

Forum: **The Security Council**

Issue: **Addressing the Situation in Western Sahara**

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Introduction

Western Sahara, a territory located in North Africa, has been the subject of a territorial conflict since June 1970. The region was originally a Spanish colony, which was later left in dispute after Spain's withdrawal in 1975. This led to a struggle for sovereignty primarily between Morocco and the Sahrawi nationalist movement, otherwise known as the Polisario Front. The goal of the Polisario Front is independence for the Sahrawi nation, who seek to establish the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. However, Morocco claims the territory as part of its sovereign land, stating the Western Sahara is an integral part of the Moroccan kingdom. This dispute has led to intense political conflict between the independence movement and Morocco.

The conflict has drawn in various international actors and organizations, influencing diplomatic relations and humanitarian efforts. A ceasefire was established in 1991 by the UN, with the region primarily being administered by the Moroccan government with support by the United States and France. However, a lasting resolution remains to be seen, resulting in a divided territory and ongoing tensions.

Currently, the humanitarian situation is dire, with many Sahrawis living in refugee camps in Algeria under desolate conditions. Reports of human rights violations and limited access to resources highlight the urgency for a sustainable solution. Efforts by the United Nations to facilitate negotiations have seen little progress thus far. As the situation continues to evolve, the need for a comprehensive and equitable resolution becomes ever more pressing, making Western Sahara a focal point of geopolitical interest and humanitarian concern.

Definition of Key Terms

Term

Each term must be indented like so. Do not leave blank lines between terms.

Western Sahara

A disputed territory located in North Africa, formerly a Spanish colony, claimed by both Morocco and the Sahrawi people.

Polisario Front

A nationalist movement formed in 1973 that represents the Sahrawi people and seeks independence for Western Sahara. It operates as both a political organization and a military force.

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)

A self-proclaimed state declared by the Polisario Front in 1976, claiming sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Madrid Accords

A set of agreements signed in November 1975 that facilitated Spain's withdrawal from Western Sahara and the partition of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania.

Referendum

A direct vote in which an entire electorate is invited to vote on a particular proposal, often relating to issues of sovereignty or governance, such as the proposed vote on the status of Western Sahara.

Ceasefire

An agreement between warring parties to stop fighting, often a preliminary step toward peace negotiations. A ceasefire in Western Sahara was established in 1991 under UN mediation.

Protectorate

A state that is protected and controlled by another. Spain established the Western Sahara as protectorate in 1884.

Gdeim Izik Protests

A string of protests starting in October 2010 in the Sahrawi refugee camps near Laayoune, Western Sahara. The protests centered on demands for better living conditions, socioeconomic rights, and against Moroccan rule of the area. The protests culminated in the eviction of the Gdeim Izik refugee camps by Moroccan authorities and violent clashes between both parties.

MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)

A UN peacekeeping mission established in 1991 to oversee the ceasefire and facilitate the referendum process in Western Sahara.

Self-Determination

The right of a people to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. This principle underpins the Sahrawi quest for independence.

Occupation

The control and possession of a territory by a foreign power, often involving military presence. Morocco's presence in Western Sahara is described by some as an occupation.

History & Developments

Pre-conflict background

Pre-colonization

Before European colonization, Western Sahara was inhabited by various nomadic tribes, primarily of Berber and Arab descent. These tribes had established a semi-nomadic lifestyle, relying on herding and trade. The region was characterized by its arid climate and sparse resources, leading to a decentralized social structure with local leadership based on kinship and tribal affiliations.

Colonization

In the late 19th century, European powers began to assert control over Africa, and Spain laid claim to Western Sahara in 1884, establishing it as a protectorate. Spanish colonial administration faced challenges due to the territory's harsh environment and the resistance of local tribes. Despite this, Spain maintained nominal control, focusing primarily on the coastal areas. The colonial period saw the introduction of Western-style governance and economic exploitation. The Spanish aimed to establish a presence, but their authority was often contested by local tribes. As in other parts of Africa, the imposition of foreign rule disrupted traditional social structures and ways of life.

Decolonization

Post-World War II, the decolonization movement gained momentum globally, with many African nations seeking independence from colonial rule. Inspired by these movements, the Sahrawi people began to organize and articulate their desire for self-determination. The rise of nationalism in the mid-20th century influenced political consciousness among Sahrawis, leading to calls for an end to colonial rule. In the 1960s, the United Nations became involved in decolonization efforts, and

Western Sahara was placed on the UN's list of non-self-governing territories. This international recognition fueled the aspirations of the Sahrawi people for independence and highlighted the need for a political solution.

Western Sahara conflict begins

Polisario Front formation

In the early 1970s, as Spain began to reconsider its colonial policies, the Sahrawi nationalist movement coalesced around the Polisario Front (Frente Polisario). Founded in 1973, the Polisario aimed to promote the rights of the Sahrawi people and secure independence from Spanish colonial rule. Initially, the movement employed peaceful protests and diplomatic efforts, but as Spain's grip weakened, armed resistance began to emerge.

The Polisario's commitment to armed struggle was solidified in the mid-1970s, as Spain faced increasing pressure to withdraw from the territory. The group garnered support from neighboring Algeria, which viewed the conflict through the lens of anti-colonialism and regional solidarity.

Spanish withdrawal and partition

Spain's withdrawal in 1975 was a pivotal moment in the conflict. As it sought to exit the territory, Spain signed the Madrid Accords with Morocco and Mauritania, partitioning Western Sahara between them. The Madrid Accords facilitated Spain's withdrawal from the region and established the territorial partition in the Western Sahara. This agreement was not sanctioned by the UN and was widely criticized for ignoring the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. The partition ignited armed conflict, with the Polisario Front launching a guerrilla war against both Moroccan and Mauritanian forces. The situation escalated as Morocco, claiming historical ties to the region, intensified its military presence and began efforts to integrate Western Sahara into its national framework. Mauritania's involvement ended in 1979 when it withdrew under pressure from the Polisario. Thousands of Sahrawis fled to Algeria, where refugee camps were established. Moreover, an ICJ ruling was given out, claiming both Morocco and Mauritania had historical ties to the Western Sahara region, but not enough to justify rule, so the area would be given up for self-determination. A combination of issues and stalling in enacting the later referendum, heated historical disputes as to who has the rightful claim to the land, and tense political alliances has led to the conflict persisting until now.

Major conflicts

Throughout the 1980s, the conflict reached a stalemate, characterized by intermittent skirmishes and a militarized presence. Morocco constructed a sand wall, known as the Berm, to secure its control over the territory and prevent incursions by Polisario forces. The wall extended approximately 2,700 kilometers and divided the territory into two distinct zones. Internationally, the

situation garnered attention, with various countries and organizations expressing support for the Sahrawi cause. The UN began to take a more active role, pushing for a peaceful resolution and recognizing the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people.

Ceasefire

In 1991, after years of conflict, the UN brokered a ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario Front. This was a significant development, leading to the establishment of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The mission was tasked with overseeing the ceasefire and preparing for a referendum on self-determination.

The UN Settlement Plan proposed a phased process that included a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Moroccan troops, and the organization of a referendum. However, disagreements over the details, particularly regarding voter eligibility and the political status of the territory, hindered implementation. The referendum, intended to allow the Sahrawi people to choose between independence and integration with Morocco, never took place.

The 1990s saw ongoing tensions as negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front faltered. While MINURSO, the UN forces responsible for managing the referendum and ceasefire, continued to control the area, the political landscape remained tense. Morocco asserted its claims over the territory, promoting development initiatives to integrate Western Sahara into its national framework. In contrast, the Polisario Front maintained its stance for independence and continued to gain international support. Diplomatic efforts, including talks facilitated by the UN, yielded little progress. The humanitarian situation for Sahrawi refugees remained critical, with ongoing reliance on international aid and limited access to basic services. Morocco governs approximately 80% of the territory, including the resource-rich coastal areas, while the Polisario Front controls the remaining 20%, primarily in remote desert regions. The UN recognizes Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory and continues to advocate for a referendum on self-determination, which has yet to happen.

By the start of the 2000s, the Western Sahara conflict remained unresolved. Plans for a referendum had dwindled, and tensions between both sides continued. Morocco's continued military presence and economic investment in the territory were met with resistance from the Polisario Front, which remained committed to its goal of independence.

Mounting tensions

In October 2010, the Gdeim Izik protests, which were a significant expression of Sahrawi dissent against Moroccan rule in Western Sahara, began. Sparked by grievances over social, economic, and political marginalization, thousands of Sahrawis established a protest camp near El Aaiún, the territory's capital, to demand better living conditions and respect for their rights. The camp, which grew to house around 20,000 people, became a focal point for calls for independence and

human rights. On November 8, Moroccan authorities launched a violent eviction, leading to clashes that resulted in numerous injuries and arrests. The aftermath of the protests intensified tensions between the Sahrawi population and Moroccan security forces and drew international attention to the ongoing struggles in Western Sahara.

In late 2020, tensions escalated sharply when Morocco launched military operations in the Guerguerat region, a disputed area near the Mauritanian border, in response to Polisario Front actions that disrupted a key trade route. This move effectively ended the ceasefire, leading to resumed hostilities. Clashes have since been reported, although the scale has been limited compared to the earlier years of conflict.

The geopolitical landscape has also shifted. The normalization of relations between Morocco and several countries, including the United States, which recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in 2020, has altered the dynamics of international involvement. This recognition has been met with strong opposition from the Polisario Front and has further complicated efforts toward a negotiated solution. Later, in 2022, Spain has shifted from its historical stance of neutrality and recognized Morocco's sovereignty in the Western Sahara, as well as Israel in 2023.

The humanitarian situation for the Sahrawi people is dire, particularly for those living in refugee camps in Algeria. Approximately 173,000 Sahrawis reside in these camps, facing harsh living conditions, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited educational opportunities. Humanitarian aid is critical, but reliance on international support fluctuates with donor priorities.

In the occupied territories, reports of human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions, suppression of free speech, and restrictions on movement, have emerged. Moroccan authorities maintain a heavy security presence, and Sahrawi activists often face intimidation for advocating independence, leading to a Freedom House score of 4/100. The future of the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara is uncertain and largely hinges on the political resolution of the territory's status. If Morocco maintains control, the Sahrawis may continue to face marginalization and repression, hindering their cultural identity and self-determination. Conversely, if a political solution leads to independence or greater autonomy, the Sahrawi people could experience improved governance, human rights, and development opportunities. However, predictions also caution that unresolved tensions could escalate into conflict, further destabilizing the region and impacting both the Sahrawi people and neighboring states.

The international community remains divided on the issue. While some African nations and Latin American countries support the Sahrawi cause, key Western nations have generally sided with Morocco. The African Union has called for renewed dialogue, yet meaningful engagement has been sporadic.

Conclusion

The prospects for a resolution remain uncertain. The ongoing military confrontations, coupled with Morocco's strategic geopolitical maneuvers and the Polisario Front's resilience, suggest that the conflict will continue unless there is a concerted international effort to mediate effectively. A lasting peace will require addressing the underlying issues of self-determination, resource control, and human rights. The modern situation of the Western Sahara conflict is marked by a fragile ceasefire, persistent political deadlock, and significant humanitarian challenges. As local and international dynamics evolve, the future of Western Sahara hangs in a delicate balance, necessitating renewed dialogue and commitment from all parties involved to seek a sustainable and just resolution.

Major Parties Involved

Polisario Front (Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro)

A nationalist movement representing the Sahrawi people, seeking independence for Western Sahara. Formed in 1973, it has led armed resistance against Moroccan control and has declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR).

Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco claims sovereignty over Western Sahara, considering it part of its territory since Spain's withdrawal in 1975. Morocco administers approximately 80% of the region since the 1991 ceasefire and has built a significant security presence to assert control.

Algeria

A key supporter of the Polisario Front, Algeria has provided military, political, and humanitarian support to the Sahrawis. It hosts the SADR government in exile and sees the conflict as part of its broader regional stance against colonialism.

United States

The US is a major power in support of Morocco's claims of sovereignty but has also called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. In recent years, the US has officially recognized Morocco's sovereignty but is still in support of peaceful discussions.

United States

Spain held colonial rule over Western Sahara until 1975. Following Spain's withdrawal, the conflict arose between Morocco, which seeks to annex Western Sahara, and the Polisario Front, which advocates for Sahrawi independence. Although Spain no longer administers the territory, it remains a key player in diplomatic discussions and is involved in addressing humanitarian issues.

United Nations

The UN has been involved in attempts to resolve the conflict, establishing the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 1991 to oversee a ceasefire and facilitate a (failed) referendum on self-determination for the Sahrawi people.

Timeline of Events

Depending on the subject, this section may not be entirely necessary. Bringing clarification is still advised, though. Please chronologically list the major events that occurred for the topic.

Date	Event Name	Description
1963	UN lists Western Sahara as non-self-governing	The United Nations officially declares Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory.
May 10, 1973	Formation of Polisario Front	The Polisario Front is formed to fight for the independence of Western Sahara, initially against Spanish colonizers.
November 14, 1975	Madrid Accords	The Madrid Accords are signed, partitioning the Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania following Spain's withdrawal.
February 8, 1976	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic declaration	The Polisario Front declares the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, marking its strive for independence.
September 6, 1991	MINURSO Ceasefire	The United Nations brokers an agreement, establishing a ceasefire, negotiations, a referendum, and forms the MINURSO to oversee the process.
October 2010	Gdeim Izik protests	Protests against the poor conditions and lack of freedom against Sahrawis within the Western Sahara begin, leading to significant conflicts between Sahrawis and Moroccan authorities.
November 13, 2020	Hostilities continue	The Polisario Front declares the resumption of warring after the breakdown of the ceasefire.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The United Nations has put forward various proposals and resolutions to address the Western Sahara conflict, primarily centered on the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people. These include the UN Settlement Plan in 1991, various attempts at peace-talks, and many resolutions urging for the improvement of humanitarian conditions, but no definitive action.

The UN's involvement in the Western Sahara conflict has consistently focused on achieving a political solution that respects the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people. While various proposals, particularly the UN Settlement Plan, have been put forward, the ongoing impasse reflects the complexities of the situation, including differing national interests and the challenges of implementing these solutions effectively. The path to a lasting resolution remains contingent on renewed dialogue and genuine political will from all parties involved.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- **Engagement with Regional Actors:** Involving neighboring countries like Algeria in the dialogue process, given its support for the Polisario Front and its role in the conflict.
- **Informal talks:** The UN has facilitated informal talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front, aiming to explore potential compromises and solutions outside formal negotiations.
- **Resolution 621 (1988):** Called for an immediate ceasefire and a commitment to a political solution, laying the groundwork for the UN Settlement Plan. This resolution emphasized the need for both parties to respect the plan's provisions.
- **Resolution 1292 (2000):** This resolution extended MINURSO's mandate and urged both parties to cooperate with the UN in facilitating the implementation of the Settlement Plan. It called for a continuation of efforts toward a political resolution and reaffirmed the commitment to the principle of self-determination.
- **Resolution 1979 (2011):** This resolution called for renewed negotiations and emphasized the importance of addressing the humanitarian situation in the territory. It highlighted the need for mutual respect and dialogue to reach a sustainable solution.

Possible Solutions

Several potential solutions have been proposed to address the enduring Western Sahara conflict, each aiming to balance the interests of the involved parties while promoting lasting peace and stability in the region.

One of the most discussed approaches is the conduct of a UN-sponsored referendum on self-determination. This referendum would allow the Sahrawi people to choose between independence and integration with Morocco, aligning with the principles of self-determination recognized by international law. This option has gained support from key UN member states such as Algeria, as it emphasizes the need for the voices of the Sahrawi population to be heard in determining their political future. However, organizing a fair and transparent referendum would require substantial international backing, meticulous planning, and guarantees to ensure the process is free from manipulation or coercion.

Alternatively, Morocco has put forward an autonomy proposal that offers significant local governance while maintaining Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. This plan aims to address some of the economic and administrative grievances of the Sahrawi people by allowing them a degree of self-rule. For this solution to gain acceptance, it would be crucial to clearly define and safeguard the cultural rights and administrative autonomy of the Sahrawis, ensuring they have a meaningful say in local governance without the fear of repression.

Sustained and renewed negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations could facilitate a mutually acceptable compromise, focusing on building trust between the parties involved. An independent mediator could help bridge the gap between the conflicting positions of the Polisario Front and Morocco, encouraging dialogue and creative solutions that might not have been previously considered. This would require both sides to engage constructively, with an emphasis on finding common ground rather than entrenched positions.

International pressure and mediation from the broader international community, including regional powers and organizations like the European Union and the African Union, could also play a vital role in encouraging both Morocco and the Polisario Front to return to the negotiating table. Diplomatic efforts could be bolstered by clear incentives for both parties to seek a peaceful resolution, as well as consequences for continued non-compliance with international norms.

Another important aspect is the enhancement of a human rights focus in the region. Addressing humanitarian needs and improving the living conditions of Sahrawis, irrespective of the political outcome, could help create a more favorable environment for dialogue. Initiatives that promote economic development, education, and healthcare in Sahrawi communities might foster goodwill and reduce tensions, demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of the people affected by the conflict.

Engaging neighboring countries, particularly Algeria, which has historically supported the Polisario Front, could provide additional perspectives and incentives for a resolution. Algeria's involvement could help facilitate discussions, given its interest in regional stability and its influence

over the Sahrawi movement. Collaborative efforts could create a more comprehensive approach to peace that takes into account the broader geopolitical context.

Finally, the deployment of international peacekeeping forces may be considered as a means to maintain stability during any transition towards a long-term resolution. Such forces could help prevent escalations of violence and provide a secure environment for negotiations, particularly in the event of renewed hostilities.

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