

Arab  
League  
**ARAB**



**MUNUC 35**

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

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## CHAIR LETTER

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Salam Wa Alaikum Arab League Delegates,

I'm JJ Abu-Halimah, a third-year Biochemistry major who's also Premed and your chair for the committee. I'm a Palestinian and a fan of great food. My go-to snack in the Middle East is 5 Shawarma sandwiches. I am from the suburbs of Nashville, but I despise country music.

Outside of MUNUC, I am the Treasurer of the UChicago Global Health Alliance, am on the Arab Student's Association Board, am in the anime club, and work in a Chemistry Lab.

As your Chair, hope to create a fun but also insightful committee experience. I hope that you work hard in addressing the Western Sahara Crisis, while also enjoying the experience.

While I look forward to your creativity, please remember that while we want to have fun while solving this crisis, it is just that: a crisis. Take care to be respectful of everyone, and do not try to engage in acts that violate MUNUC's code of conduct. These are not solutions to address the Western Sahara Crisis and will just make things worse. Also, please be respectful of Islam.

I'm looking forward to a great committee and hopefully solutions to the Western Sahara Crisis! I love talking to people, and if you have any questions (or memes), feel free to contact me!

Best,

JJ Abu-Halimah

[jaabuhalimah@uchicago.edu](mailto:jaabuhalimah@uchicago.edu)

## CRISIS DIRECTOR LETTER

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Salam Wa Alaikum delegates of the Arab League,

My name is Cameron Landin, and I will be serving as your Crisis Director during MUNUC 35. I am a second-year hoping to double major in Political Science and Economics, but I tend more towards Economics. I am a native of Savannah, Georgia: the greatest city in the world. I am a Mexican-American who loves spicy food; I grow and eat some of the spiciest peppers in the world. Please ask me about it.

I am an active member of the Catholic Student Association and Calvert House, participant in the Outdoor Adventure Club and their trips, and worked on Political Campaigns over the summer.

In my role as Crisis Director, it is my job to keep you motivated and engaged while offering educating and character-building experiences in dealing with the crisis at hand.

I am excited to be working with you on the Western Sahara crisis, which is an often overlooked yet important issue in international affairs and nation building. I hope that you will work together to create a prosperous solution for the people of Western Sahara and learn more about our world in the process.

I am excited to meet y'all in MUNUC 35! If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me!

Best,

Cameron Landin

[cameronlandin@uchicago.edu](mailto:cameronlandin@uchicago.edu)

## SENSITIVITY NOTE

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Salam delegates,

Although we plan to have a lot of fun and energy in our committee, we do want to acknowledge the sensitivity of the topic being discussed. There are religious, political, social, and economic disputes to consider, and these issues must be approached with caution. We will not tolerate ethnic cleansing, purposely harming and/or killing people, or discriminating against others.

You are more than encouraged to speak out against and criticize governments, but please keep any such criticisms separate from the people, as that can perpetuate nationality-based discrimination. Moreover, while we encourage you to embrace the character of the nation which you are representing, you must still maintain a standard of conduct characterized by equality and tolerance, *regardless of your country's official stance*.

Again, you are dealing with a regional crisis, and we want to lower, not heighten, the amount of animus, so please act accordingly. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, or are unsure whether something would or would not be acceptable, feel free to speak with us!

Salam,

JJ & Cameron



# COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MECHANICS

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## ***Overview of the Arab League***

The Arab League is an intergovernmental regional body of 22 Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen) formed on March 22nd, 1945 in response to post-WWII regional tensions and growing anti-Zionist sentiment. Syria's membership has been suspended since 2011, but in our committee, Syria's delegation will be reinstated. There are also five observer states (Armenia, Brazil, Eritrea, India, Venezuela).

Since its founding, the purpose of the Arab League has expanded to "draw closer the relations between member states and coordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries." Since its inception, the Arab League has served as a medium for geopolitical, social, and economic cooperation on the tasks of broader regional development and conflict resolution. It is particularly notable that the Arab League is somewhat notorious for internal disagreements between member states and an inconsistent record with regard to enforcing unilateral resolutions.

This committee is a regional body that mainly contains traditional Model United Nations parliamentary procedure. However, on occasion, the committee will be presented with time-sensitive crisis-style updates that will require deft resolution. Because of this, we may amend the boundaries of parliamentary procedure as needed. For our purposes, Syria will be reinstated as a member of the committee, and observer states may vote on resolutions and crisis directives; because resolutions are non-binding, it would be illogical to prevent observers from fully participating in this simulated committee. The crisis elements are described later in this section.

## ***Crisis Mechanics***

*Our committee will not include classical crisis mechanics.*

Usually, crisis committees involve a backroom responding to notes and crisis breaks to which delegates have to respond. Instead, we will not have a backroom, so there will be no classic crisis note writing (notes to each other and the dais are encouraged!).

We will be performing crisis breaks, and we will have a couple of breaks each session. These will mimic real life crises that suddenly arise. You will be tasked with working together to write smaller resolutions (which are separate from the longer committee resolutions), known as directives, to take actions to mitigate these crises. We will, in turn, work to respond to your actions in other breaks that will reveal the relative success of your plans.

The Western Saharan Conflict is a very serious issue, and we believe that delegates should focus on it in the front room to better focus on addressing the crisis and facilitating multinational cooperation, rather than have individuals work alone in a backroom setting. We believe that by utilizing crisis break mechanics, we can present you with dangerous and sudden situations that mimic real life threats so that our committee can closely simulate actual circumstances and issues. We hope that through such mechanics, we can all grow in our response time to crises and teamwork capabilities.

# TOPIC: CONFLICT IN WESTERN SAHARA

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## Statement of the Problem

### *Introduction*

Currently, the area of the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara is divided between the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and Morocco. The Sahrawi people there have sought independence for decades, however Moroccan and Mauritanian claims to the land have kept that dream at bay. Now, Morocco occupies most of the area as an extension of their nation, denying the Sahrawi people the right to control their own land.

The ruling government of the SADR is the Polisario Front, and due to decades of skirmishes with Moroccan forces, a peaceful resolution to this situation seems impossible. While few nations recognize the SADR as the rightful government in Western Sahara, many simultaneously see Morocco's occupation as illegal.

This crisis has resulted in several territorial, humanitarian, economic, and political crises. To first address these crises, we must better understand them.

### *Territorial Disputes*

The root of the Western Sahara Crisis is the territorial fight between the Polisario Front and Morocco. This land, which makes up about 252,120 square kilometers, is home to approximately 630,000 people.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Western Sahara Population (Live)." Worldometer, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/western-sahara-population/>.

<sup>2</sup> Sharaf, Nabil. "The Polisario Front, Morocco, and the Western Sahara Conflict." Arab Center Washington DC, 8 July 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-polisario-front-morocco-and-the-western-sahara-conflict/>.



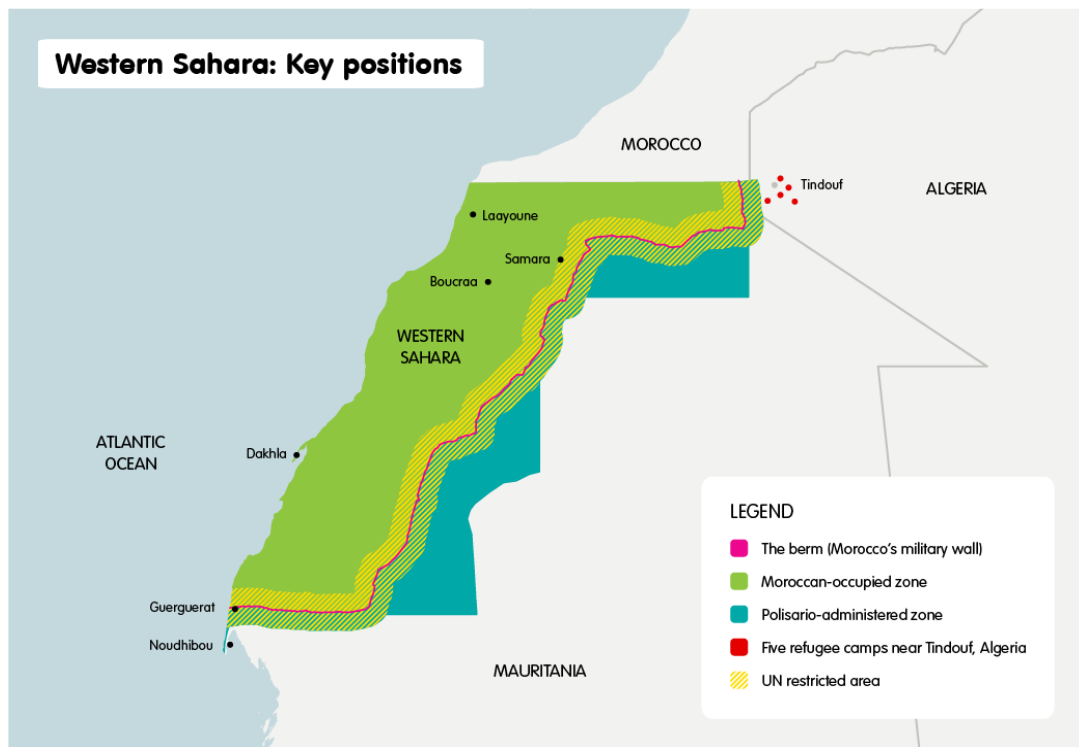


Figure 1: Western Sahara: Key Positions<sup>3</sup>

The most prominent resources in Western Sahara are rich fishing and phosphate reserves. Additionally, its large, unused, and sun-exposed land area is ripe for solar energy generation.<sup>4</sup> There aren't many people to establish a strong economy in Western Sahara, but there is a lot of land. The Western Sahara Crisis is politically motivated because each side wants to lay claim to more land—while the land itself is not particularly usable, it offers 1,100 kilometers of coastline for trade and fishing opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

As seen in the map above, Morocco is the dominant side in water control in the conflict, meaning they control West Saharan fishing and sea-trade access. The Polisario Front has a small sliver of

<sup>3</sup> Dworkin, Anthony. "North African Standoff: How the Western Sahara Conflict Is Fuelling New Tensions between Morocco and Algeria." ECFR, 8 Apr. 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/north-african-standoff-how-the-western-sahara-conflict-is-fuelling-new-tensions-between-morocco-and-algeria/>.

<sup>4</sup> "The Resource Curse." Western Sahara Resource Watch, <https://wsrw.org/en/the-resource-curse>.

<sup>5</sup> "Western Sahara." World Factbook, [https://relief.unboundmedicine.com/relief/view/The-World-Factbook/563250/all/Western\\_Sahara](https://relief.unboundmedicine.com/relief/view/The-World-Factbook/563250/all/Western_Sahara).

coastal land near the bottom of Western Sahara, but this pales in comparison to Morocco's coastal claim.

### ***Economic Hurdles***

Due to its dry and arid geography, Western Sahara has been a hostile environment for human settlement and economic growth. Agriculture in the region has been successful in some areas and oases, but is unable to provide much more than subsistence due to water scarcity. The phosphate mining activity has not contributed much to the local economy, although there is a significant growth of phosphate extraction facilities. On a similar note, small scale tourist activities have grown but do not seem to be able to contribute a larger impact due to the region's remote location and lack of access. Without these sufficient conditions, the only reasonable source of income for locals comes from the fishing industry that employs almost two-thirds of its population.<sup>6</sup>

For the coastal areas controlled by the Moroccan government, source of fish is certainly not a huge problem. However, for the Polisario Front controlled areas, lack of water resources and industrial infrastructure makes the inland region more uninhabitable. The Polisario Front government does control a strip of coastline on the Southwest, but this is miniscule by the length of coastline under Moroccan control. This imbalance has caused unemployment to reach 20% and poverty to reach 15% in the region.<sup>7</sup>

In efforts to boost the economy and maintain its popularity among 500,000 people living in the region, the Moroccan government has poured a huge amount of money into fuel and water subsidies, tax cuts, and military infrastructure projects. These expenses, however, are not financially sustainable as they show a negative balance on the government's budget. On the other hand, the Polisario Front is only able to pursue fishing on its limited coastline and oil exploration in its interior. Its 30,000 people also survive by nomadically raising animals such as camels, sheep, and goats.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## ***Political Situation***

The two states have contrasting forms of government. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament. Its multi-party universal suffrage elections have been regarded as “reasonably free and fair” by international observers, although Democracy Index put Morocco as an authoritarian regime in 2014. The official position of the government is that Western Sahara is an integral part of the kingdom. It refers to the Western Sahara region as “Moroccan Sahara” or “Southern Provinces.”<sup>9</sup>

The in-exile Polisario Front government, called the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), is a presidential republic with a unicameral single-party parliament. The president and prime minister hold the executive branch of the government while Sahrawi National Council (SNC) acts as its legislative body, elected from 11 constituencies. People in the Free Zone and refugee camps can participate in elections. The government is currently based at the Tindouf refugee camp in Algeria with Tifariti as its temporary capital since 2008.<sup>10</sup>

Both the Moroccan and Polisario Front governments have contested their claims for the territory in the international stage. As of 2022, the overwhelming majority of United Nations member states have not announced any position. As many as 31 states recognize Western Sahara as an autonomous region of Morocco, with 20 states supporting but then withdrawing the claim. On the other hand, 40 states support the Polisario Front or SADR government’s sovereignty and maintain diplomatic relations. Some other states support the self-determination of the Sahrawi people, but do not recognize the SADR.

Despite such limited recognition, the Polisario Front or SADR government has been listed on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. This sends a message that the United Nations does not recognize Morocco’s claim over Western Sahara and supports the right of self-determination of the Sahrawi people through a referendum. The Polisario Front is also an observer

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<sup>9</sup> Nabil 2021

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

member in the Andean Community of Nations. The Arab League however, does not have a clear position on the conflict.<sup>11</sup>

The Polisario Front government has been a fully recognized founding member of the African Union since 1982. Morocco withdrew from the African Union back in 1984 as a protest to SADR's membership. In 2016, the king of Morocco announced that Morocco intends to rejoin the union. In response to this, 28 member states of the African Union issued a joint statement to withdraw support for the SADR and revoke its membership. Although this statement is a significant political victory for Rabat, it does not contain any legally binding action since there is no mechanism to expel a member state in the African Union.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the ongoing conflict and dispute over the two governments' legitimacy over the region, clashes of authority and rights over the area have erupted. In December 2015, the Polisario Front government brought a case against an agriculture deal between the EU and Morocco since the deal involved products from the Western Sahara. This caused the deal to be canceled under a ruling by the EU's Court of Justice in order to not include Western Sahara in the deal. Three years later, the same court ruled against Morocco again where a new fisheries agreement must exclude fishing areas off the coast of Western Sahara. These cases caused a huge issue for the Moroccan government, since the EU accounts for 63% of Morocco's export and future resources exploitation in the region has been halted.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Humanitarian Situation***

The humanitarian situation for Western Sahara is largely defined by where you live. There is a sharp divide between the areas controlled by the Polisario Front and the areas controlled by Morocco, both facing their own humanitarian challenges.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "World Refugee Survey 2009: Mauritania," US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed November 27, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130710010454/http://www.refugees.org/resources/refugee-warehousing/archived-world-refugee-surveys/2009-wrs-country-updates/mauritania.html>.

## Refugees

There are many thousands of Sahrawi refugees which fled during Morocco's invasion, but their numbers are disputed. Most refugees reside in the southwest corner of Algeria in the Tindouf province; Algeria claims their numbers are about 150,000 while Morocco claims it lies at 50,000. These camps are controlled by the Polisario front with little Algerian interference. Mauritania also has about 26,000 refugees and Spain has about 3,000. These refugees, especially the ones in Algeria, are denied access to their homelands in Western Sahara. This has led to over four decades of family separation imposed by the Moroccan government.<sup>15</sup>

## Human Rights

Refugees abroad seem to enjoy a far better human rights situation than the Sahrawis residing in Western Sahara under Moroccan control. The refugee camps in Algeria enjoy freedom of speech, movement, and other rights within the camps. Sexism is an undeniable issue within the camps, however the Polisario Front has worked diligently to integrate women into the society as equals. Most of the camp administrators are women and the National Union of Sahrawi Women is an organization which advocates on their behalf.

Within Western Sahara, human rights have been systematically denied for decades, according to most reports. The Moroccan government has been accused of discrimination against the Sahrawi people in favor of Moroccan settlers, with Sahrawi people being denied the right to political organization through unions and elections being controlled by the state. Politically-active, pro-independence Sahrawis are routinely imprisoned and tortured by Moroccan officials. Many are forced to live in terrible conditions within prisons for years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid; "Amnesty.org." Amnesty International, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/algeria/report-algeria/>; Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Country Operations Plan." UNHCR, 2007; "Des Femmes Sahraouies Dénoncent, Au Parlement Européen, Les Conditions De Vie Inhumaines Dans Les Camps De Tindouf." Menara.ma, March 3, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140915004632/http://www.menara.ma/fr/2013/03/08/525376-des-femmes-sahraouies-d%C3%A9noncent-au-parlement-europ%C3%A9en-les-conditions-de-vie-inhumaines-dans-les-camps-de-tindouf.html>; Peoples Dispatch. "Right Violations and War Crimes by Morocco Continue in Occupied Western Sahara, Says Codesa Report." Peoples Dispatch, August 3, 2022. <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/08/03/right-violations-and-war-crimes-by-morocco-continue-in-occupied-western-sahara-says-codesa-report/>; Amnesty International. "Middle East And North

## Prisoners

Both sides have reportedly committed egregious acts and crimes against prisoners of war. From the 1970s to 2006 the Polisario Front held prisoners of war in their refugee camps and denied them many human rights. Since then, Polisario-controlled territories and refugee camps are supervised by the UN to monitor human rights, so abuses have become far rarer.

Morocco does not recognize the Polisario Front as a governing body but rather as a terrorist organization, and therefore it treats its POWs as it sees fit. Morocco denied the existence of these prisoners until 1996 when it released 66 of them. The Polisario Front claims that 151 captured soldiers are still in Morocco. The larger issue is the “disappeared,” political prisoners taken by the Moroccan government early in their occupation, most of whom have not been released. As of 2010, 520 remained unaccounted for. Previously, they have been released by the Moroccan government or their bodies have been exhumed in the desert.<sup>17</sup>

## Education

Education is surprisingly good in the Sahrawi refugee camps. The Polisario Front has prioritized education for all in the camps, with education available to all refugees. Preschools, primary schools, and secondary schools are all available in the camps. The Polisario Front has drastically increased literacy rates in the camps from about 5 percent at their formation to 90 percent today. There are no universities in the camps, so those who want a university education are sent abroad, usually to Algeria, Spain, or Cuba. It has been claimed that those sent to Cuba undergo communist indoctrination and are trained with weapons, however students today state they are there of their own free will. In Western Sahara, students go into the Moroccan education system where education is provided from preschool to university level, but optional after middle school. Discrimination still

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Africa : Morocco / Western Sahara.” Amnesty International, October 12, 2007.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20071012222844/http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/mar-summary-eng>.

<sup>17</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Morocco.” U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State, February 23, 2001. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/nea/804.htm>;

“Polisario Front Demands from the UN to Compel Morocco Release Political Prisoners and Account for the 'Disappeareds'.” Sahara Presse Service, September 21, 2005.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080720165846/http://www.spsrasd.info/sps-e210905.html#4>.



exists here, with it being harder for Sahrawi people to attend Moroccan universities than Moroccans.<sup>18</sup>

### Health, Nutrition, and Water

The main areas where the Refugee camps suffer are in health, nutrition, and water access. Sahrawis have access to medical care, with dozens of clinics and a hospital with regional branches in the camps. Chronic malnutrition is a serious issue for the Sahrawi people. They receive food aid and water from outside the camps brought in on trucks daily, as their position in the desert makes it impossible to have any domestic agriculture or livestock. Their food shipments are never enough and tend to lack in nutritional value, making most Sahrawi refugees diseased from years of nutritional deficiencies. Hygiene is also a major issue in the camps, with people unable to clean themselves regularly and the same latrines being used for decades without proper sanitation. This further exacerbates disease in the camps, and makes this the largest issue facing the Sahrawi refugees in their daily life.

Water access is also a major issue in the main part of Western Sahara. People can be forced to walk for miles to reach the nearest water source in the forms of wells and wadis, but these supplies are often contaminated. Desalinization is another method for water access, and with their large coastline it has become one of the main methods. Nutritional access is better in Western Sahara than in refugee camps, but for the impoverished, the food situation can be just as bad. In the cities, hospitals and clinics are readily available to the people, but in the desert medical care is practically nonexistent.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Western Saharan Refugee Students in Cuba." ARSO. UNHCR, September 2005.  
<https://www.arso.org/UNHCRcuba.htm>; Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Sahrawi Refugees: Three Generations without Access to Water." We Are Water Foundation, April 27, 2022.  
[https://www.wearewater.org/en/sahrawi-refugees-three-generations-without-access-to-water\\_350421](https://www.wearewater.org/en/sahrawi-refugees-three-generations-without-access-to-water_350421); "UNHCR-WFP Team Finds Dire Health Conditions in Algerian Refugee Camps." UNHCR, June 12, 2007.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20070612110145/http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/45d09ac14.html>.

## History of the Problem

### 1346 - 1972

In 1346, Western Sahara was ruled by primarily Berber, Arabic speaking nomads. It was in this year that the North African ethnic tribe first had contact with European explorers, meeting sailors from Portugal who were searching for the Senegal river who instead discovered a bay in Western Sahara.<sup>20</sup>

The first Spanish interaction with the land came later in 1476 when they established a small and short-lived trading post called Santa Cruz de Mar Pequeña. The existence of this trading post sparked Spanish interest in the land once again in the 19th century and was used as a lever to claim the surrounding areas.<sup>21</sup>

By the late 19th century, the area had continued its existence as a sparsely populated area of nomadic tribes with the Spanish only using the coasts for commercial fishing, but it was at this time that the Europeans gathered at the Berlin Conference to divide up Africa. The Spanish at this time ruled an empire that had been in decline for centuries, so they received what was left after the major players got their share of Africa. Western Sahara was among what was left over.<sup>22</sup>

In 1884 the Spanish Society of Africanists and Colonists established treaties with the coastal populations of Western Sahara and declared a protectorate over the area, cementing Spanish rule in the region. Simultaneously, the French colonies of Morocco and French West Africa halted major expansion of the colony beyond the already established protectorate, so by 1934, the modern borders of Western Sahara took shape.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Western Sahara." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Western-Sahara>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



Figure 2: Colonial territories in Western Sahara.<sup>24</sup>

In 1956, Morocco gained independence from the French and quickly claimed Western Sahara as their own, sending troops in and clashing with the Spanish military, which successfully repelled them. Soon after, Mauritania, who also has historic and cultural ties to the region, claimed sovereignty over the area. Alongside these foreign claims came a movement within the region itself, led by the native Sahrawi people who called for independence. This was further complicated by the discovery of large phosphate deposits in the north of the region, making control of the area potentially highly lucrative.<sup>25</sup>

Spain at this time was ruled by the Fascist dictator Francisco Franco whose government tenaciously held on to Western Sahara despite the wider anticolonial movement sweeping the world following World War II. By the early 1970s, Franco planned for a world where he no longer existed,

<sup>24</sup> Sellier, Jean, Bertrand de Brun, and Anne LeFur. Atlas Des Peuples D'Afrique. Paris: La Découverte, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> "Morocco Profile - Timeline." BBC News. BBC, April 24, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14123260>.

implementing reforms in the Spanish homeland. Along with all of this, plans were made for an independence referendum in Spanish Sahara.<sup>26</sup>

### **1972 - 2000**

In 1972, extraction of the deposits at Bu Craa started. The impacts from years of socio-economic transformation caused by drought, desertification, and phosphate mining culminated in a surge of national awareness and anticolonial nationalism. In the early 1970s, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Ro de Oro, led by the nomadic Sahrawis who make up the indigenous population of the Spanish Sahara, emerged and created the Polisario Front. This insurrection prompted Spain to declare its withdrawal from the region in 1975. Faced with constant pressure from Morocco and Mauritania, as well as domestic instability, Spain agreed to the split Western Sahara between the two countries, despite a World Court finding that Morocco's and Mauritania's legal claims to the Spanish Sahara were weak and did not amount to anything. During this time, Hassan II actively supported Morocco's claim to the Spanish Sahara. Even in November 1975, he urged for a "Green March" of 350,000 unarmed Moroccans into the region to show general support for its annexation.<sup>27</sup>

In 1976, Western Sahara was divided between Morocco and Mauritania: Morocco took control of the phosphates and the northern two-thirds of the region, while Mauritania took authority of the southern third. Although this looks like a success for Morocco, it was not a big one because the Polisario Front's guerrillas, who were pushing for Saharan independence, were able to contain Moroccan forces and halted the exploitation of the phosphate deposits that had originally made the Sahara desirable to Morocco. Not long after, sporadic violence erupted between the Polisario Front, which was backed by and based in Algeria, and Moroccan forces. The Polisario Front then formed a government-in-exile known as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (recognized by over 70 nations), and it continued to target Mauritanian and Moroccan outposts in Western Sahara.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "Historical Foundations of the Moroccanity of the Sahara." Mincom, February 10, 2007.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20070210082420/http://www.mincom.gov.ma/english/reg\\_cit/regions/sahara/s\\_hist.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20070210082420/http://www.mincom.gov.ma/english/reg_cit/regions/sahara/s_hist.htm).



Figure 3: Moroccans marching in the desert.<sup>29</sup>

After Mauritania withdrew from the conflict and signed a peace treaty with the Polisario Front in 1979, Morocco swiftly grabbed Mauritania's share of Western Sahara. While the Polisario Front insurgents maintained their incursions, Morocco fortified the crucial triangle created by the Bu Craa mines, Laayoune, and Semara. In 1988, the UN proposed a referendum for the native Sahrawis to decide whether they preferred an autonomous Western Sahara governed by the Polisario Front or whether the region should formally join Morocco. Both Morocco and the Polisario Front agreed to a cease-fire in 1991 after accepting this peace plan. However, as a United Nations administrative and peacekeeping force arrived in Western Sahara to prepare for the referendum, Morocco deployed tens of thousands of "settlers" into the area and insisted on having their voting eligibility assessed. This drawn-out procedure, which includes uncertainties over who among the historically nomadic Sahrawis would be eligible to vote, lasted throughout the 1990s and into the early 21st century. Despite broad opposition to its presence in the regions it controls, Morocco persisted in growing its physical infrastructure in Western Sahara.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Jadaliyya. (n.d.). Morocco's double infallibility: The intergenerational peril of the 1975 Green March. Jadaliyya. Retrieved September 24, 2022, from <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/41535>

<sup>30</sup> "Hassan II." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hassan-II>.

In 1982, the SADR received entry into the Organization of African Unity, the predecessor to the African Union, with near unanimous support from the member states. The motivations of the member states seem to be the spirit of anticolonialism present in the African continent at this time, viewing Morocco as a neocolonialist power asserting control over a fellow African nation, and the SADR entry into the organization was a sharp rebuke of Morocco's invasion. As expected, Morocco did not appreciate the organization's disrespect of their land claim and after a tense two years, Morocco left the OAU. The SADR was brought into the OAU's successor entity, the African Union, at its formation and remains a member state to this day.<sup>31</sup>

### **2000 - Present**

After the Moroccan King Hassan II died and Muhammad VI became king, the Moroccan policy changed such that Morocco refused entirely to hold referendums in Western Sahara in 2001. Morocco began their more aggressive campaign of trying to take control of Western Sahara, taking even less regard to foreign resistance. Alongside this change of foreign policy, thousands of Sahrawis and Polisario Front soldiers moved to Algerian refugee camps as Morocco tried more extensively to take over Western Sahara.

As a result of the change, the UN sought different solutions to address the Western Sahara conflict. Against Muhammad VI's wishes of Morocco refusing to hold referendums on Western Sahara, the UN created a five year autonomy plan for the territory after which a referendum would be put in place. Of course, this was thrown out by the Moroccan government as they again refused to hold referendums.

Various talks occurred between the Moroccan government and the Polisario Front in 2007 and 2008 sponsored by the UN as the threat of the Polisario Front became larger. A peaceful resolution to this conflict was sought, but the problem exists today because none was found.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Africa | Morocco's King Pardons Satirist." BBC News. BBC, January 7, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3376601.stm>.



Years passed and in 2018, the US tried to more extensively involve itself in the Western Sahara conflict. They pushed the UN to remove peacekeeping troops in Western Sahara if Morocco and the Polisario Front did not meet to try to end the conflict. As a result, the two nations held a meeting in December 2018. However, this meeting did nothing, and although a solution to this conflict was not achieved, the UN kept the troops in Western Sahara.



Figure 4: Morocco and Polisario Front peace talks.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, the Polisario Front has been increasing its action in the region. In 2020, it blocked a major trade route between Morocco and Mauritania, hindering the economies of the two nations. Morocco responded with military force, invalidating the 1991 cease-fire agreement.<sup>34</sup>

Over the course of these events, many countries threw their support behind Morocco. In 2020, the United States went from their ambiguous position on the issue to firmly siding with Morocco, supporting their claims to all of Western Sahara. This was done in exchange for Moroccan recognition of Israel.<sup>35</sup> This is the most notable example of a country decisively siding with Morocco,

<sup>33</sup> Western Sahara: The Geneva Meeting – Robert M. Holley -. Morocco On The Move. (2019, January 17). Retrieved September 24, 2022, from <https://moroccoonthemove.com/2018/12/10/western-sahara-the-geneva-meeting-robert-m-holley/>

<sup>34</sup> Western Sahara. Western Sahara | South African History Online. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/western-sahara>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

although it does little to change the positions of various African and Arab states. Roughly one third of the nations which once recognized the Polisario Front as the legitimate rulers of an independent Western Sahara have since reneged their recognition, which for the most part has taken place between the year 2000 and today. The primary cause of this seems to be that few expect Morocco to ever leave Western Sahara, as they have been established there for nearly 50 years and do not seem to be willing to leave without significant military force, which the Polisario Front is unlikely to provide.

Despite the SADR remaining as a member of the African Union, Morocco joined the organization after being absent for 33 years.<sup>36</sup> This is due to many members of the African Union abandoning their recognition of Western Sahara and the benefits presented to Morocco through its participation in this organization alongside every other African state.



Figure 5: The headquarters of the UN Mission in Western Sahara<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hasnaoui, Yasmine. Morocco and the African Union: A New Chapter for Western Sahara Resolution? Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2017. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12679>. Accessed 30 Sep. 2022.

<sup>37</sup> "Western Sahara: Meltdown of a Frozen Conflict." CGSRS, 17 June 2016, <http://cgsrs.org/publications/57>.

## *Conclusion*

Now that we understand the history behind the Western Sahara Conflict, it is up to the delegates of the Arab League to address the current state of West Saharan sovereignty. We hope that you do your best and bring an end to this conflict in a way that saves as many lives as possible.



Figure 6: Polisario Front soldiers marching.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Zartman, I. William, et al. "Western Sahara." Middle East Institute, 21 Dec. 2020, <https://mei.edu/regions/western-sahara>.

## Past Actions

### ***The First Attempt at a Referendum (1991)***

The UN attempted to give the Sahrawi people the choice of who should fully govern them in 1998 via referendum. After this (the two options being self-determination or a full integration with Morocco), Morocco and the Polisario Front agreed to a ceasefire in what is now known as the Settlement Plan.<sup>39</sup> The UN established the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), a peacekeeping force, to provide support for the referendum. Ultimately, while this ceasefire did reduce the amount of bloodshed at the time, it did not stop Morocco from pushing themselves into Western Sahara.<sup>40</sup> Several countries attempted to rig the process in their favor by stalling negotiations, not agreeing with certain referendum terms, and finding it difficult to draw the line as far as voter eligibility. The voter eligibility issue became especially apparent as the MINURSO peacekeepers were tasked with designating who was and was not of Sahrawi ethnicity (a contentious issue considering some shared Arab-Berber blood), limiting people in the country from speaking with groups outside of the country (as a means to not influence their votes—another controversial solution), and controlling immigration to the region.<sup>41</sup> With this impasse, the United Nations Security Council finally called for the withdrawal of peacekeepers from the region and the abandonment of the process.<sup>42</sup>

### ***The Baker Plan***

In 2001, the UN tried to instate a five year autonomy plan followed by referendum. The plan was introduced by James Baker, the UN special envoy to Western Sahara which, in effect, offered the prospect of self-determination to the Western Sahrawis, but under the protection of a Moroccan state. This was promptly rejected by both the Polisario front and Algeria.<sup>43</sup> A second version of the

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<sup>39</sup> Samir Bennis, "Western Sahara: Why the Referendum Has Been Impossible since Day One," <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/>, April 16, 2016, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/04/184361/western-sahara-why-the-referendum-was-impossible-since-day-one>.

<sup>40</sup> BBC 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Shelley, Toby, and Jose R. Horta. *Endgame in the Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony*. London: Zed Books, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

plan was offered, which would have given the Sahrawis their self-rule for at least five years with an eventual referendum (mirroring the one in 1991) taking place. This plan was generally favorable to most international bodies, but was subsequently rejected by Morocco, due to its Sahrawi-bias and similarity to the 1991 plan.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Further Obstacles (2007)***

The UN held various peace talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front in 2007 and 2008. The result was renewed extensions of the MINURSO mandate (which has been extended over 47 times). However, these talks broke down after international pressure and arguments over the UN's potential acknowledgment of human rights abuses (to which South Africa, France, and Costa Rica raised objections).<sup>45</sup>

### ***A Breakdown of Peace (2020)***

After a breakdown in peace talks during the later part of 2018, the ceasefire finally collapsed in November 2020, in large part due to a general dissatisfaction with the lack of progress from the international community or the presence of any feasible solutions to the problem. Doubly, with the US recognizing the Western Sahara as part of Morocco (as part of a deal intended to normalize relations with Israel and Morocco), the Polisario Front lost trust in the international community to behave impartially.<sup>46</sup>

This series of failures of past actions by the international community, failed pursuits of peace by the two sides, and the history of Moroccan land claim and Polisario Front control as a result of the Spanish withdrawal from Western Sahara are what led to the Western Sahara that we see today. Unfortunately, there are essentially no successful past actions on this end of the crisis, but we hope that you can create one yourselves in committee.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Samir 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Magid, Jacob. "'Historic': Israel, Morocco Agree on Diplomatic Ties 'as Soon as Possible'." The Times of Israel, December 10, 2020. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-and-morocco-to-establish-full-official-relations-trump-announces/>.

## Possible Solutions

This section will review some potential solutions to this crisis. Please do not restrict yourself to the following solutions; we encourage you to use your creativity to create even better solutions to the Western Sahara Crisis.

### *Solutions to Land Disputes*

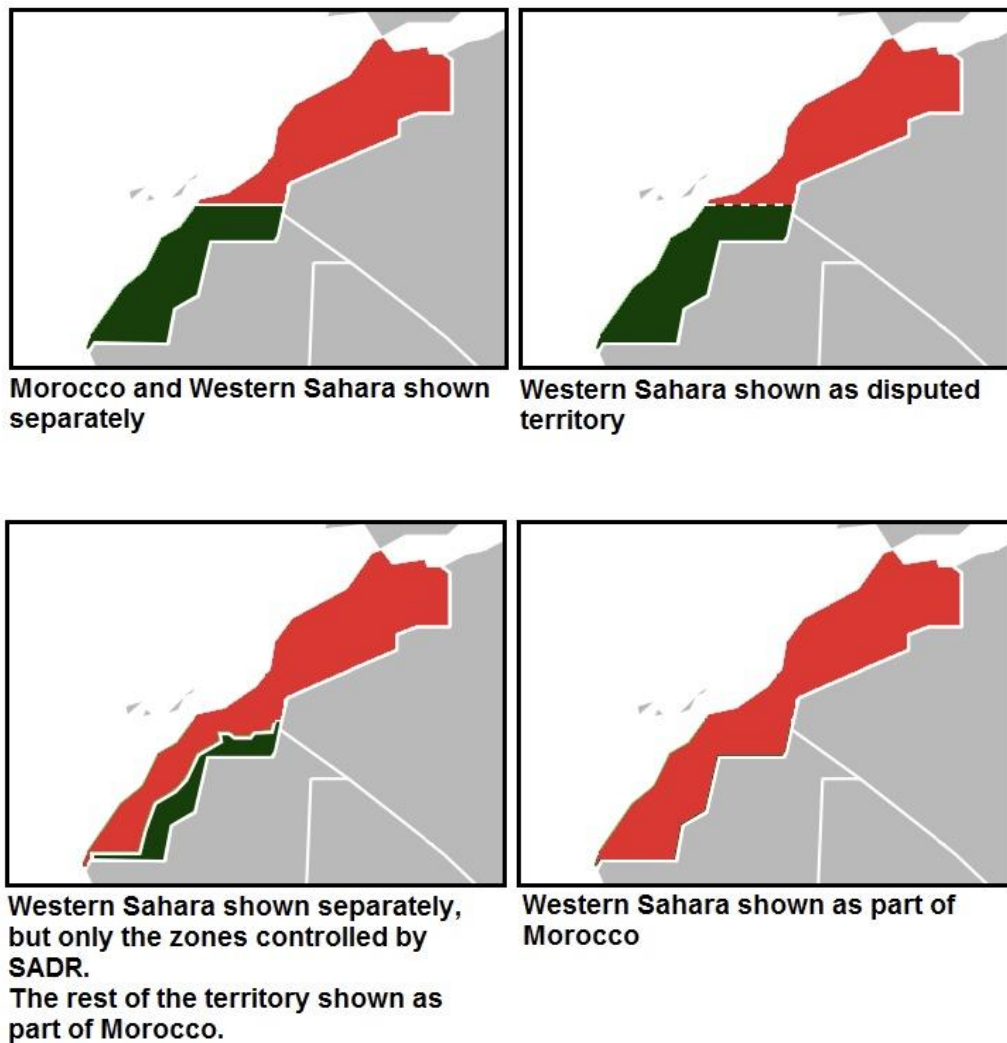


Figure 7: Four Ways to Show West Sahara<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, August 20). Western sahara conflict. Wikipedia. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_Sahara\\_conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Sahara_conflict)



There are three obvious solutions to the Western Sahara conflict:

1) Relinquish the territory to Morocco

This would require defeating the Polisario Front, increasing Moroccan control over the region, and decreasing autonomy for the Sahrawis. However, you would be stripping the Sahrawi people of their right to their self-determination and subjecting them to rule by an outside country. You would also need to do a lot of work to ensure that Morocco does not abuse the Sahrawi people if they proceed to go on Western Sahara land.

2) Relinquish the territory to the Polisario Front

This would require kicking Morocco, who has support of many countries including the United States, out of the region which is very hard to achieve. You would have to work with many of the members of the Arab League to turn on Morocco and deliver freedom to the Sahrawi people from Western Sahara rule. This would require a lot of diplomacy and you would essentially lose Moroccan support for the Arab League while simultaneously gaining Sahrawi support.

3) Divide the land between Morocco and the Polisario Front

This hasn't worked in the past—but could it work now? Evenly splitting land when one side dominates the region is a difficult task to achieve. However, maybe the committee can make this solution work!



Figure 8: Western Sahara Refugee Camp<sup>48</sup>

### Refugee Crisis

Refugee camps are not a permanent solution, as they constrict people to bad living conditions, second class citizenship, and few paths for advancement. Countries that host refugee camps often try to make it difficult for refugees to obtain citizenship. Thus, a solution that could counter the dreadful living situations in refugee camps is the idea of truly integrated refugee status. Rather than place refugees into camps, one could instantly integrate them into society. This could include a path to citizenship, either temporary or permanent, legitimate housing, and potentially a host family. The details can change, but the central tenet is a more intense integration to improve quality of life for refugees.

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<sup>48</sup> Ministers, N. C. of, Fetbb, E. – E. –, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, EU, C. of the, & Institute, R. (n.d.). Western Sahara: Young rebels feel betrayed by EU. EUobserver. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from <https://euobserver.com/world/132507>

## Water

The Arab League needs to invest in more innovative ways to clean and reuse water so that both Western Sahara and the Arab League member states as a whole can help combat the water crises. Ways to do this are investing in water recycling machinery and machinery to extract water from waste or salination from the sea. Providing adequate infrastructure for transporting and distributing water would also be a critical point to address the issue.

## Food

Western Sahara is infertile, and fish alone cannot sate the entire population. The Arab League needs to open ties with the Sahrawi people and increase their trade options so that they can get the food they need to survive. Doing so would require the improvement of Western Sahara's economic infrastructure, which would require Arab League investment.

## ***Solutions to Economic Issues***

### Renewable Energy

Though Western Sahara is infertile, it has ample land that is ripe for solar and other renewable energy plants. By repurposing large swathes of land to house large solar panels, Western Sahara can enjoy both energy and a viable source of revenue. Where this runs into difficulty is balancing the Arab League member states' desire to continue to profit off of demand for oil.

Another source of renewable energy that is abundant in the area is wind. The Western Sahara has a huge potential for wind energy production, especially in coastal regions with up to 45 GWh per square kilometer.<sup>49</sup> The energy produced through these new wind farms could then be used by the people in the region and exported to other countries.

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<sup>49</sup> Reve. 2021. "The dawn of wind energy in Africa". <https://www.ewind.es/2016/06/27/the-dawn-of-wind-energy-in-africa-2/56727>



Figure 9: Solar Power Farm<sup>50</sup>

### Oil and Minerals

The Western Sahara region has an abundance of extractable minerals, including phosphates and oil. Although phosphate extraction has been in existence for decades, it has not been optimized and thus does not contribute as much as it could. Therefore, expanding the extraction and building infrastructure to add value on phosphate products would increase economic output and add value to the market, and eventually stimulate the economic growth in the region. Oil exploration has also happened in the past few years, but it has not proceeded to extraction stages due to political struggles and competition of authority between the Moroccan and SADR governments. Therefore, to increase oil production and provide more economic opportunities for people in the area, there would need to be an agreement and consensus between the governments. They also have to convince private companies to invest and build necessary infrastructure to make sure these products can be extracted, refined, and distributed through stability and security in the area.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Harnessing the power of the Desert Sun: BMW Group sources aluminium produced using Solar Energy. BMW Group PressClub. (n.d.). Retrieved September 16, 2022, from <https://www.press.bmwgroup.com/latin-america-caribbean/article/detail/T0325851EN/harnessing-the-power-of-the-desert-sun:-bmw-group-sources-aluminium-produced-using-solar-energy?language=en>

<sup>51</sup> Western Sahara Resource Watch, 2007

## Bloc Positions

### ***Morocco***

As is evident by the preceding sections of this Background Guide, Morocco wants full control of Western Sahara. They have been fighting for it for decades now. They have also garnered the support of many countries internationally in their fight to take control of Western Sahara. Many of these countries are listed here in this section. Namely, Morocco is the stronger power in this fight, especially with the foreign support that they have.

Morocco already controls almost all of Western Sahara's coastline. Thus, by gaining full control of Western Sahara, all they really gain is more land to control, work with, and perhaps capitalize off of through fishing and phosphate mining.

### ***Algeria***

Algeria in many ways could be considered the leader of the nations which want to make Western Sahara an independent nation, however its motivations are not that simple. Many of their actions are directed more towards causing as much trouble for the Moroccans as possible, as they are their geopolitical adversary. Algeria understands that an independent Western Sahara would be a thorn in the side of Morocco, and what would be even better is an independent Western Sahara under their control.

Algeria is currently the host of the refugee camps in Tindouf, and so is used to having the Polisario Front somewhat under their control. It is likely that in a peace deal with an independent Western Sahara they will want to somehow maintain that control, and if not that then be granted favorable access to the land in some capacity.

### ***Syria and Libya***

Both Syria and Libya have Sahrawi relations and support the Polisario Front.

### ***All other Arab League Members***

All other members of the Arab League, namely the Arabian Peninsula, generally support Moroccan control of Western Sahara.

### ***Spain***

While Spain will not be a participant in the conference, they may still appear as an active player in this crisis. As the former colonial overlord, they are often involved in the conflict over Western Sahara, especially because in many ways they caused it. Currently, they send humanitarian aid to refugees and allow them access to Spanish higher education, but they could use their former position of power as a pretense to meddle in the affairs of any possible peace deal. They could perhaps be a moderator of the peace, or the prevention of it.



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