



جامعة جورجتاون
كلية الشؤون الدولية في قطر
Model United Nations

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar

I. ABOUT THE SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (SPECPOL):

The United Nations Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly (also known as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee) is one of six committees of the United Nations (consisting of all UN members). Its initial jurisdiction was applied to trusteeship and non-self-governing territories. However, after the eventual independence of all the trusteeship and the vast majority of non-self-governing states, the trusteeship system was disassembled. With the limited number of non-self-governing states, there was not enough jurisdiction to keep the committee fully occupied. Therefore, it was merged with the Special Political Committee, which was created as a seventh committee in order to deal with specific political issues after the General Assembly concluded that the first Committee (Disarmament and Political) needed further committees to assist.

SPECPOL deals with issues such as decolonization, refugees and human rights, peacekeeping, mine action, outer space, atomic radiation, outer space and the University for Peace (a United Nations University that was established in Costa Rica in order to institutionalize education that is dedicated to international peace) (Special Political and Decolonization).

The current Chair of the committee's sixty-seventh session is Noel Nelson Messone (Gabon). Mr. Messone, elected by acclamation, has been the permanent representative of Gabon to the United Nations since February 2012. The vice-chairs also elected by acclamation are Maratee Nalita Andamo (Thailand), Ayesha Borland (Belize) and Dimitrius Felopoulos (Greece) with Zulfy Ismaili (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) as Rapporteur (FOURTH COMMITTEE ELECTS BUREAU FOR SIXTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION).

II. BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON MOROCCO AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WESTERN SAHARA TERRITORIAL CLAIMS:

Morocco is an Arabo-African country located in the Maghreb region of North Africa. Morocco is a monarchy that traces its history far back in the region and that has been subjected to French rule. It is predominantly Muslim and has had a strong Sufi (Islamic mysticism) guild that is influential in the country. Morocco gained its independence from France in 1956 and since then it has been under monarchical rule. Before introducing the conflict with Western Sahara, it is crucial to look at the following points about Morocco and putting them in context of the conflict:

- Morocco's independence movement was somewhat chaotic and involved many factions. They are as follows:
 - The Istiklal party (Independence party), which fought for Moroccan national independence and waged fights against the French metropole. They called for independence under Sultan Mohamed V (later to become King), wanted him to negotiate it for France and to establish democracy in the country (Mezran 68)
 - The urban elite formed of the tribal caids (leaders), rural establishments, sufi sheikhs and hinterland notables. Most of these elite were in good terms with the French protectorate (Mezran 67)
 - The traditional elite of the merchants' guild and the professional classes. They were mainly loyal to the Sultan and were in good terms with the French authorities (mezran 67)
 - The Makhzen, which is the Sultan, whose bureaucracy was the most important in Morocco and with an attaché that held the top offices of control in the country such as the police, army officers etc . . . (Mezran 67)

Moroccan independence was hard to negotiate with numerous contending factions fighting for a nationalist identity, a monarchical identity and an Islamic identity. This led to the rise of King Mohamed V as a unifier of Moroccan nationalism and the spearhead for the struggle for independence. With all the conflicting ideas, the King appeared as the best short-run unifier of all the fronts, as long as the main goal was obtaining independence. Why is this important to understanding the conflict? It is because ever since independence the Moroccan vision has been mainly shaped by that of the King, with the most recent King being King Mohamed VI. The King in Morocco has a monopoly over the politics and the economics and is extremely influential in shaping the country's statecraft. The King and his ancestors see the Western Sahara area as Moroccan and they base their claims on the ancient Kingdom of Mullah Hassan

(Boukhars 39). Therefore, apart from all the economic and political reasons that influence the conflict, the Kingdom has established a hereditary claim to the area. An attack on that claim would mean an attack on the Moroccan Kingdom and consequently on the vision of Moroccanism.

III. BACKGROUND GUIDE ON THE CONFLICT:

To begin with, the Western Sahara is a disputed territory in North Africa that was under Spanish colonization since the early 19th century. It is a desert area and is sparsely populated consisting of a population of about 500,000 individuals (Ben-Meir 76).

The Western Sahara was relinquished by Spain in 1975 and since then has been under the control of the Moroccan Kingdom (Boukhars 22). It was King Hassan II who engineered the 'retrieval' of the Western Sahara from Spain and was an important step in the consolidation of Moroccan politics. The key word here is 'retrieval', for Morocco does not consider itself colonizing the Western Sahara; rather, it sees it as a Moroccan area that is rightfully theirs. The Moroccan retrieval of the Western Sahara was peaceful and was handled in a very effective way (Boukhars 132). It was a peaceful retrieval in which 350,000 unarmed Moroccans crossed into the former Spanish colony and reasserted their kinship ties to the tribes that existed in that region (Ben-Meir 76). It was labeled as the Green March, it consolidated King Hassan II's power more, and it showed his experience in statecraft and the handling of territorial dispute. This boosted his popularity in Morocco and strengthened the perception of the Western Sahara as a Moroccan region.

Ever since the Moroccan retrieval and the Western Sahara has been labeled as a non-self-governing state in the United Nations and has had international and regional discussions on the Moroccan claim to it. The United Nations officially considers the Western Sahara as Africa's last colony (Mundy 115) indicating that they adopted an international stand that is for Western Saharan independence. However, the process for independence has been deeply hampered and the area has undergone numerous conflicts. It is still under the control of Morocco and despite various negotiations, the future status of it is still unknown.

Despite the supposedly peaceful retrieval of the Sahara, the region was plagued with conflict for almost two decades. Indigenous Sahrawis who labeled themselves as the Polisario Front waged a war against Morocco from 1975 until 1999 (the Polisario front and the conflict will be discussed in more depth later). The conflict ended with a ceasefire in 1991 with a promise for a referendum for independence a year later, which did not occur (Mundy 116). After the ceasefire, the first 9 years saw a UN presence to organize a referendum on the independence of the Sahara region or integration within Morocco. Following the death of King Hassan II in 1999, the Security Council opted out of the "winner take all" referendum and preferred negotiations with the new King, Mohamed VI. Despite everything, the Security Council maintained its support for Western Sahara's right to self-determination (Mundy 116).

Currently the international framework for the handling of the Sahara region was submitted in 2007 to the United Nations by Morocco. The proposal recommends an autonomous Sahara region federated by Morocco, which has elections of officials for local institutions, development of varied educational programs, levying of taxes, adopting budgets and monitoring police and judicial boards. The only part that would have remained officially under the control of the central Moroccan government would have been the defense and the foreign affairs (Saidy 86). This was still not adopted and the situation of the Sahara until now has no official framework.

IV. KEY PLAYERS:

• THE POLISARIO FRONT IN WESTERN SAHARA:

- The Polisario Front was created in 1973 in order to end the Spanish colonization of the Western Sahara area. When Spain officially departed in 1975, the front shifted its focus to oppose the annexation of the Sahara region by Morocco and Mauritania. They succeeded in ousting Mauritania, but that led to full Moroccan control of the area. They launched a full-fledged fight against Morocco from 1975 until 1991 when the ceasefire was brokered (Ben-Meir 76)
- An important thing to keep in mind about the Polisario front is that their claim to the indigenous nature of the Western Sahara region (Ben-Meir 76). They reject the Moroccanism of the Sahara as espoused by the region. This has been an important issue with the formation of the Sahrawi identity and a call for a Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic by the Polisario. The Polisario constantly affirms that Morocco has not historical ties to the region and that the true Sahrawis are indigenous to the region and have had a distinct past from Morocco.
- At heart, the Polisario front remains a nationalist organization that believes in an independent Western Sahara. It is a banned organization in the Moroccan controlled areas of the Sahara and is on extremely bad terms with Morocco. Algeria has been the main supplier of arms for the Polisario and provides a lot of financial and logistical assistance (Ben-Meir 76)
- The Polisario are considered as an official representative of the Sahrawi people by the United Nations and it is important to keep in mind that any future peace discussions cannot happen without the inclusion of this front. The Polisario have threatened to return to conflict if Morocco keeps stalling its promise to hold a referendum on the future of the Sahrawi region

V. AMERICA'S ROLE & THE BAKER PLAN:

- The United States of America has had good ties with the Moroccan Kingdom for a long time and has directly and indirectly intervened in the Sahrawi conflict. Generally, America endorses the Madrid Accords of 1975 which grant Morocco administrative authority but not sovereignty over the Sahrawi region. The Ford administration in particular played a pivotal role in pressuring Spain to cede the Western Sahara region to Morocco (Saidy 87)
- During the Cold War, America was opposed to the Polisario even though the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China did not officially endorse it. That was because the Polisario adopted a socialist approach to politics and were supported by Libya and Algeria (Saidy 87). This led to more support granted to Morocco which continued on even after the end of the Cold War. However after the Cold War, the US adopted a position that was more in line with cooperating with international frameworks such as the United Nations
- The stances of America towards the region shift as it moves from republic to democratic presidency and it must be kept in mind that recently they have been heavily influenced by security fears after 9/11. The emergence of increased terrorist threat and Islamist organizations in Morocco made Sahrawi independence less desirable out of fear that it would exacerbate the security situation
- It was not until George W. Bush's administration did the US pressed Morocco to table an autonomy plan for the Sahrawi region. The Bush administration launched talks with Morocco on discussion a realistic autonomy plan for the Western Sahara. The US government also received a letter from 173 members of Congress judging that it is time for the US to have a historic role in ending the conflict in the region and establishing a framework for autonomy (Saidy 88)
- **The Baker Plan:**
- During the second phase of the Sahrawi peace process from 2001 to 2004 the lead negotiator was former US secretary of state James Baker (Mundy 116)
- James Baker was assigned to this mission in 1997 and he was fully dedicated into reaching a final consensus on the issue
- As the personal envoy of the UN Secretary General, Baker put forth numerous proposals to resolve the Sahara conflict. They were all rejected by Morocco under the pretext of refusing an proposal that explicitly offers independence to the Western Sahara (Spector 128)
- Examples of proposals: Baker I also known as the framework agreement meant to give the people of Western Sahara self-determination through a large

autonomy with the Moroccan state (Benabdallah 420). This was rejected by both Algeria and the Polisario and it failed

Baker II, aimed at instituting a Saharan self-rule with a “Western Sahara Authority” for a five-year period (Benadballah 420). After that period elapsed, the referendum for independence would be held, in which all the population of the Western Sahara would vote. Algeria and the Polisario accepted this plan, but Morocco rejected it

- In June 2004, Baker was forced to resign because the Security Council would not make a decision on whether to reject Western Sahara’s right to independence or force Morocco to participate in a vote on autonomy (Mundy 116). It was a difficult choice to be made by the Security Council and Baker saw that from that point onwards his efforts would have been futile

VI. THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- The European Union’s foreign policy in the Western Sahara conflict is heavily related to the greater Middle East region.
- The European Union approaches this issue through the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP). It is the organized foreign policy of the EU covering areas such as security defense and diplomacy (Benabdallah 421)
- The first position of the European Union towards the Western Sahara conflict was adopted on 12 March 1981 in the European Parliament (EP). The EP endorsed its first resolution on the issue that supported the Moroccan position on it (Benabdallah 423). This was due to the strong support that the Western powers provided to Morocco during the Cold War period
- The first EP support caused some uproar between members and led to the creation of “Peace for the Sahrawi People”. The group worked to draw attention to the conflict and lobbied to resolve this “decolonization issue”. They succeeded on recognizing the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people and the adopted of a resolution on 15 March 1989 (Benabdallah 423)
- On the 27th of October 2005, the EP endorsed a resolution voted by majority vote on the human rights issues in the Western Sahara conflicts. The resolution passed despite numerous attempts by the EP president to block it. The resolution endorsed the Security Council’s resolution and resolutions 1495 (2003) and 1598 endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. The resolution stressed the importance of deploying a convoy in the region and to put pressure on Morocco to tackle the issue

of disappeared persons and displaced individuals in the region. It also called for facilitating access to the Western Sahara region (Benabdallah 424)

- **Spain:**
- Spain obviously has an important part to play in the EU concerning the conflict, as it was the previous colonial power of the Western Sahara. During the 1980s and 1990s, Spain had socialist governments that maintained good relations with the entire North African region (Benabdallah 427). Spain in particular had a good relation with Morocco aiding it and trying to help it modernize. This of course would put a strain on the conflict with the Western Sahara as Spain was more inclined towards the Moroccan vision of it
- When the Popular Party took over from 1996 to 2004, Spanish-Moroccan relations were quickly deteriorating. The government of Jose Maria Aznar did not grant much attention to Morocco and rarely visited it (Benabdallah 427). This culminated in 2002, when Aznar expressed vehement opposition to the Moroccan annexation of the territory and the Spanish government went against increased Moroccan settlements in the area
- It must be pointed out that there is a strong Sahrawi civil society in Spain that constantly lobbies for the self-determination of the Western Sahara and that puts increasing pressure on the Spanish government through its various associations
- In 2004, when the socialist party came to power (PSOE), the new Prime Minister, Jose Zapatero decided to warm up the relations between Morocco and Spain. He visited Morocco regularly and promised to better Spanish relations with it (Benabdallah 428). He also indirectly opposed a referendum citing that it would cause a crisis in the region and that Moroccan cooperation is preferred.
- When the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 occurred in Spain, the Spanish government aligned with Morocco out of security concerns and to cooperate with Morocco on the war on terror (Benabdallah 429)
- Overall, Spain is trying to have a balanced relation with both Algeria and Morocco and to increase its dominance in the region.
- **France:**
- France being a former colonial power in North Africa has a prominent role in the EU with regards to the conflict

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- The French position is officially neutral, but France has expressed constant support to the Moroccan government
- France supported both Morocco and Mauritania during the invasion of the Western Sahara through arms sale and diplomatic efforts (Benabdallah 429). French troops actually supported Mauritanian troops with their fight against the Polisario Front
- Within the European Union, France revives the Moroccan position on the issue and goes against Algerian state positions (Benabdallah 430). France looked at Morocco as a key ally and constantly visited the Sahrawi region declaring after it the French support for the Moroccan stance on the issue
- A study issued by France in 2000 under Qusai d'Orsay and two French researches supported an "autonomy" status for the Western Sahara under Morocco, like the Kosovan model and expressed repeated support to Morocco (Benabdallah 430).
- Former president, Nicolas Sarkozy, strongly expressed his support to Morocco's position and the autonomy plan. Sarkozy visited Morocco in 2007 and expressed his repeated support to the Moroccan government. Economic ties supported such friendship, as France signed around two billion euros worth of civil and military contracts with Morocco (Benabdallah 430)
- Overall, whether a socialist or a conservative government rules France they are against the emergence of an independent Sahrawi state. France has had a long-standing support for the Moroccan government and considers it a key ally in the North African region

Question to Consider:

- What is Algeria's official role in this? They support the Polisario Front, is it out of spite from the Moroccan government?
- Does Algeria support the front because they look at them as fighting for liberation like the one the Algerians fought against the French?
- Does Morocco have interest in the natural resources of Western Sahara such as the phosphate reserves?
- How can a peaceful referendum occur if Morocco keeps opposing it?

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- Is France against the independence of Western Sahara because they are against the rise of microstates?
- Would the independence of Western Sahara trigger conflict in the region especially between Algeria and Morocco?
- Why is the Security Council indecisive on the issue and why cannot they force either side to take a decision?
- Did the Arab Spring overshadow the Western Sahara conflict?
- Why is the conflict so rarely discussed in the media especially Middle Eastern ones?
- Does the monarchical nature of Morocco prevent it from allowing a referendum? (compare situation to the United Kingdom, a constitutional monarchy, allowing the Falkland islands to vote on a referendum of independence)
- Do you think the Polisario Front will allow multiparty democracy if the Sahara got independent? Alternatively, will they use force to rule the potential state?
- If the Western Sahara were to be independent, would it join the Arab League? Is that a viable option or would it create tension with Morocco?
- What becomes of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria, if Western Sahara got independent? Will they be granted return or have to stay in Algeria?
- What becomes of Moroccan settlers in Western Sahara if it got independent?
- Should the African Union be one of the main envoys in the region to negotiate peace? On the other hand, is it impossible due to bad Moroccan ties with the Union?

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VII. ADDITIONAL ONLINE SOURCES:

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