

The conflict in western sahara assignment

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POL 342E: Nationalism and Ethnicity: Political Conflicts in Europe Instructor:
Dr. Tommaso Chiamparino Final Paper: The Conflict in Western Sahara

(Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Spain) Written by: Tahiri Joutei Idrissi

Hassani Driss July, 3rd SUMMER 2009 Western Sahara is a region located in the North West of Africa, occupying an area of around 260 000 km². This land is subject to serious disputes between Morocco, Mauritania, Spain and Algeria since 1884. This complex problem, unsolved until now, has gone through many processes in order to establish peace and self determination in that territory.

Before analyzing the major aspects of this conflict, it is important to introduce the parties involved as to know: Morocco, Mauritania, Spain and Algeria. First, Morocco is a country located in the North West of Africa, occupying a total area of 713 000 km² and counting around thirty million people. Morocco is one of the oldest monarchies in the world, founded twelve centuries ago in the Cultural Capital ?? Fez?? by ?? Moulay Driss the First?? who is the descendant of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

The king Moulay Driss implemented Islam as the main religion of the country, the city of Fez as the capital and constituted the ?? Idrissides dynasty??. Many dynasties have governed Morocco since then. Today, the ?? Alaouite Dynasty?? has been governing Morocco for more than five centuries. Second, Mauritania is a country located in the south of Morocco, occupying an area of 1, 030, 700 km², and counting a population of 3, 364, 940. The main religion of the country is Islam and the spoken language is the Hassania dialect of Arabic.

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Western Sahara is the land of dispute between Morocco and Mauritania since every country is substantiating its own claims on that territory. Third, Algeria, a country located in the east of Morocco, occupies a total area of 2, 381, 741 km² and counts a population of 33, 769, 669 according to the 2008 estimate. The main religion of the country is Islam and the official language is Arabic. Regarding the Western Sahara Conflict, Algeria allowed refugees from Sahara to stay in the South of Tindouf, a city close to the borders of Western Sahara, where the Polisario Front has its main base.

Finally, Spain, a country member of the European Union, located in the South East of Europe, occupies an area of 504, 030 km² and counts a population of 46, 661, 950 people according to the 2009 estimate. The official language of the country is the Spanish one and concerning the religion, the predominant one is the Christianity with 76% of the population being Christian. Spain was occupying Western Sahara since 1884, and after the Green March of November 1975 ordered by the Moroccan king Hassan the Second, where over 350 000 Moroccans participated, Spain gave up its colonization on that territory and negotiated with Morocco and Mauritania.

This negotiation gave birth to the Madrid Agreement. In the beginning of the Spanish colonization in 1884, Western Sahara was a Spanish property and became a Spanish province only fifty years later in 1934. In the 1960's, many ethnic groups emerged in the Western Sahara. These nomadic tribes have different origins, some of them are Berbers, some are Arabs and some are Africans. Today, we can count three main ethnic groups living in this region that are: the ?? Reguibat??, The ?? Ouled Bou Sba?? and the ?? Ouled

Delim??. The Western Sahara conflict is very harsh and complex in a way that each party is substantiating its claim on that territory.

For Mauritania, the link between the country and Western Sahara is the existence of nomadic tribes sharing the same origins as the Mauritanian tribes. For Morocco, Western Sahara has always been a region of the country because of the historical links of the Sahrawi tribes and the allegiance to the first Moroccan dynasty ?? The Idrissides??. For the Sahrawis, who are the nomadic tribes living in the Sahara; they fight for independence and self governance, that is why they have created with an Algerian support the Polisario, a front to free the Sahara on May, 10 1973.

The Western Sahara is subject to many controversies only because it is a land of many important raw materials. Obviously, conflicts rise because of human greed and our will to always have more. Western Sahara is a region rich with Phosphate, containing around 6 billion tons which gives to Morocco the third place in worldwide Phosphate reserves. In addition, the region is very rich in Iron, copper, and the Atlantic coasts of Western Sahara are well stocked with fish. Furthermore, there could possibly be huge reserves of oil which may interest countries such as the United States of America.

The Western Sahara conflict has gone through many steps in order to be solved, but all have gone in vain. After the independence of Morocco from the French colonization in 1956, Moroccan people were claiming their historical links with the Sahara Region and the King Hassan II made huge efforts and prepared a meticulous lawsuit in order for the Western Sahara conflict to be presented to the International Court of Justice of The Hague. ??

In October 1975 the International Court of Justice rejected territorial claims by Morocco and Mauritania.

The court recognized the Saharawis' right to self-determination and Spain agreed to organize a referendum. But in November 1975, Moroccan King Hassan II ordered a "Green March" of over 350,000 Moroccans into the territory. Spain backed down and negotiated a settlement with Morocco and Mauritania, known as the Madrid Agreement^{??}. (BBC News, Regions and Territories: Western Sahara, May 2009). This famous Madrid Agreement signed on November 14, 1975, a week after the ^{??}Green March^{??}, stated that Morocco will govern two thirds of the Western Sahara and the remain area will be under the Mauritanian governance.

Regarding Spain, the Madrid Agreement ended the Spanish colonization of the region as of any relation with the Sahara. In fact, the decision of The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the outcome of the Madrid Agreement were not considered as satisfying solutions by the Moroccan government. For Morocco, the entire Western Sahara is a Moroccan territory, not just the two thirds of it. Consequently, the decisions of the ICJ and the Madrid Agreement did not stop Morocco from occupying the remaining piece of land allocated to Mauritania.

Algeria, in its southern part of the country, in a city called Tindouf, allowed Sahrawi refugees to stay in camps in this city, where the Polisario Front holds its main base. This forced Moroccan occupation led the Polisario to launch a bloody war against the Moroccan army. This war, known as ^{??}The Guerrilla^{??} ended with the help of the United Nations with a declaration of a

ceasefire in September 1991. [pic] (Picture showing Sahrawi Refugees in Algerian Camps) Referendum ?? In April 1991 the UN established Minurso, the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara.

Its brief was to implement a peace plan outlined in a 1990 Security Council resolution. In September 1991 a UN-brokered ceasefire was declared. The peace plan provided for a transition period, leading to a referendum in January 1992. Western Saharans would choose between independence and integration with Morocco. Minurso was to total 1, 000 civilian and 1, 700 military personnel. Its brief was to monitor the ceasefire, the confinement of warring parties to designated areas and the exchange of prisoners??. (BBC News, Regions and Territories: Western Sahara, May 2009). The referendum was seen as a peace solution by Morocco and the Polisario Front.

To choose the body of voters, an identification process was conducted in order to see people who are eligible to vote. ?? This identification was to be based on a census carried out by Spain in 1973?? (BBC News, Regions and Territories: Western Sahara, May 2009). But when came the time to choose the body of voters, Morocco wanted to include in its electorate some people who participated in the Green March of 1975 and settled in Western Sahara. The Polisario Front of course, rejected this because the sixty five thousand people would obviously vote for the Western Sahara to be a Moroccan land.

This was for the Polisario a referendum won in the advance in favor of Morocco. Finally, with both parties not succeeding in choosing their own body of voters, the referendum was suspended in 1996 and it was considered for the UN as a big failure and disaster in the peace plan for the

Western Sahara region. Baker Plan James Baker, the UN special envoy, was chose to be the mediator of the Western Sahara conflict. He mediated talks between the two parties in 1997 and in 2000 in London. The efforts of James Baker gave birth to a ?? framework agreement?? conducted by the UN special envoy in June 2001. This framework agreement, known also as the third way provided autonomy for Saharawis under Moroccan sovereignty, a referendum after a four-year transition period, and voting rights for Moroccan settlers resident in Western Sahara for over a year. This formula was rejected by Polisario and Algeria. Then in July 2003, the UN adopted a compromise resolution proposing that Western Sahara become a semi-autonomous region of Morocco for a transition period of up to five years. A referendum would then take place on independence, semi-autonomy or integration with Morocco.

This compromise was seen as addressing Moroccan concerns, in a bid to entice it to agree to a referendum??. (BBC News, Regions and Territories: Western Sahara, May 2009). [pic] (Veteran Polisario Leader: Mohamed Abdelaziz) In front of this unsolved harsh conflict, James Baker, the United Nations special envoy stopped his mediation in June 2004 when Polisario accepted the referendum and Morocco rejected it for security matters. The Impasse Period In March 2008, the UN organised a talk in New York between Morocco and the Polisario.

Algeria and Mauritania also attended the talk but the outcome was unsuccessful since there was no progress made by the different parties. Few months later, Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, came in an official visit to North Africa seeking to break the impasse. Once again, with no result, <https://assignbuster.com/the-conflict-in-western-sahara-assignment/>

since during this visit, terrorist matters were discussed regarding the ?? Al Qaeda?? networks in Morocco and Algeria. In January 2009, Christopher Ross, the US diplomat, was named by the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon to be the new UN special envoy to mediate and deal with the Western Sahara Conflict.

Other Key Facts Although these many disputes and problems around the Sahara region, it did not stop the Polisario Front to declare the SADR (Sahara Arab Democratic Republic) in the year 1976 and which was recognized by seventy five countries. All this makes from this conflict a very hard one to resolve and to understand because on the one hand, the area of Morocco stated by the Moroccan government is around 713, 000 km². On the other hand, the area recognised by the United Nations to Morocco is just 446, 000 km². The difference of course is the Western Sahara region.

This huge difference between the area declared by the country and the area being recognized to that country has never happened to any state of the world. Despite these facts, all the official maps figuring and sold in Morocco include the Western Sahara region as one the sixteen regions of the country. Conclusion All in all, the advantage of Morocco in that specific conflict is the fact it is having the United States as a strong ally. According to the International Relations Center: ?? The U. S. and Morocco have a longstanding special relationship.

They have had a treaty of friendship since 1787, the longest unbroken peace agreement the U. S. has maintained with any country in the world. Morocco has nearly thirty million people, making it the second largest Arab county,

and is rich in mineral resources that may become important to the U. S. in coming years. It is strategically located in the northwest corner of Africa, bordering both the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, and includes the Straits of Gibraltar. Since 1950, Morocco has received more U. S. aid than any other Arab or African country, except for Egypt.

Indeed, since the beginning of the war over Western Sahara, Morocco has received more than one-fifth of all U. S. aid to the continent, totaling more than \$1 billion in military assistance and \$1. 3 billion in economic aid. In return, Morocco has remained one of Washington's closest strategic allies in either Africa or the Arab world, particularly during the early years of the Reagan administration. Morocco allows the U. S. Navy access to its port facilities and grants the U. S. Air Force landing, refueling, and overflight rights.

There has been close binational cooperation in intelligence and communications. Despite a history of close relations with Iraq, Morocco sent forces to Saudi Arabia in 1990 to support the U. S. -led war effort to liberate Kuwait. In addition, the United States and Morocco have cooperated militarily in supporting pro-Western regimes in Africa, and Morocco has engaged in destabilizing efforts against radical African states, with apparent close collaboration with the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency. Meanwhile, the U. S. has been largely silent about the Moroccan overnment's ongoing human rights abuses against its own people, and Washington has prodded Morocco to pursue questionable neoliberal economic policies. With the demise of the anticommunist rationale for the cold war, Morocco is now being touted as a bulwark against Islamic extremism and as a model for U. S. -backed

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economic reforms??. (The Foreign Policy in Focus: Morocco and Western Sahara, December 1998). Moreover, the opinion of the actual Moroccan King Mohamed VI towards this conflict is the fact he sees Algeria as an obstacle to the resolution of the Western Sahara Conflict.

In an interview regarding this matter, the King Mohamed VI stated that: “ We reiterate our readiness to be engaged in a serious negotiation towards autonomy as a lasting solution to the conflict”. His majesty also stated in the same interview that: ?? Algeria is doing everything possible to prolong the crisis and this can lead to further balkanization of the Maghreb and Sahel regions, he said, adding that Algeria had also refused to normalise relations with Morocco and open their common borders, closed since 1994??.

Furthermore, the latest steps are that the Moroccan government presented again the Western Sahara Conflict to the UN, stating that the region should have its own autonomous parliament and government, but this of course implies the region staying under Moroccan sovereignty. This step was obviously not accepted by the Polisario Front who insists on conducting a referendum in order to determine the independence of Western Sahara. In my opinion, I think the Sahara region should remain a region of Morocco because of the close historical links, but at the same time, the region should have some autonomy without being an own republic.

Noticing the advancements and replies of each part of the conflict, the Western Sahara problem seems to be very far away to resolved, unfortunately. References – Human Rights Watch, 2008. Human Rights in Western Sahara and in the Tindouf Refugee Camps, annual report of 2008.

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