the United Nations normative framework while preserving room for political maneuverability across its institutions. This supports the argument that abstention was not a situational response, but a logical extension of a long-standing institutional role in safeguarding one of the foundational principles of the contemporary international system.

Defending the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination within the Fourth Committee

At the level of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, which is dedicated to political issues and decolonization, Pakistan's interventions show consistent support for the right of peoples to self-determination as the cornerstone of the UN approach to issues remaining on the decolonization agenda. During the seventy-ninth session in 2024, Ambassador Munir Akram stated that decolonization "remains an unfinished task," and called for the treatment of non-self-governing territories in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions[15]. In 2025, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad reiterated the same position, emphasizing that the implementation of the right to self-determination remains a prerequisite for resolving protracted conflicts such as Palestine and Kashmir/Jammu, and stressing the need to adhere to the legal framework established by Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960[16].This sustained presence in the Fourth Committee demonstrates Pakistan's use of the UN forum most directly concerned with issues of

[15] Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, "Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram at the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) of the UN General Assembly, 79th Session", October 14, 2024, New York, https://pakun.org/official-statements/10142024-01.

[16] Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, "Statement by Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad at the Fourth Committee on Decolonization, 80th Session of the UN General Assembly", New York, October 6, 2025, https://pakun.org/official-statements/10062025-02.

colonialism and occupation to reaffirm its commitment to the normative and legal principles that place self-determination at the heart of regional conflict resolution.

Notably, however, Pakistan's interventions and official statements do not explicitly refer to the Western Sahara among territories requiring decolonization, despite its formal inclusion on the UN list of non-self-governing territories. From a political and diplomatic perspective, this omission may suggest that Pakistan does not treat Morocco as an "occupying power" in the conventional legal sense, but rather as a party to a political and legal dispute. At the same time, it reflects Pakistan's attention to its bilateral relations with Morocco and its awareness of the specific political and legal dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict, distinguishing it from other territories under direct colonial rule.

It is important to stress that Pakistan's defense of the right to self-determination within the Fourth Committee should not be understood as adopting positions directed against the Kingdom of Morocco. Rather, it falls within the legal and procedural framework through which the United Nations addresses this conflict. In this institutional context, Pakistan's interventions in the Fourth Committee, centered on respect for UN resolutions and the application of the right to self-determination, reflect a general commitment to the normative principles governing the Committee's work and do not entail a judgment portraying Morocco as a "colonial" or "occupying" power. Consequently, Pakistan's adherence to this reference framework stems from the nature of the Fourth Committee's mandate and the historical linkage of the Western Sahara conflict to it, rather than from a fixed or explicit position hostile to the Kingdom of Morocco.

The Political Determinant of Pakistan's Position: Between Internal Separatist Threats and the Kashmir Issue

Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict is grounded in a central political–normative determinant that transcends situational considerations and diplomatic courtesies. This determinant reflects Islamabad's priority of preserving the unity of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and confronting separatist movements. Its roots can be traced to the threat posed by internal separatist movements within Pakistan, most notably the Balochistan nationalist movement, whose activities constitute a genuine challenge to national security and state cohesion. This concern is reinforced by historical experience with the Kashmir issue, which occupies a pivotal place in its conception of the right to self-determination and its political, legal, and humanitarian dimensions.

Internal Separatist Concerns and Their Impact on Pakistan's Position

Pakistan's political system is based on a federal structure regulated by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which recognizes the division of powers between the federal government and the provinces within the framework of a unified and sovereign state[17]. This arrangement seeks to accommodate ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity while preserving state unity and avoiding demands for internal self-determination**.** This constitutional choice cannot be understood in isolation from the structural challenges posed by separatist movements, which have represented, since the founding of the state in 1947, a major source of political and security pressure, particularly in peripheral regions.

[17] National Assembly of Pakistan, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973)*, accessed January 12, 2026, https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf.

In this context, the province of Balochistan stands out as the most volatile area, given its vast territory, natural resources, and historically weak integration into the central state structure, as well as the complexity of its security environment[18]. In Balochistan, separatist insurgency intersects with sectarian tensions, armed organizations, and transboundary regional dynamics. External factors have further complicated this landscape, notably the involvement of international and regional powers such as the United States, China, India, and Iran, whose economic interests and geopolitical considerations are linked to the region**,** giving the conflict dimensions that transcend the purely domestic framework. For this reason, the Baloch National Movement (BNM) is classified in Pakistani and international security literature as an armed separatist movement seeking to undermine national sovereignty from within[19].

In light of the threat posed by armed separatist movements to the unity of the Pakistani state, Islamabad has developed a preventive approach toward secessionist issues, based on rejecting any formulas that could create political or legal precedents open to internationalization. Pakistan's handling of separatist organizations therefore goes beyond purely internal security concerns and reflects a broader conception of safeguarding national sovereignty and preventing the reproduction of separatist models that might later acquire international legitimacy[20].

Accordingly, Pakistan does not adopt autonomy as an acceptable political solution for addressing separatist movements within its peripheral regions. Instead, it relies on an approach centered on administrative decentralization within the framework of a unified state, combined with

[18] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *Pakistan: Security Situation, Country of Origin Information Report* (Valletta: European Asylum Support Office, October 2021), 92, https://www.euaa.europa.eu/publications/coi-report-pakistan-security-situation.

[19] Faisal Ali Raja, "Elements of Violence in Jeay Sindh Tehreek (JST) and Balochistan National Movement (BNM): A Comparative Analysis", *Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research* 1, no. 1 (2017): 69–72.

[20] Vishnu Prakash Mang, "Fragmented Identities: Understanding Separatist Movements in Pakistan", *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (*IJHSSM) 5, no. 3 (May–June 2025): 102–109, https://www.ijhssm.org.

security and development tools. This is clearly reflected in the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment[21], which expanded provincial powers in administrative and financial domains without affecting the sovereign structure of the state or recognizing a right to internal self-determination. This reflects a deeply rooted awareness among political decision-makers in Islamabad that any recognition of autonomy arrangements could encourage similar demands in a state characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity.

Based on these objective factors, Pakistan has not expressed an explicit rejection of the Moroccan autonomy proposal in its specific formulation. However, it has expressed reservations toward any UN resolution that might present it as the most likely option or the sole reference framework for a political solution. This position is consistent with Pakistan's emphasis on the "priority of previous Security Council resolutions", the "right to self-determination", and a "mutually acceptable solution", as well as its concern to avoid establishing a legal precedent that could later be invoked by Pakistani separatist movements. Consequently, Pakistan's abstention from voting does not reflect a situational stance toward the Moroccan case, but rather embodies an extension of a broader vision that remains cautious about transforming autonomy into a general international reference for resolving territorial disputes. This caution seeks to avoid elevating autonomy into a recognized settlement model or granting it broader normative weight in international law and practice**.**

The Kashmir Issue as a Geo-Strategic Determinant in Shaping Pakistan's Position

[21] Government of Pakistan, *The Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act*, 2010, Act No. X of 2010, Gazette of Pakistan, Extraordinary, Part I (Islamabad: Senate Secretariat, April 20, 2010), https://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1302138356_934.pdf.

The Kashmir issue is one of the oldest and most complex regional disputes in the world, with roots dating back to 1947 following Britain's withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent and the emergence of a dispute over the fate of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir. The signing of the Instrument of Accession to India led to the outbreak of the first war between India and Pakistan, followed by Security Council resolutions (1948–1949) calling for a ceasefire and the organization of a plebiscite to determine the region's future. That plebiscite was never implemented because of disagreements between the parties over its conditions**.** This resulted in the consolidation of the Line of Control and the de facto division of the region between India and Pakistan, giving rise to a multidimensional issue encompassing political, sovereign, humanitarian, and strategic dimensions. The dispute became even more sensitive after both states became nuclear powers in 1998, strengthening its connection to regional security in South Asia.

Pakistan views Kashmir as a self-determination issue concerning a population of approximately 13 million people and as an integral part of the "Muslim homeland" project upon which the state was founded. India, by contrast, considers it an inseparable part of its federal unity and a guarantor of federal cohesion and religious pluralism. With India's revocation of Article 370 in 2019, the dispute acquired a new dimension in terms of restructuring autonomy arrangements and intensifying the security presence. This brought Kashmir back to the international forefront as a conflict that remains unresolved both legally and politically, and whose settlement continues to depend on regional political will and complex international balances[22].

Centrality of Kashmir Issue in Pakistan's Diplomatic Doctrine

[22] Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1p6hp3k.

For Pakistan, the Kashmir issue constitutes an existential cause embedded at the core of its national, religious, and strategic identity, and occupies a non-negotiable position in its diplomatic discourse. Successive Pakistani governments have reinforced this principle at the level of international and regional organizations and within bilateral relations, considering any retreat from defending the rights of Kashmiris as something that would be interpreted domestically and internationally as undermining the state's legitimacy and diplomatic credibility. From this perspective, Kashmir has become a normative compass guiding Pakistan's positions on similar issues, particularly those involving territorial disputes or secessionist claims[23]. In this light, Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict cannot be understood as being based solely on adherence to the normative framework of the right to self-determination; rather, it is also grounded in an implicit analogy with the Kashmir case**.**

Pakistan tends to support initiatives that are consistent with its discourse on self-determination in order to avoid any contradiction that India could exploit against it in international forums, or that could provoke domestic public opinion. Consequently, any clear alignment with Morocco in the Western Sahara conflict could be perceived as a disruption of Pakistan's diplomatic consistency. This explains Islamabad's careful use of cautious diplomatic language in its statements, emphasizing respect for UN resolutions and support for peaceful solutions, without adopting an explicit position against Morocco or against other parties concerned by the conflict, particularly Algeria and the Polisario.

Despite the centrality of Kashmir in Islamabad's foreign policy, Pakistani diplomacy tends to adopt a pragmatic approach in managing its political and diplomatic positions. Pakistan recognizes

[23] Hamid Nasir Chattha, *The Kashmir Issue at a Glance* (Islamabad: Special Committee of the Parliament on Kashmir, National Assembly of Pakistan, [year]), accessed December 10, 2025, https://na.gov.pk/en/content.php?id=89.

Morocco's importance in the Islamic world, particularly in terms of its standing within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the strength of its relations with the Gulf states[24].

Morocco's Position on the Kashmir question: Neutrality and Balance as a Diplomatic Choice

Morocco's position on the Kashmir dispute is based on well-established principles in its foreign policy, centered on respect for national sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and support for peaceful solutions to regional disputes through direct dialogue between the concerned parties[25]. It was clearly reflected during the official visit of Moroccan Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi to Pakistan in 2001, the first visit by a Moroccan head of government, during which he emphasized, in his talks with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, the need to "resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully through bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan", without aligning with any party or adopting a confrontational approach, despite the issue's humanitarian and political significance for Pakistan[26]. This diplomatic approach illustrates Morocco's commitment to maintaining balanced relations with both New Delhi and Islamabad, in line with its vision of regional peace and its principled approach to international conflict resolution. It also demonstrates the consistency of Moroccan foreign policy, as Morocco has not sought to link the Kashmir debate to the Western Sahara conflict. Instead, it has maintained a clear separation

[24] Tooba Ahmad et al., "Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards the Islamic World: An Analysis", *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1755–1763, https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/16429.
[25] Adnan Debbarh, "La doctrine de la politique étrangère du Maroc: fondements et pertinence", *Le 360*, August 2, 2024, https://fr.le360.ma/politique/la-doctrine-de-politique-etrangere-du-maroc-fondements-et-pertinence_DTKFJV4S3BHPRNTRWQUZTP2KUQ/.
[26] Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), "Moroccan PM, Musharraf Discuss Kashmir", *KUNA*, April 17, 2001, https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1157861.

between bilateral relations and positions on international conflicts, reflecting a professional and principle-based diplomacy rather than transactional or exchange-based diplomacy "quid pro quo."

Beyond these principled foundations, Morocco's approach has been further shaped by the expansion of its bilateral relations with India, which have witnessed significant growth over the past decade, particularly in the fields of security, defense, and economic cooperation. In light of this rapprochement, Morocco avoids adopting positions that could be interpreted as direct support for Pakistan, instead favoring a discourse centered on respect for state unity and sovereignty, principles that constitute a core foundation of Moroccan foreign policy.

Moroccan academic literature on relations with India, including studies by the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES), indicates that Rabat views India as an emerging economic and political partner and seeks to neutralize the Kashmir issue within the trajectory of bilateral cooperation, while reaffirming its support for peaceful, UN-led processes without direct involvement in the dispute**.**

Consequently, Morocco's position may be characterized as a balanced, dual-dimensional stance: neutrality within international organizations and diplomatic caution in bilateral relations, consistent with Rabat's strategic priorities while preserving its traditional relations with both Pakistan and India[27].

Kashmir and Western Sahara conflicts: Pakistan's Position in Comparative Perspective

[27] Abdel Latif Al-Rayssouni, *Morocco's Position in Asian Interactions: A Reading of Moroccan–Indian Relations* (Casablanca: Moroccan Institute for International Studies, 2019).

Kashmir issue and Western Sahara are among the most prominent regional conflicts inherited from the post-colonial era, sharing certain structural characteristics that have rendered them permanent subjects of UN deliberation. In Kashmir, Britain's withdrawal in 1947 produced a contested situation between India and Pakistan. In the case of the Western Sahara, Spain's withdrawal in 1975 led to the reintegration of the southern provinces into the Moroccan state and the completion of its territorial sovereignty. However, that same withdrawal also led to the proclamation of the "Sahrawi Republic" as a separate "state" outside Moroccan sovereignty, advanced by the Polisario Front and supported by Algeria at multiple levels, thereby contributing to the internationalization of the dispute and to its incorporation into a UN-sponsored settlement process.

From another perspective, an objective comparison between Kashmir issue and Western Sahara conflict provides an effective analytical entry point for understanding the nature of the reciprocal interaction between Moroccan and Pakistani positions within the corridors of the United Nations and regional organizations. On the one hand, this comparison reveals similarities in the historical roots of both disputes within post-colonial contexts, leading each country to view its national cause through a sovereignty-centered lens shaped by the constraints of colonial partition and its long-term political repercussions.

On the other hand, this similarity helps explain the convergence of Moroccan and Pakistani approaches around prioritizing peaceful solutions and respect for the UN framework, without resulting in explicit supportive positions or mutual alignment. Just as Morocco adopts a balanced and cautious approach toward the Kashmir issue, Pakistan maintains a similar stance on Western Sahara, taking into account considerations of international legitimacy and the consistency of its

principled discourse, alongside a mutual understanding of the political and geopolitical constraints shaping each party's policy decisions.

In this respect, the reciprocal interaction between Rabat and Islamabad reflects a shared awareness of the structural constraints governing the behavior of middle powers within the international system, where neutrality and balance are viewed as deliberate diplomatic strategies rather than passive positions. Pragmatism is not limited to Pakistan; Morocco also pursues a balanced policy, maintaining relations with both Pakistan and India while preserving its commitments to international legitimacy and peaceful conflict resolution. Thus, convergence between Moroccan and Pakistani positions is not based on alignment, but on a shared logic of managing regional and international balances in a changing geopolitical context, allowing both countries to preserve flexibility in their foreign policy behavior.

Distinctive Historical Relations between Morocco and Pakistan: A Legacy of Continuity

Moroccan–Pakistani relations in the early 1950s represented one of the most prominent expressions of political solidarity among Asian–African liberation movements. These relations emerged in an international context characterized by the establishment of the United Nations as a new arena for decolonization and the growing role of newly independent Asian states, such as India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, to assume leadership roles in supporting national liberation movements and defending the right of colonized peoples to self-determination.

Within this framework, the Moroccan national movement became increasingly aware of the importance of internationalizing the Moroccan question at the United Nations level, particularly after the French Protectorate authorities intensified restrictions on the mobility of Istiqlal Party leaders and prevented them from traveling abroad.

The Granting of a Diplomatic Passport to *Ahmed Balafrej*: A manifestation of political solidarity

During a critical phase in the political history of the Kingdom of Morocco in the 1950s, the representative of the Moroccan national movement, Ahmed Balafrej, faced a precarious legal situation due to the imminent expiration of his passport and the refusal of the French Protectorate authorities to renew it. In order to overcome these obstacles, Pakistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan[28], appointed him as an honorary adviser on Moroccan affairs to Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

This decision triggered protests from the French authorities, who considered it a violation of Pakistani nationality law, which stipulated a five-year residency requirement for the acquisition of citizenship. Since Balafrej had never resided in Pakistan, Zafarullah Khan invoked a legal provision allowing exemption from the residency requirement "for special reasons," justifying the exception on the grounds of diplomatic necessity and Balafrej's expertise and in-depth knowledge of Moroccan affairs in the context of defending Morocco's independence at the United Nations[29].

In the same vein, the official website of Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that in 1952, when Morocco was under French rule and struggling for independence, "Sultan

[28] Muhammad Zafarullah Khan (1893–1985) was a Pakistani diplomat and jurist and an early key figure in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy after independence. He served as Pakistan's first Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1947 to 1954 and represented the country in several international forums, including the United Nations. He later held senior positions within the UN system, including President of the United Nations General Assembly (1962–1963) and President of the International Court of Justice (1970–1973). His work is frequently associated with advocacy for decolonization and support for the principles of the United Nations Charter.

[29] Masood Ahmed Riaz, Gulab Khan, and Qamar-ud-Din, "Muhammad Zafrulla Khan: The Man Who Struggled for Independence of Muslim Arab World", *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (April–June 2022): 606–616, https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2022(3-II)55.

Mohammed V sent Ahmed Balafrej[30] to represent Morocco at a session of the United Nations Security Council in support of his country's independence. However, French delegates prevented him from delivering his speech, claiming that Morocco was a French colony. At that point, and given Pakistan's strong support for the right of peoples to self-determination, the Pakistani delegation, headed by Sir Zafarullah Khan, opened the Pakistani embassy at night and issued a Pakistani passport to Mr. Balafrej (…)"[31].

For his part, Mehdi Bannouna[32] clarified the circumstances surrounding this exceptional event, noting that in 1952 the French Protectorate authorities annulled the validity of Ahmed Balafrej's passport, placing him at risk of losing his legal residency status in the United States while he was in New York attending Security Council sessions. In response, Bannouna suggested that Balafrej seek assistance from Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, who was known for his sympathy toward the Moroccan cause. Although Balafrej initially hesitated, fearing rejection or a sense of indebtedness, Bannouna proceeded directly to Pakistan's

[30] Ahmed Balafrej (1908–1990) was a prominent Moroccan politician and diplomat from the city of Rabat, he was one of the leaders of the national movement and a contributor to the founding of the Istiqlal Party. He was among the most notable signatories of the 1944 Independence Manifesto. He played an important diplomatic role in promoting the Moroccan cause internationally. After independence, he served as the first Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1956, and later as Prime Minister in 1960. Balafrej is considered one of the central figures in building the modern Moroccan state and laying the foundations of its diplomacy.
For his biography, see: Abu Bakr al-Qadiri, *Al-Hajj Ahmed Balafrej: The Seasoned Diplomat, Features of His Life and Samples of His Work*, in *Men I Have Known*, vol. 5 (Casablanca: Al-Najah Al-Jadida Press, 1996):389.

[31] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Rabat — Pakistan-Morocco Relations", accessed December 7, 2025, https://mofa.gov.pk/rabat-pakistan-morocco-relations.

[32] Mehdi Ben Abdeljalil Bennouna (1918–2010): One of the most prominent figures of Morocco's national movement, media, and diplomacy, he was from the city of Tetouan in northern Morocco. In 1943, he founded the newspaper *L'Opinion Marocain*. After independence, he contributed to the establishment of the Maghreb Arab Press (MAP) news agency in 1959 and served as its director. He played a pivotal role in promoting the national cause abroad, particularly in the United States and Europe, before holding senior diplomatic positions, including Ambassador of Morocco in Washington and Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He is also considered one of the pioneers who documented the course of the national struggle through his writings and testimonies. For further reading, see: High Commission for Former Resistance Members and Members of the Liberation Army, *The Life and Career of a Distinguished Figure of the National Movement and the Liberation Army: The Late Mehdi Bennouna* (Rabat: High Commission, 2011):115.

UN mission and explained the gravity of the situation. Zafarullah Khan immediately instructed the mission's secretary to draft an urgent letter to Pakistan's head of state requesting a decree granting Balafrej Pakistani citizenship and membership in its UN delegation. Within forty-eight hours, Balafrej received a phone call inviting him to the mission, where he was officially informed of the decision and asked to submit photographs and personal details for the issuance of a Pakistani diplomatic passport, thereby restoring his legal status[33].

Pakistan's Role in Supporting Moroccan Independence at the United Nations

Pakistan's role in supporting the Moroccan cause at the United Nations from the early 1950[s] must be understood within the broader context of the reconfiguration of Asian–African alliances during the decolonization era. *The Moroccan question* was initially presented to the General Assembly in 1951 as an Arab-led initiative[34] primarily concerned with procedural matters. However, a qualitative shift occurred in 1952 with Pakistan's engagement, alongside several Asian and African states, in promoting the transition of the debate from a procedural to a substantive level. This shift explicitly linked *the Moroccan question* to the principles of the UN Charter, particularly the right of peoples to self-determination. As a result, the international support base for Moroccan demands expanded, granting the issue a global dimension beyond the previously narrow Arab diplomatic framework.

[33] Mehdi Bennouna, "The speech he delivered at the academic seminar organized by the Rabat Al-Fath Association in honor of Al-Hajj Ahmed Balafrej, 29 January 1994", in Publications of the Rabat Al-Fath Association: *Al-Hajj Ahmed Balafrej…*, pp. 225–235, quoted in: *Al-Hajj Ahmed Balafrej: Pioneer of Cultural, Political, and Diplomatic Struggle for the Independence of Morocco* (published memoirs, no date):179.

[34] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, *Official Records: General Committee, 75th (Opening) Meeting*, November 8, 1951, 5:45 p.m., A/1894, Palais de Chaillot, Paris (New York: United Nations, 1951). See also:
-Samya El Mechat, "L'improbable 'Nation arabe': La Ligue des États arabes et l'indépendance du Maghreb (1945–1956)", *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire* 82 (2004): 65, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-vingtieme-siecle-revue-d-histoire-2004-2-page-57?lang=fr.

In 1952, Pakistan's support for the Moroccan cause assumed a concrete and institutional character, most notably through enabling Ahmed Balafrej to gain official access to the United Nations by granting him a Pakistani diplomatic passport. Although this measure did not confer upon him an independent legal representative status allowing him to address UN organs on behalf of Morocco, it nevertheless provided a legal–procedural mechanism that allowed him to circumvent the restrictions imposed on non-governmental actors in a colonial context, benefit from diplomatic privileges, and participate in political consultations accompanying UN deliberations. In the same context, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, assumed a pivotal role within the General Assembly by publicly defending Moroccan demands during its seventh session in 1952, which resulted in the adoption of Resolution 612 affirming the fundamental freedoms of the Moroccan people[35], a step widely regarded at the time as a symbolic political gain for the Moroccan national movement[36].

At the level of the Security Council, Pakistan also assumed a supportive political and legal role in 1953, particularly following its election as a non-permanent member for the 1952–1953 term. Together with Lebanon, Pakistan advocated for the inclusion of the Moroccan question on the Council's agenda, arguing that the deterioration of the situation in Morocco and the accompanying French measures affecting political legitimacy and fundamental rights constituted a potential threat to international peace and security under the UN Charter. In response to the French position that framed the issue as a purely internal matter, Pakistan defended the

[35] United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 612 (VII): Question of Morocco*, 19 December 1952, A/RES/612 (VII), accessed via Refworld, January 19, 2026, https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1952/en/7590

[36] David Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), https://www.academia.edu/39309736/Globalizing_Morocco_Transnational_Activism_and_the_Postcolonial_State_Stanford_University_Press_2019_

international legal status of Morocco, emphasizing its lack of integration into French sovereignty and referencing the international legal framework governing the protectorate system. Although the Security Council ultimately failed to adopt the agenda item due to voting dynamics, Pakistan's initiatives and pleadings helped consolidate the international dimension of the Moroccan cause and underscored Pakistan's early commitment to supporting national liberation movements through a legal and institutional approach consistent with UN procedural norms[37].

In this regard, Pakistan's membership in the Security Council carries particular significance in the trajectory of its engagement with Moroccan issues, as it coincided on two critical historical occasions with pivotal moments in Morocco's political history. During the 1952–1953 period, Pakistan's non-permanent membership overlapped with the intensification of confrontation between the Moroccan national movement and the French Protectorate authorities, during which Pakistan actively promoted the internationalization of the Moroccan cause within UN bodies. More than seven decades later, a similar temporal convergence occurred with Pakistan's Security Council membership for the 2025–2026 term, coinciding with sensitive international discussions concerning the autonomy proposal as a framework for resolving the Western Sahara conflict.

This temporal convergence should not be interpreted as mere coincidence but rather as reflecting a historical continuity in Pakistan's positioning within the UN system toward issues related to Moroccan sovereignty and political stability. It constitutes a significant indicator of the distinctive nature of Moroccan–Pakistani relations, grounded in shared diplomatic memory and a commitment to legal–institutional approaches to conflict management within the framework of

[37] United Nations, *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council: Supplement 1952–1955* (New York: Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, United Nations, 1957): 46–50, https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210581653/read.

international legitimacy. Accordingly, this historical legacy provides an important analytical reference for understanding the enduring features of Pakistan's subsequent stance on Morocco's territorial issues, including its cautious and balanced approach to the Western Sahara conflict, which seeks to reconcile adherence to UN principles with sensitivity to the complexities of the international context.

Political Solidarity and Multilateral Coordination in Moroccan–Pakistani Relations

Beyond these exceptional episodes, numerous historical indicators further attest to the strength and continuity of Moroccan–Pakistani relations over the decades. Pakistan maintained its explicit support for the Moroccan national movement's struggle for independence, as reflected in the boycott by Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali of the Constituent Assembly session on 2 September 1955 in solidarity with the Moroccan cause. This stance was consistent with the declared orientations of Pakistani foreign policy as outlined in the 1954 Basic Principles Committee Report, which affirmed Islamabad's alignment with liberation causes in Asia and Africa[38]. Pakistan's early recognition of Morocco's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1958[39] further demonstrated a shared awareness of the importance of South–South cooperation and laid the foundations for a stable and balanced diplomatic relationship characterized by mutual respect, non-interference, and coordination within multilateral frameworks, particularly the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

[38] Farooq Hasnat and Zamurrad Awan, "Bridging Continental Divide: Pakistan–Morocco's Enduring Friendship", *The Nation*, July 16, 2023.
[39] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Africa", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan*, accessed January 8, 2026, https://mofa.gov.pk/africa

Similarly, Morocco displayed clear understanding and support for issues related to Pakistan's national security, especially in the aftermath of the 1971 war, when it affirmed its support for Pakistan's territorial integrity and delayed its recognition of Bangladesh until 13 July 1973, at a time when most states had already extended recognition[40]. This decision reflected Rabat's concern to avoid undermining its relations with Islamabad. Consequently, Moroccan–Pakistani relations were not built on transient positions or political "bargains", but rather on a historical legacy of mutual political solidarity that reinforced continuity and balance in their bilateral relations amid complex and tense regional and international contexts.

In addition to the distinctiveness of bilateral relations, this solidarity was reflected in their cooperation and coordination within multilateral regional organizations. The shared historical experience of Morocco and Pakistan within Asian–African liberation movements, particularly following the Bandung Conference of 1955[41], helped establish an early foundation for political convergence based on anti-colonialism, the defense of self-determination, and respect for state sovereignty. This convergence was further reinforced through their engagement in multilateral frameworks such as the Non-Aligned Movement[42] and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation[43], which provided platforms for political coordination and the management of regional balances within the Arab and Islamic worlds. In this context, Pakistani foreign policy has generally adopted

[40] Sisson, Richard, and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), https://www.ucpress.edu/books/war-and-secession/paper

[41] Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2020).

[42] Anwar, Zahid, Sajad Rasool, and Muhammad Ilyas Khan, "The Non-Aligned Movement and Pakistan in Historical Perspective", *Pakistan Journal of Social Research* 4, no. 3 (September 2022): 335–340. https://doi.org/10.52567/pjsr.v4i03.720.

[43] Tajwar Ali and Haseena Sultan, "Emerging Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the Global Governance since 1969", *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023): 5-7 https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2202052.

a consensus-oriented approach, favoring the avoidance of sharp alignment in intra-Islamic conflicts, which helps explain its balanced posture toward the Western Sahara conflict.

Accordingly, Pakistan's abstention from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 2797 should not be interpreted as a cooling of its relations with Morocco, but rather as part of a cautious diplomatic approach aimed at maintaining amicable relations with all concerned parties, particularly in light of Pakistan's overlapping commitments within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, where issues such as Kashmir occupy a special normative priority. Thus, Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict reflects a historically grounded logic in the management of foreign relations, one that balances political solidarity with respect for national sovereignty and seeks to avoid the costs of alignment within multilateral arenas characterized by divergent interests and priorities.

The Significance of Pakistan's Abstention on UN Security Council Resolution

An analysis of the determinants underlying Pakistan's abstention from voting on UN Security Council Resolution No. 2797 allows for the identification of a set of broader interpretive meanings that extend beyond causal explanation. These analytical interpretations reflect deeper dynamics related to Pakistan's positioning within the international system and to the behavioral patterns of middle powers in managing multilateral conflict-related issues. Beyond shedding light on Pakistan's specific stance, they also contribute to broader theoretical debates on the instruments of diplomatic action within UN institutions, the limits of neutrality, and the political meaning of abstention in contemporary international contexts.

Affirming the Effectiveness of Multidirectional Balancing in Explaining External Behavior

Pakistan's abstention from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 2797 constitutes a revealing case of multidirectional balancing in the behavior of middle powers within a multipolar international system. Rather than reflecting passive neutrality or an absence of position, abstention emerges as a deliberate diplomatic choice aimed at managing tensions between principled commitments, geostrategic considerations, and the demands of institutional pragmatism, without becoming locked into rigid alignments. The analysis demonstrates that multidirectional balancing is neither a product of ambiguity nor uncalculated hesitation, but rather a strategic distribution of external engagements that enables states to sustain balanced relations with opposing actors while preserving their capacity to adapt to shifting geopolitical configurations.

Abstention as an Instrument of Cautious Reservation within the Security Council

The Pakistani case demonstrates that the Security Council is not merely an arena for entrenching the will of major powers, but also an institutional space that enables middle powers to pursue flexible strategies through legal tools. In this context, abstention emerges as a mechanism that allows a state to express reservations without obstructing the Council's collective work or entering into direct diplomatic confrontation with the sponsors of a resolution. This highlights the dual function of abstention: on the one hand, it is a low-cost institutional tool compared to a negative vote. On the other hand, it is a political instrument that retains diplomatic flexibility for maneuver within an institutional structure governed by precise procedural constraints.

Rejecting the Interpretation of Hostility toward the Kingdom of Morocco

An examination of the diplomatic context and the language employed in Pakistan's statement indicates that abstention does not carry hostile connotations toward the Kingdom of Morocco, nor

does it signal a deterioration in bilateral relations between the two states. Rather, it reflects Pakistan's concern to distinguish its positions within the Security Council from its bilateral relationships—a behavioral pattern consistent with the logic of balance management rather than rivalry or maneuvering against a particular actor. In this respect, abstention functions as an option that enables Islamabad to maintain cordial relations with Morocco without undermining its ties with Algeria, while also avoiding the appearance of bias in a dispute marked by high political sensitivity within the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Normative Consistency in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Beyond Situational Alignment

The study demonstrates that Pakistan's emphasis on the right to self-determination, in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 2797, does not amount to explicit political support for secessionist claims. Rather, its conduct within the Security Council must be understood in light of internal structural constraints—most notably the separatist challenges confronting the state—and as part of a broader pattern of normative consistency shaped by the enduring salience of Balochistan and the Kashmir issue in Pakistan's diplomatic discourse. In this sense, abstention reflects a deliberate effort to avoid the creation of legal or political precedents that could later be mobilized against Pakistan's vital interests in comparable disputes. It thus carries a preventive dimension that extends beyond the management of external balances, encompassing the avoidance of normative outcomes that might undermine state unity and territorial integrity.

Future Significance: Anticipating Continued Abstention

The study's overall analysis indicates that Pakistan's position on the Western Sahara conflict is likely to remain within its current configuration unless a systemic shift occurs in one of its core

determinants, whether related to the Kashmir issue, regional alliance configurations, or the balance of power within the Security Council. In this context, Pakistan is expected to continue resorting to abstention when voting on substantive resolutions concerning the dispute. Should the Moroccan autonomy proposal be activated as a framework for settlement within the UN system, this trajectory would likely confront Pakistan with a particularly sensitive normative dilemma in its voting behavior. Any explicit support for resolutions framing autonomy within Moroccan sovereignty could establish political and legal precedents with potential repercussions for separatist dynamics in Balochistan and for Pakistan's long-standing position on Kashmir, which rests on rejecting the incorporation of disputed territory into Indian sovereignty absent a mutually agreed settlement.

From this perspective, abstention does not signal opposition to the Moroccan initiative, but rather functions as a diplomatic instrument for avoiding normative inconsistency that could weaken Pakistan's negotiating posture in international forums. It enables Islamabad to preserve coherence in its discourse on the right to self-determination without casting a vote that might be construed as implicit endorsement of reconfiguring territorial disputes within a settled sovereignty framework. As such, abstention remains the option most consistent with the structural determinants shaping Pakistan's foreign policy in the context of any prospective UN-led settlement based on the Morocco's autonomy proposal.

The results of the study

1. The findings indicate that Pakistan's abstention on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2797 does not reflect any deterioration in its bilateral relations with Morocco, as official diplomatic statements consistently reaffirm continued friendship and cooperation. Rather, the

abstention is best understood as part of a broader pattern of issue-based neutrality, whereby Pakistan tends to avoid taking explicit positions on geographically distant disputes that do not directly intersect with its core security and strategic priorities.

2. The analysis further shows that this voting behavior reflects Pakistan's effort to preserve strategic flexibility during its tenure on the Security Council, allowing it to navigate competing diplomatic expectations without constraining its foreign policy options. In this context, Pakistan's position is consistent with its long-standing preference for multilateral, UN-centered mechanisms and an emphasis on procedural and legal legitimacy in international disputes.

3. Overall, the case supports the explanatory value of middle power balancing theory, particularly in accounting for how states with limited systemic power seek to maximize autonomy, manage reputational costs, and maintain diplomatic room for maneuver within multilateral institutions.

4. The interaction between Rabat and Islamabad reflects a shared understanding of the constraints facing middle powers in the international system, where neutrality and balance are understood as deliberate diplomatic choices rather than passive or neutral stances in the traditional sense. Moreover, pragmatism is not limited to Pakistan, as Morocco also adopts a balanced approach in its external relations, particularly with Pakistan and India, while maintaining its commitment to international legitimacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

5. Pakistan's abstention on Western Sahara-related resolutions is likely to remain a stable diplomatic strategy, reflecting structural constraints linked to Kashmir and internal territorial sensitivities. Rather than indicating neutrality or opposition, abstention functions as a deliberate policy tool to preserve legal consistency in Pakistan's foreign policy while avoiding precedent-setting positions on sovereignty disputes within the UN system.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Pakistan's abstention on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2797 concerning the Western Sahara conflict does not signal a shift in foreign policy, nor a hostile posture toward Morocco. Instead, it reflects continuity in a cautious diplomatic approach that has consistently characterized Pakistan's management of sensitive international issues.

The findings suggest that Pakistan's position on the resolution is better understood within the framework of a broader balancing strategy rather than as evidence of foreign policy realignment. In this regard, abstention emerges as a meaningful instrument of diplomatic behavior, particularly among middle powers seeking to preserve autonomy in foreign policy decision-making while avoiding the costs of direct alignment in conflicts that do not involve their core national interests.

These findings further highlight the analytical value of abstention as a tool for understanding state behavior within multilateral institutions. They also underscore the relevance of middle power diplomacy in managing complex international environments marked by competing pressures and overlapping alignments.

Finally, the study contributes to broader debates on diplomatic behavior in international organizations and opens avenues for future comparative research on voting strategies and non-alignment practices in an increasingly multipolar international system.