



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Special Political and Decolonization Committee
ISSUE Addressing the Western Sahara conflict
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Introduction

Western Sahara, a former colony of Spain, has been in constant warfare for over 60 years now. The Spanish laid claim to the territory in 1886, known as the Spanish Sahara. Later on, in 1956, it changed its name to the Province of Sahara. For more than a century, the province had been in Spanish possession, when due to international pressure and demands from the Moroccan Kingdom the Spanish government gave up its authority over Western Sahara. The Madrid Accords and Moroccan control over the territory are not recognized by the UN and the term widely used for Western Sahara is a “non-self-governing territory”. The opposition, which represents the Sahrawi people fighting for their freedom, is the Polisario Front, also known as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a partially recognized state that controls one-fifth of the easternmost part of Western Sahara. The Sahrawi continue to fight back, however, their resources and the help they receive are limited.

Definition of Key Terms

Madrid accords (the Declarations of Principles on Western Sahara): An agreement signed by Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania in 1975. It ended Spanish presence in the territory and divided Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania leaving no place for the Polisario Front.

Green March: A strategic mass demonstration orchestrated by the Moroccan government in November of 1975. Its purpose was to force Spain’s retreat from the country and hand it over to the Kingdom of Morocco.

Guerilla warfare: A type of warfare fought by irregulars in fast-moving, small-scale actions against orthodox military.

Moroccan Western Sahara Wall/Berm: An approximately 2,700 km long wall separating the Moroccan-controlled areas, from the Polisario-controlled areas.

Refugee camps: A refugee camp is created for the purpose of temporary accommodation for those, who have been forced to leave their home due to persecution and violence.

MINURSO: United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

The Settlement Plan: An agreement between the Polisario Front and Morocco on the vote of a referendum, whether the people would prefer independence or integration with Morocco. This resulted in a ceasefire for over 30 years, however, broken by the SADR due to the continuous postponement of the issue.

Baker Plan (Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara): It was intended to replace The Settlement plan. Baker Plan was an initiative by the UN to grant self-determination to Western Sahara.

AU(African Union): Established to promote union and solidarity between African countries.

International Court of Justice (ICJ): The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

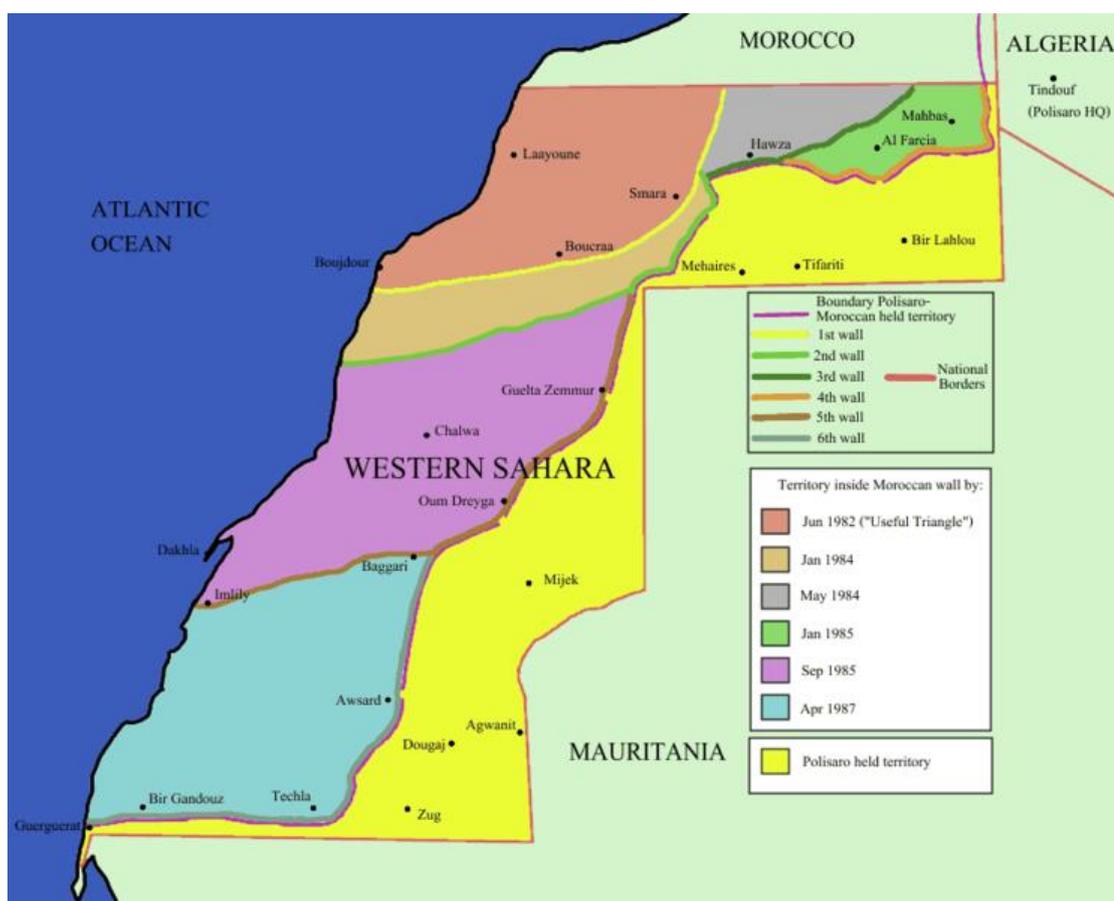
Intifada: A legitimate uprising against oppression.

Bilateral relations: It consists of the political, economic, or cultural relations between two independent states/sovereigns.

General Overview

Western Sahara is a war-torn country, one that has been struggling to gain its independence for decades. The territory was colonized by the Spanish in 1884 and remained as a colony until 1975 when the Moroccan government organized the so-called "Green March" in which 300 000 Moroccan civilians escorted by 20 000 Moroccan troops marched kilometers deep into the country. The goal was to establish a Moroccan presence in the territory and force the hand of

Spain at giving up its sovereignty over the area. The march is condemned internationally since it's considered to be an attempt at bypassing the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Western Sahara. Nonetheless, Morocco reached its goal and acquired two-thirds of the territory. In 1975, when the Madrid Accords was signed, and the opinion of the indigenous people was not taken into account, the Polisario Front took action. They capitalized on guerilla warfare, which aided them many times against the heavy, slow-moving military Morocco possessed. These attacks were the reason for the construction of the Moroccan Western Sahara Wall which is a sand wall running through Western Sahara from north to south and the southwestern part of Morocco. It is reported that walls reach into the territory of Mauritania as well.

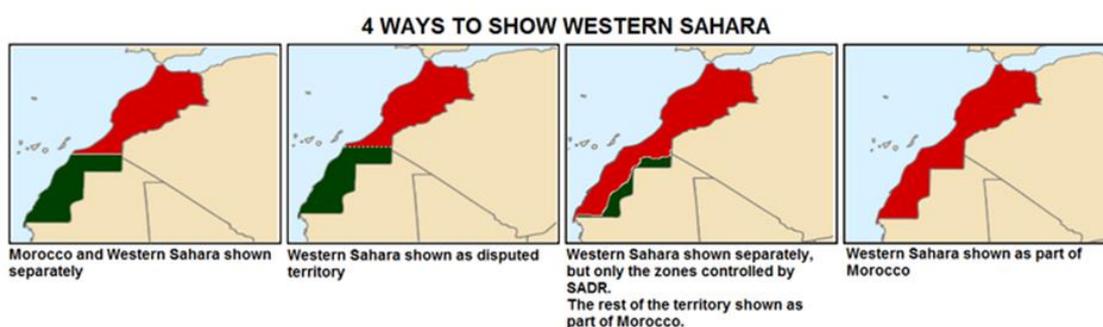


The SADR has the United Nations' unwavering support, however, it hadn't necessarily benefitted them for a while now. In 1991, the UN proposed The Settlement Plan with the purpose of giving a choice to the Sahrawi in choosing the political state of their country. Yet the referendum had been postponed for years. Another attempt made by the UN was the Baker Plan, with the same initiative as the Settlement Plan. While it achieved a ceasefire, no actual progress had been made at liberating the country. During the ceasefire, two intifadas were organized by the Sahrawi, both focusing on human rights and the need to fight for

independence. The intifadas were crucial, as they showed Sahrawis that they can protest and state their demands.

The 30-year-long truce ended in 2020 when Sahrawi troops returned to active resistance. The country is aware of the Moroccan military superiority, which is why the attacks are more likely a strategic step to bringing attention to the situation once again than it is an attempt at ending the colonization by force.

Ending the conflict would safeguard North Africa from further turmoil and protect Europe's southernmost borders. Any violation of international law in Western Sahara would lead to drastic global consequences.



Major Parties Involved

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR): The SADR controls one-fifth of Western Sahara, however, continues to fight for the independence of the whole country. The Republic is a partially recognized state (recognized by 45 Member States of the UN) and a full member of the AU. In 1976, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and claiming Western Sahara as their territory. Around 70000 Sahrawi people and its exiled government still reside in the refugee camps in the province of Tindouf, Algeria. The country's ultimate goal is to bring peace and liberation to the country, as Western Sahara is the last African colony that requires decolonization.

Kingdom of Morocco: The Moroccans claim a centuries-old historical right to Western Sahara. For more than 40 years, the Moroccan have governed two-thirds of the territory, yet their sovereignty is recognized by only 35 countries as of 2022. Morocco has built a number of elaborate walls in an attempt to control both the territory and the Polisario. They continue to fight the resistance posed by the Sahrawi people and refuse to give up their possessions of the country and hear out any amendments that would indicate the independence of Western Sahara.

Mauritania: The country waged war in the 1970s against the Polisario Front, joined with Morocco. In 1979, however, Mauritania renounced its claim to the territory and withdrew all its military forces. In 1984, Mauritania formally recognized the SADR as an independent state. Consequently, the Kingdom of Morocco immediately severed its ties with Mauritania and annexed its territory in Western Sahara by August of 1979.

Algeria: The country had allied itself with the Polisario Front ever since the war has been waging upon Western Sahara. Algeria is its main and unwavering supporter, providing food, arms, and financial aid. The refugee camps, which house around 70 000 Sahrawis are located in an Algerian province as well, Tindouf. However, Algeria's conflict with Morocco has predated the Western Sahara war. They were involved in a Border war in 1963 called the "Sand War" over the provinces of Tindouf and Bechar. As of 2021 the President of Algeria had reminded the Moroccan Kingdom of their military superiority and refused to recognize their sovereignty over the Sahrawi people.

France: France orchestrated Opération Lamantin in 1979 in an attempt to back the regime of Mokhtar Ould Daddah, the President of Mauritania at the time. After French civil technicians were taken hostage by the Polisario Front, the French used jaguar combat aircrafts to start bombing Polisario columns. The operation proved useless and Ould Daddah was overthrown a year later. As of 2022 French president, Emmanuel Macron stated that the autonomy plan proposed by the Moroccan government is a "basis" on which serious and credible talks can be built. The French position on the proposal is "constant" and "long-lasting" - as said by the Foreign Ministry of France.

Spain: Spain, as the former sovereign in the country, has stated its opinions on the matter of the proposal as well in 2022 when they took a political turnaround and sided with the Kingdom of Morocco in the conflict of Western Sahara. They reportedly said that the autonomy plan for Western Sahara "is the most serious and realistic basis." Spain has successfully mended its relationship with Morocco with this statement, however, stirred up conflict with Algeria, as the country is a well-known adversary of the Moroccan Kingdom. Therefore it is feared that Algeria might raise gas prices or cut off Spain's supply entirely. Although it had been reported that "Algeria was previously informed."

United States of America: As it seems, for the USA, Morocco's constant pressure campaign has borne fruit, when former President Trump tweeted in 2020 that the United States now recognizes Moroccan sovereignty. President Biden still refuses to reverse Trump's foreign policy on the conflict. This stance only solidified the Moroccans' insistence that self-determination for the Sahrawi people is out of the question.

Libya: Libya and Morocco had maintained an alliance for decades, yet over the years distrust grew between the countries due to different views. Libya, under the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, chose to support the Polisario Front in the conflict.

Germany: Germany continues to support the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over Western Sahara. President Frank Walter-Steinmeier stated that the plan proposing Morocco's autonomy over the country "is a serious and credible effort."

Timeline of Events

1884 - Spain colonized today's Western Sahara (then: Spanish Sahara)

1957 - Morocco claims centuries-old historical right to the territory

1973 May 10 - Polisario Front formed to fight against the Spanish and represent the voice of the Sahrawi people

1975 November 6 - The Green March (to Sahrawi people known as the Black March) a mass demonstration orchestrated by the Moroccan government to force Spain to give up sovereignty

1975 November 14 - Morocco, Mauritania, and Spain sign the Madrid Accords

1975 December - Spanish Sahara becomes known as Western Sahara

1976 - Beginning of guerilla warfare between Polisario and the Moroccan army

1976 February 26 - Spain announces its full withdrawal from the territory

1979 - Mauritania signs a peace treaty with the Polisario Front, renounces its claim to Western Sahara and retreats from the country

1980 - Morocco annexes Mauritania's share of territory

1981-87 - The construction of the Moroccan Wall (called the Wall of Shame by Sahrawi people)

1991 September 6 - Ceasefire between Polisario and Morocco, monitored by MINURSO

1999-2004 - First Sahrawi intifada

2005 - Second Sahrawi intifada

2020 November - Polisario resumes its armed campaign against the Moroccan army (ceasefire broke after 30 years)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

THE SETTLEMENT PLAN

Proposed in 1991, The Settlement Plan initiated a "winner-take-it-all" strategy. Depending on the side that wins the referendum- integration or independence - the authority chosen would be the legal sovereign of the country. However, in order to take action, all sides (Morocco, Polisario Front, Algeria) would have to compromise, which is considered unlikely by the UN.

HOUSTON AGREEMENT

The agreement was a conclusion of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, concluded in Houston, USA. It was a renewed plan, proposing the same initiative the Settlement Plan did. The referendum should have taken place in 1998, however, the countries could not agree on who would be eligible to vote. It was postponed and eventually, the agreement was unsuccessful.

THE BAKER PLAN

The Baker Plan (Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara): The plan, put forward by the former envoy to Western Sahara, James Baker proposed the idea of autonomy for Sahrawis under Moroccan sovereignty. After a four-year transition period, a referendum would take place, voting rights for Moroccan settlers residing in Western Sahara for more than a year. Due to the lack of cooperation from Algeria and the Polisario Front, this plan also failed. The postponement of the inauguration of these proposals is what led to the end of the ceasefire in 2020.

BAKER II

Baker II (Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara): In 2003, the UN proposed a compromise. Western Sahara would become a semi-autonomous region of Morocco in 5 years. Followed by a referendum on whether the territory will become independent, semi-autonomous, or integrate with Morocco. The Polisario Front and Algeria signaled their readiness to proceed, however, Morocco rejected it raising security concerns, and saying it will never give up sovereignty.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

INAUGURATION OF THE PLANS

The UN strongly supports indigenous people's claim as the sovereign of Western Sahara. The previous plans proposed by the United Nations have been unsuccessful due to the lack of cooperation from one of the sides. However, it is pressing to deal with the conflict and find a suitable solution for both parties, as it is the citizens living in Western Sahara whose homes were taken away and still "held hostage". The unresolved conflict is a pressing issue that needs to be dealt with swiftly. Another solution could be to invent creative ways to house students. Building housing complexes could take years, but the issue of student housing insecurity becomes more pressing with time, this is why it is important to also think of new innovative ideas to solve the problem even for a short term. The best example of this is the parking program Long Beach City College in the United States has been experimenting with. Even though it can only accommodate 15 people, it provides a safe place for housing insecure students when their only remaining option is to sleep in their cars while also providing nearby restrooms and power outlets.

IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS

The thousands of Sahrawi refugees residing for decades now in Tindouf are living in poverty. Their standard of living is worsening day by day. Hence why it is crucial we provide living facilities, food, and other resources that would enable the Sahrawi people to receive education beyond secondary school and create a brighter future.

RAISING AWARENESS

As Western Sahara is the last African country that is yet to go through decolonization, its significance is tremendous. The continent would be free once again. The aforementioned aspect is imperative in itself yet raising awareness and discussing it, is what would accomplish results. The more people talking about it, the more help and support the Sahrawis could receive.

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Further information about the MINURSO and its activities:

<https://minurso.unmissions.org/activities>

Who recognizes/ recognized the SADR?

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The refugee camps in Algeria:

<https://www.arso.org/05-3.htm>

A great explanation of the conflict (while the ceasefire had not been broken yet):

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/07/united-nations-and-western-sahara-never-ending-affair>

Helpful videos:

Understanding Western Sahara:

https://youtu.be/4SakRNO_SMY

Can the Sahara conflict be resolved?

(Focus on the strained relationship between Spain and Algeria.)

<https://youtu.be/e9UNm3EtgrU>

Why is Spain backing Morocco's claim to Western Sahara:

(Focus on Moroccan sovereignty, Spain, and Algeria)

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