

# General Assembly Fourth Committee (SPECPOL)

Research Reports



**Forum:** General Assembly Fourth Committee (SPECPOL)

**Issue:** Addressing the Political and Humanitarian Situation in Western Sahara

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## **Introduction**

The conflict in Western Sahara has been ongoing for decades between Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic/ Polisario Front. It originated during times of Spanish colonial rule in the Western Sahara when there was an active revolt by the Polisario Front against the Spanish forces. Later in 1975, following Spain's withdrawal, Western Sahara was occupied by Moroccan and Mauritanian troops. Consequently, the SADR, backed by Algeria, launched a military struggle against the Moroccan and Mauritanian forces.

The conflict escalated into an armed struggle between the Polisario Front and Morocco, known as the Western Sahara War. A similar conflict was also taking place between the Polisario Front and Mauritania, however, in the face of multiple defeats, Mauritania withdrew in 1979, leaving the territory to Morocco. Over the next couple of years, Morocco would establish control over most of the Western Sahara territory and build the "Sand berm", a defensive wall along the entire territory.

In 1991, a cease-fire agreement was reached between the Polisario Front and Morocco. However, the independence of the SADR has yet to take place. Today, the SADR can govern inland parts of Western Sahara, but the territory is still under Moroccan control. The conflict has now shifted from military to civilian resistance and poses challenges to peace in the region. The SADR is still resisting Moroccan control and striving for official recognition.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Polisario Front**

The indigenous Sahrawi forces fighting for independence of Western Sahara.

### **The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)**

The self-proclaimed republic declared by the Polisario Front in 1976, was only recognized by several countries worldwide. Is not recognized by the United Nations as its own state, but is recognized as the official representative of the Sahrawi people.

### **Sand Berm**

The heavily militarized 2,500 Km wall built by Morocco that divides the territory.

### **Referendum**

A vote proposed to determine the future of Western Sahara and the control over it, however, it has yet to be conducted by the UN, despite being part of the peace process.

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **Morocco**

Currently controls about 80% of Western Sahara and claims sovereignty. The Moroccan government is against the referendum and has instead proposed an autonomy plan for the region where they will grant the SADR partial governmental control of certain regions while still maintaining Moroccan sovereignty.

### **Polisario Front/SADR**

The state of the Sahrawi people who want independence and recognition.

### **Algeria**

A key supporter of the SADR, providing them with all types of assistance and acting as a vocal advocate for the Sahrawi people.

### **Mauritania**

Initially controlling certain regions of Western Sahara like Morocco but pulled out and signed a peace treaty with the SADR in 1979 after facing many defeats by the Polisario front. Mauritania no longer plays a role in the conflict, however, it remains a crucial member in discussions about the conflict.

### **United States**

The United States formally recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara as part of the Abraham Accords in 2020. This has significantly influenced the diplomatic landscape of the conflict.

### **Spain**

Spain was the former colonial power of Western Sahara. Starting in 2020, they have aligned more with Morocco, following the United States' lead.

### **African Union (AU)**

The African Union has expressed support for the Sahrawi people and has included the SADR as a member state. However, its involvement in the overall peace process is limited.

### **UN Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)**

The United Nations mission is tasked with overseeing the Western Sahara conflict and taking actions to promote peace and to issue the referendum.

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
1884	Spain colonized the Western Sahara, which would become known as the Spanish Sahara.
1960s	A movement emerges among the Sahrawi people, advocating for independence.
November 6, 1975	The Green March, involves around 350,000 Moroccans entering Western Sahara to assert claim following Spain's withdrawal decision.
December 1975	The ICJ issues an advisory opinion stating that there are no ties between Morocco or Mauritania and the Western Sahara.
1976	The Polisario Front declared the SADR as the official government of Western Sahara and Spain withdrew from the region, leading to conflict between Morocco and the SADR.
1977	France begins military support for Morocco.
1979	Mauritania withdraws after signing a peace treaty with the SADR.
1980s	Conflict continues with low-intensity warfare like guerrilla fighters.
1991	A ceasefire was reached between Morocco and SADR, facilitated by the UN, and led to the establishment of MINURSO.
2010	Protests occur, highlighting Sahrawi discontent with the Moroccan rule, and this lead to violent clashes.
November 13, 2020	Morocco conducts military operations in the buffer zone, leading the SADR to declare the end of the ceasefire.
2020	The United States recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over Western
2022	Diplomatic efforts continue and consultations are held between parties, however, no actual progress is being made toward a resolution.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

1. **UN General Assembly Resolution 1514:** Calls for decolonization of Western Sahara which was under Spanish rule at the time.
2. **UN Security Council Resolution 690:** Established MINURSO to monitor the ceasefire and organize a referendum.
3. **Various UN Security Council Resolutions:** Over the years, the UN has established many resolutions like resolutions 1979 and 2285 to extend MINURSO's mandate and call for negotiations.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

**Settlement Plan (1988):** Morocco and SADR accepted a settlement plan that included a ceasefire and a referendum for the Sahrawi people to choose between independence and integration with Morocco.

**Establishment of MINURSO (1991):** The UN established MINURSO to monitor ceasefire and referendums in hopes of increasing peace.

**Autonomy Plan (2007):** Morocco presented a plan offering autonomy for Western Sahara under Moroccan Sovereignty, and it was deemed a credible plan by the Security Council.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Referendum**

It has already been accepted before as a solution by both parties in which the Sahrawi people get to choose between integration with Morocco or independence. However, this has not taken place. Such a solution may be a great peaceful option if both parties were to agree to it again.

### **Autonomy Plan**

Welcomed by the Security Council as a great and credible plan, it includes Morocco granting autonomy to the Sahrawi people but also maintaining sovereignty. Such a realistic solution could grant both parties what they want with little compromise.

### **Free Association**

The Western Sahara becoming its complete self-governing region in association with Morocco. This can allow for increased economic prosperity and peace while also giving Western Sahara the control it wants and preserving Morocco's core interests.

### **UN Led Negotiations**

Negotiations and discussions like these can help both parties express what they need, and reach compromises and valuable solutions.

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