

**Committee/Council: Security Council**

**Issue: The question of the disputed Western Sahara territories**

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## Introduction

Western Sahara is a region situated in the north of Africa, bordering the countries of Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. Its population consists of mostly people of Moroccan nationality and the minority of the Sahrawi population, which consists of native people living in the western part of Sahara and more explicitly claim to be citizens of the Sahrawi Arab Republic. Currently, Western Sahara is a disputed territory by Morocco and the Sahrawi people, thus fuelling the conflict between them and leading the Sahrawi people, who wish to gain total independence from Moroccan authority, to the foundation of the Polisario Front. Morocco has many times used armed response towards the claims of the Polisario Front, and has a quite large arsenal, since it is backed by countries such as Spain, USA and France. On the other hand, the Polisario Front have also a quite large military and are currently backed by Algeria. The region is considered to be rich in oil deposits, nevertheless, due to Sahara's climate, agricultural and horticultural development is at a decline. Morocco has been exploiting the regions natural resources and is in control of them, which led the Sahrawi People to protest and claim control from Morocco. Presently, Western Sahara is divided into three parts. Two of them are known as the Southern Provinces and currently belong to Morocco and are inhabited mostly by Morrocoans and by a number of Sahrawi refugees. The third one, known as the Free Zone, is claimed by the Polisario Front and its population consists of only Sahrawi People while there have been rumours of Al-Quaeda terrorist presence.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Congress of Berlin

The Berlin Conference, organised by the chancellor of Germany Otto von Bismark, regulated European colonization and trade in Africa during the period of the New Imperialism.

### Self-Determination

The process by which a country determines its own statehood and forms its own allegiances and government.

### Polisario Front

The Polisario Front is a political and military organization, whose goal is to claim the land of Western Sahara and gain the independence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and put an end to the presence of Moroccan control in the area.

### Western Sahara

Western Sahara is a territory in North-western tip of Africa, bordered by the North Atlantic Ocean, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania.

## Background Information

### Colonization and Decolonization

In 1884, after the decisions of the Congress of Berlin, Spain was given full territorial and coastal control over Western Sahara, benefiting from the resources given and especially fishing. In 1960, the United Nations adopted resolution Number 1514 with the title, Declaration on the granting of independence to Colonial Countries and peoples, which actually forced Spain to grant independence to the region. Many countries actually gave independence to their colonized regions, except Spain which did not take any action relevant to the matter. The United Nations and the international community started pressuring Spain to finally liberate Western Sahara. In 1971, Spain started giving certain liberties but not backing off completely from the region, after protests from the Sahrawi people and announced that a referendum will take place, concerning the self-determination of West Sahara. However, the referendum, was cancelled since the two parties involved did not in any way helped towards its successful holding.

### Moroccan interference and the Green March

While Spain refused to give up Spanish Sahara, the Kingdom of Morocco decided to follow a rather expensive policy, claiming that the rightful borders of Morocco should be re-established by claiming that the region rightfully belonged to it. In fact, King Hassan of Morocco, took the case to the International Court of Justice, asking it to ratify Morocco's sovereignty over the region. In 1975, the International Court of Justice's decision was not in favor of Morocco's aspirations. Instead, the United Nations decided to investigate the views of the local population in the region. It seemed that, with an overwhelming majority, the people clearly wanted liberty. King Hassan in response, convinced the Morocci people to peacefully march to Western Sahara, a movement called The Green March. The Spanish

military, in order not to harm any civilians, was forced to withdraw, allowing Morocco to establish itself as a leading force in Western Sahara.

#### The Madrid Agreement and the establishment of MINURSO

In 1975, Spain, in an effort to avoid any potential conflict, granted via the Madrid Accords, a treaty between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania in order to facilitate the decolonization of Western Sahara, the two-thirds of the region to the kingdom of Morocco and one-third to Mauritania. In 1976, in order to protest for the decisions taken, the Polisario Front declared the Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic and after two years of negotiations was given by Mauritania, the one-third of the claimed land. The Polisario Front, using the newly acquired lands, opened guerrilla war against Morocco. After a decade of bloody war and the numerous attempts by the United Nations, a treaty was signed between the two countries, who agreed to stop armed conflict. After ensuring a relative peace, the United Nations started organizing the next phase of solving the conflict with the creation of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Its primary goal was to identify the eligibility of voters for a new referendum with the options of either independence or integration with Morocco. In 1991, after the intensification of the efforts of the MINURSO, a ceasefire was agreed between the two countries and the referendum was scheduled to take place sometime in 1992. However, as King Hassan evaluated that the referendum's result would be against Moroccan interests, he ordered the movement of thousands of settlers to Spanish Sahara in order to vote in favor of the integration with Morocco. Following these actions, MINURSO was forced to postpone the referendum and ultimately completely canceling it.

#### Election of Kofi Annan and Special Envoy James Baker

In 1997, Kofi Annan was elected as new Secretary General and immediately started taking actions to address the issue. In order to have a clearer view of the situation, he appointed James Baker as Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General in Western Sahara. Having examined all the possible solutions to the problem, he proposed the Baker Plans I and II. After seeing that none of his attempts at solving the issue would succeed he resigned from his position in 2004.

#### The current situation

Since the resignation of James Baker, the situation has unfortunately deteriorated. Both of the parties have stated that they do not wish to enter into any sort of negotiations for the matter at hand. Furthermore, Polisario has openly stated that it is wishing to continue its armed policy if needed and Morocco not only has violated the ceasefire agreement in 1991 but has been continuously hindering the efforts of the MINURSO and generally of the United Nations to give an adequate solution to the problem.

### **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### Spain

Spain has been a key player in Western Sahara for many years and while has not openly sided with neither party, continues to this day to have very friendly relations with the government of Morocco. This can be explained due to the fact that while Spain was forced to decolonize the region, it still has interest in its resources and Morocco would be willing to give resources to Spain in exchange for their support in the conflict.. However, in recent years Spain has started forming diplomatic relations with Algeria, a major ally to the Polisario front, but this has not changed in Spain's attitude towards the problem.

### The Kingdom of Morocco

After gaining independence, Morocco has meticulously pursued the idea of Greater Morocco and adding Western Sahara in its borders. Many support that the Kingdom of Morocco is more interested in the resources offered in Western Sahara rather the land itself. This is the reason why the Moroccan government has taken every action possible in order to establish itself as the rightful owner of Spanish Sahara and putting at halt every action that threatens their authority over the region.

### Mauritania

Mauritania, along with Morocco, has also numerously claimed the lands of Western Sahara, but under the pressure of the growing number of the Polisario Front forces in the region, decided to sign a peace treaty and give up the land which was given to them by the Madrid Accords.

### Algeria

Algeria has never claimed any parts of the region; still, it has been strongly supporting the efforts of the Polisario Front and its rights to freedom. Algeria has actually voted in favor of UN resolutions with respect to the organization of a referendum.

### The United States of America

The United States of America have been very friendly towards Morocco, due to the fact that Morocco was a major ally during the Cold War since it protected the region of Western Sahara from any possible Soviet interference. That is why the USA has been supporting Morocco's efforts to obtain the region, not only via the United Nations and especially the Security Council but also by supplying them with weapons.

### France

France was a major colonial force in Africa and especially in Algeria and Morocco. Like the United States of America, it favors Morocco in the conflict and has been also supplying it with weapons. It has also used its veto power more than a few times in order to prevent the passing of any resolution which would not favor Morocco. France is also very interested in harvesting the resources of Western Sahara and also keeping a friendly policy towards Morocco, given the fact that it is a previous colony.

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

MINURSO was established in 1991 in Western Sahara, under United Nations Security Council Resolution 690, with the purpose of monitoring the ceasefire and organizing a referendum which would allow to the Sahrawi people to choose between gaining their independence and integrating with Morocco and thus finally completing the decolonization of the Western Sahara region. MINURSO work has been met with mixed reviews and has been criticized due to the fact that it has not the capacity to monitor human rights.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1884	Spain completes the colonization of the Western Sahara
1965	The United Nations start putting pressure on Spain to decolonize the region of Western Sahara
May 1973	The Polisario Front is found
October 1975	Morocco and Mauritania ask the International Court of Justice to ratify their right to control the region
November 6 <sup>th</sup> , 1975	Morocco organizes the Green March
November 14 <sup>th</sup> , 1975	Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania sign the Madrid accords
February 27 <sup>th</sup> , 1976	The Polisario front declares the foundation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
August 1979	Mauritania signs a peace treaty with the Polisario, giving to it their claimed lands
1984	Morocco withdraws from the African Union in protest after the admission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
1991	The United Nations establishes the MINURSO in Western Sahara, with James Baker in charge
1992	The originally planned referendum is postponed
May 1996	The referendum is completely canceled
1997 - 2004	James Baker mediates talks between the two sides and formulates the Baker Plans
June 2004	James Baker resigns from his position
March 2008	Morocco and the Polisario Front resume negotiations without any final outcome

February 2014	Judge Pablo Rafael Ruz Guitierrez of the Spanish Supreme Court will attempt prosecution against senior Moroccan military officials involved in the death of Saharawi citizens in 1976.
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## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Resolution 690

*Establishing MINURSO*

### A/RES/1514

*Declaration on the granting of independence to Colonial Countries and peoples*

### A/RES/2027

*Request at Spain for the decolonization of Spanish Sahara*

### The Baker Plan I

*Suggestion for the organization of a referendum on the subject of limited autonomy, Morocco is to have full territorial control over the region. The plan was endorsed by Morocco but thoroughly rejected by Polisario.*

### The Baker Plan II

*Suggestion for a 4 year period of an autonomous Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic under the sovereignty of Morocco with a referendum to follow and choose an independent Western Sahara or integration with Morocco. The plan was rejected by Morocco as it did not wish to hold a referendum with total self-determination as an option.*

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As mentioned previously there have been numerous attempts to solve the issue but so far no efficient solution has been given. At first, the Madrid Accords tried to distribute the control over the region between Morocco and Mauritania but failed due to the fact that the claims of the Sahrawi people for independence were ignored. Seeing that the conflict escalated, the United Nations stepped in with the establishment of MINURSO, which tried to give an acceptable solution via a referendum but did not succeed as King Hassan's actions, compromised MINURSO'S actions. Then, Special Envoy James Baker, formulated Baker Plans I and II which

were rejected by both Morocco and the Polisario Front, because they did not suit their interests. As of today, after the resignation of James Baker, there have been efforts by countries acting as mediators or directly by the UN in order for the two sides to have a fruitful negotiation to end this conflict, but so far there has been no further improvement on the matter at hand.

## Possible Solutions

Delegates must have in mind that the main problem of this issue is that the two sides involved are unwilling to back down from their claims and reach a compromise.

- Regarding the solutions, special attention must be first and foremost given to the safeguard of the human rights of the people and refugees in the region. Morocco has been accused of not only violating basic human rights of Sahrawi refugees and torturing arrested Polisario members but also censuring all Moroccan citizens who do not agree with the government's policies.
- Furthermore, delegates must find a way so that a solution is given to the issue and how this solution will be implemented. A referendum would be a difficult choice due to the fact that after Morocco's actions, the demographics of the region have changed; favoring Morocco, while endorsing the Baker Plans should be avoided due to the fact that they have been already rejected by the two sides. They must also find ways to make certain that any decision will be accepted and respected by both sides.
- Then, delegates should emphasize on how, if Western Sahara is granted self-determination, will economically support itself, due to the fact that agricultural production cannot be sustained in the area.
- Importance must be given as well to the avoidance of any possible rise of any new escalation of armed conflict.
- Finally, delegates must also bear in mind that Al-Qaeda activity has been reported in the area of the Polisario Front and since the region is unstable, a potential terrorist threat could be rising, thus making it of utmost importance to address a possible security concern.

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