



## UNITED NATIONS MISSION CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SAHRAWI ARAB DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, 1991-2019

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study looks into the UN Mission and Conflict Resolution in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic from 1991 to 2019. Since 1975, when Spain granted the region to Morocco and Mauritania, Western Sahara has been in a state of political turmoil. The analysis used a descriptive and historical research style. A total of fifteen military personnel who have served or are currently serving in MINURSO, as well as two related civilians, were interviewed via Skype, Whatsapp, Messenger, and face-to-face interviews, with additional information obtained from journals and published books. The philosophy embraced and deemed important for this analysis was the Paris-proposed Liberal Peace. For the analysis, two research questions and objectives were established. The data was analysed using a descriptive and contextual approach. According to the findings, the unresolved disagreements over the status of Western Sahara include, among other things, the weak performance of the UN mission mandate, regional dominance squabbles between Algeria and Morocco, and finally, the combined super powers' self-interest and struggle for supremacy, which makes the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict difficult. The study suggests, among other things, that the UN move forward with the Settlement Plan's transitional and referendum phases. Major powers should once again avoid prioritizing their self-interests to the detriment of the general welfare of the local population impacted by the Western Sahara conflict.*

**KEYWORDS:** United Nation, Conflict Resolution, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic



## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

The First and Second World Wars were wars of a scale never seen before in human history. The United Nations was formed shortly after the Second World War to protect future generations from similar horrifying conflicts. The United Nations' charter states that the organization's mission is to "maintain international peace and stability" (UN Charter, Article I).

Sending peacekeeping missions to various conflict zones around the world is one way for the UN to achieve this aim. The United Nations peacekeeping missions or operations have long been regarded as one of the most effective instruments for promoting long-term peace in conflict-torn countries.

The United Nations (UN) has gone through many transitions and vision shifts since its founding in 1947. In recent decades, these reforms, which were based on lessons learned from previous operations, have led the UN to focus on multidimensional peacekeeping rather than conventional peacekeeping. Today's multidimensional peacekeeping entails safeguarding civilians and promoting human rights, as well as aiding in the restoration of the rule of law and fostering the political process (Fortina, 2008, Daniel, 2013).

Africans continue to suffer from a level of human deprivation that is unprecedented in human history. Conflict has remained a significant characteristic of Africa's post-independence landscape. For many Africans, the aspirations that accompanied their country's independence in the early 1960s have proven to be largely a mirage, as the area continues to be ravaged by wars and widespread destruction of life and property. Internal wars have wreaked havoc on Africa, and the results have been devastating.

In Africa, conflict is still a major security concern. Africa continues to have the world's highest number of armed conflicts. In mid-2001, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic were all affected by intent or open institutes.

The uncontrollable accumulation and proliferation of small and light weapons have fuelled these wars, resulting in increased criminality, banditry, cross-border violence, and the rise of the epidemic of child soldiers. While most of these conflicts are internal, they also spill over into neighbouring countries, resulting in widespread regional insecurity and instability.

Since 1975, when Spain granted the region to Morocco and Mauritania, it has been in a state of political turmoil. Though Morocco has attempted to integrate the region into its boundaries, the Polisario Front has consistently contested Morocco's claims and declared themselves the indigenous Saharawi people's voice. The Western Sahara conflict is one of the world's least well-known and most uncovered wars, approaching its fortieth anniversary with no end in sight. The former Spanish colony of Western Sahara, like Jennifer (2008:1) points out, is one of the world's least hospitable areas. The Western Sahara conflict is the result of two fundamentally conflicting claims to the same past. Western Sahara's territories and inhabitants, according to the POLISARIO Front, are distinct from Morocco and should be treated as such (London, 2003:69). Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, on the other hand, has become a central and important unifying force in the region.



POLISARIO was founded in 1973 as an anti-colonial movement and present itself as the main representation of the Saharawis independence. The POLISARIO was modelled based on other anti-colonial movements; sought to end economic exploitation to advance the rights of women and to end the tribal hierarchy of Saharan society which was considered antithetical to progress and development. The POLISARIO interpreted itself as a political administrator of a state in the waiting, developed diplomatic representation and managed to build up an army, the Saharawi Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). The SPLA engaged the Spanish, Mauritania and Moroccan armies. In 1975, when the administration of Western Sahara was transferred to Morocco and Mauritania, POLISARIO continued with their resistance against both states. This conflict attracted the attention of the United Nations Peacekeeping mission. In recent years, the UN Peacekeeping missions are involved in almost all conflicts in all continents of the world.

James Baker during an interview in Houston in 2019 accepted that the conflict in Western Sahara has not been handled well, and that's why it continues to persist. He also reminded the public that when he was U.S. Treasury Secretary, the Moroccans came to them that they wanted help in their war against the Frente POLISARIO. He gave them overhead intelligence and that the U.S military support was instrumental to the Moroccans as they built the sand berm.

Interestingly, the political situation in Western Sahara had witnessed laudable improvements in recent years. Representatives of the two warring parties along with representatives of the neighbouring countries, (Mauritania and Algeria), convened two rounds of UN-sponsored talks in suburban New York in June and August 2007 under the auspices of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. The reintroduced negotiation marked the first direct discussions between the parties to the conflict in more than seven years despite the continued divergence in positions. August 2009 and February 2010 witnessed another round of deliberations between the disputed nations for further informal meetings. However, all the meetings did not produce any serious progress on the core substantive issues. As of 2010, consultations over the terms of reference have not resulted in any substantive action and progress.

Hope to overcome the unending war between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO was noticed in December 2018 when President Trump's new National Security Adviser, John Bolton organized other negotiations to initiate a resolution to the conflict in Western Sahara for the first time in six years. The fact that the two major warring parties involved in the conflict surprisingly spoke civilly and agreed to meet again in several months is an indication of a final resolution in sight. Similarly, in October 2019, after twenty-eight years of the unprogressive ceasefire agreement in Western Sahara, at the instance of the U.S. and the chagrin of Morocco and French diplomats, the UN peacekeeping mandate for Western Sahara was extended by only six months rather than one year as it has always been as an indication of a resolution in sight.

In Asia, United Nations peacekeeping missions operated in the Netherlands, New Croatia and India (1965-1966), Soviet - Afghani war in 1988-1990, Cambodia conflict 1991-1992, 1992-1993, Tajikistan civil war (1994-2000), Indonesia invasion of East Timor (1999-2002, 2002-2005); 2006-2012 East Timorese crises.

In Europe, UN peacekeeping missions operated in the following conflicts: Yugoslav wars-1942 to 1996, Abkhazian war (1993-2009), Croatian War of Independence (1994-1996), Bosnia war (1995-2002), Macedonia aftermath of the Yugoslav wars (1995-1999), Croatian war of



independence (1996-1998), Previaka territorial dispute (1996-2002), Northern Cyprus (1964), Kosovo war (1999).

In the Middle East, UN Peacekeeping Missions operated in these conflict areas; Egypt Suez crisis (1956-1967), Lebanon crisis (1958), Yemen crisis war (1963-1964), Yom Kippur war (1973-1979), Iran-Iraq war (1988-1991), Gulf war (1991-2003), Syrian Goil war (2012), 1948. Ceasefires in the Middle East,

In Africa, UN Peacekeeping missions have intervened in the following conflicts Congo crisis (1960-1964), Angolan civil war (1988-1991), Namibian war of Independence (1989-1996), Angolan Goil war (1991-1995), Mozambican Goil war (1992-1994), Somali civil war (1992-1993), First Liberian civil war (1993-1997), Rwandan civil war (1993-1996), Somali civil war (1993-1995), Chad, Libya Aouzou strip dispute (1994), Angolan civil war (1995-1997), Angolan civil war (1997-1999), Sierra Leone civil war (1998-1999), Central African Republic crisis (1998-2000), Sierra Leone civil war (1999-2005), Eritrean-Ethiopian war (2000-2008), Burundi civil war (2004-2007), Selonal Congo war (1999-2010), Darfur conflict, civil war in Chad (2005-2011), First Ivorian civil war (2014-2017), Liberia-maintaining peace (2013-2018), war in Darfur (2017), Kiuu conflict (2010), Abyei conflict (2011), Northern Mali conflict (2013), Central African Republic Civil war and Western Sahara conflict (1991 to date), (UN Peacekeeping website <https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping>). Some of these conflicts were resolved while many were not resolved. Nevertheless, the resolved conflicts obviously show that UN peacekeeping missions remain our indispensable tool in promoting peace and security. With Multidimensional peacekeeping, the UN peacekeeping missions came to be regarded as successful and effective in many respects (Bellamy, 2010:23), However, the inability of peacekeeping missions (PKM) to adequately resolve some conflicts in Africa remains a great challenge that deserves thorough research investigation.

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara has been ongoing for over thirty-five years and a resolution does not appear likely. Why the conflict is not resolved is a source of concern. The tension between the POLISARIO and Morocco is still high and are further amplified by both parties' divergent interests; while the POLISARIO Front's objective is to obtain independence from Morocco and establish an internationally recognized sovereign state, Morocco's interest is to extend the area of jurisdiction to Western Sahara. However, John (2015, p.45) argues that conflict in Western Sahara is regional and stems from the rivalry between two competitive regimes struggling for influence in North Africa.

On the contrary, Zunes (2010, p.61) attributed the continued hostilities in Western Sahara to foreign interests in the region, particularly United States, France, Spain, Portugal and Europe. Sola-Martin (2009, p.117) attributes it to poor mandate performance and inadequate supports from major stakeholders. There appear to be challenges that hinder the effective resolution of the conflict in Western Saharawi. This is manifested through continued tension in the region even as the UN peacekeeping mission peace process has been active since 1991. The problem therefore is, why is it that conflict in Western Sahara still continues despite the involvement of UN peacekeeping mission for nearly forty years and the impact of this unresolved conflict on African nations especially Nigeria in relation to present Mali?



## **Aims and Objectives**

This study aimed to ascertain the impact the UN Peacekeeping mission has made towards resolving the conflict and factors that underlying the inability of the UN mission to resolve the Western Sahara conflict.

Specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine if the struggle for regional influence between Algeria and Morocco is forestalled to the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict
- ii. Interrogate if foreign interests in the region affect UN mission resolution of Western Saharawi conflict.

## **Research Questions**

- i. Did the unresolved conflict in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic directly relate to regional supremacy squabbles between Algeria and Morocco?
- ii. Do foreign interests in the region underlying the failure of the UN mission to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara?

## **Hypothesis**

- i. There is a significant relationship between continuing conflict in Western Sahara and the regional supremacy squabbles between Algeria and Morocco.
- ii. There is a significant relationship between continuing conflict in the Western Sahara Republic and the self-interests of a major power in the region.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study shall immensely be relevant to peace and conflict experts and organizations, as it will seek to address the huge challenges being faced by officials and officers sent on conflict resolution missions by Nations or states and international organizations like the United Nations, especially when such mission is concerned with resolving conflicts in the African continent.

Theoretically, empirically and by policy choice, the study is significant because it explores and explains the challenges of peacekeeping and conflict resolution missions in crisis-ridden regions by rigorously investigating the developments and the actions and in-actions of the UN's mission in SADR through a wide range of field works, and exploration of obtained data, both primary and secondary.

Thus, the findings of the study shall provide policymakers in the aspect of conflict resolution with a rich policy choice, provide theorists with an array of phenomena upon which theories of conflict can be developed and also expand foreign affairs components of SADR and indeed those of other African countries.

Also, it is hoped that the work will be beneficial to scholars and students by providing them with an array of research information and further motivate research into the field of study.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Liberal Peace Theory**

Liberal peace theory seeks to project the importance of freedom, justice and order. Liberal Peace Theory is the most influential theory in the peacekeeping mission. It is dubitably the most document theory in peacekeeping operations because the theory maintains that stable peace could be achieved when the theory and practice of peacekeeping missions are informed by the Liberal Peace Theory (Paris, 2004:16). This implies that conflicts can be reduced through the spread of liberalism across countries of the world. The implicit assumptions of the Liberal Peace Theory are that democratic states do not wage war on other liberal states, which in itself is an aggressive act or expression of non-peaceful behaviour. This is also the argument that these states have “failed” and need democratizing or fixing to become the ideal liberal democratic state system.

As Bellamy, Williams and Cariffin (2010:23) contend, scholars following liberal peace theoretical traditions have two exploratory justifications for this scenario. First, liberal democratic states have well-established domestic political institutions. These include an independent judiciary, a legislature together with an effective rule of law that put checks on the powers of their leaders to wage wars irrationally with rebel groups within their state or with other nation-states. Also, many of the international organizations to which these states belong are guided by democratic norms, values and principles that equally renounce war as an instrument for achieving peace. Therefore, liberal states are guided by democratic, norms, values and principles that humanitarian participation and value pacific settlement of political conflicts stand. Second, at the domestic level of an individual state, the tendency for war between and among democratic states is reduced because of the democratic norms and values that direct these states as they recognize one another’s legitimacy.

Linking Liberal Peace Theory to peace operations, the mounting of peace missions is assured to serve the interests of liberal democracies by promoting the basic trends of Liberal peace. Strengthening this argument further, Bellamy, Williams and Griffin (2010:24) stated that:

This is most apparent in those peacekeeping missions that seek to build peace within states, which are increasingly becoming the norm. These operations try to build stable peace by enabling the creation of democratic societies and Liberal free market economics.

From a Liberal perspective, liberal peacekeeping mission intervention is necessary and justified based on the fact that Western Sahrawi that has descended into conflicts and armed violence with negative consequences on its civilian populations can no longer claim sovereignty and non-intervention (Jabri 2010:42).

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Conflict**

Conflict is a dynamic process in which structures, attitudes and behaviours are constantly changing and influencing one another. A conflict emerges as parties’ interests come into



disagreement or their relationship becomes oppressive. The parties then begin to develop hostile attitudes and conflicting behaviours. The conflict formation starts to grow and develop, thus the conflict may widen, deepen and spread. This complicates the task of addressing the original, core conflict. Eventually, resolving the conflict must involve a set of dynamic, inter-dependent changes that involve de-escalation of conflict behaviour, change in attitudes and transformation of relationships or structures.

Tom Woodhouse of Bradford University defines conflict as “the pursuit of incompatible goals by individuals or groups”. The use of such a broad definition allows for the consideration of any conflict, whether it is interpersonal or international, whether it is pursued by peaceful means or by the use of force. Contemporary conflict, refers to the prevailing pattern of political and violent conflict in the post-cold war world, while contemporary armed conflicts refer to those that involve the use of force.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Miller (2003) posits that resolution is “a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict”. According to Mail and Wood House (2009), “By conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitude hostile any longer, while the structure of the conflict has been changed”

### **Peacekeeping as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism**

Peacekeeping as presently conceived is traceable to an adaptation of the provisions embodied in chapter six of the UN Charter, mandating the organisation to create an enabling environment for global peace and security. The need for peaceful settlement of disputes, as contained in the UN Charter provisions, stresses the necessity for parties to a dispute to seek a solution through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and the resort to regional agencies or any other peaceful means of their choice. Since parties to a dispute are not likely to resort to negotiation to resolve their differences as long as their forces are engaged in active combat, peacekeeping is intended to create the necessary environment within which the dispute can be negotiated.

### **Empirical Review**

In another related study on UN India-Pakistan Observation Mission (UNIPOM), Singh (2015, p.5) found out that the mission succeeded in its operation. He noted that the UN India-Pakistan Observation Mission (UNIPOM) was set to supervise the ceasefire and withdrawal of all armed personnel along the India-Pakistan border other than in Jammu and Kashmir. UNIPOM highlighted the importance of following constitutional norms in “establishing, supporting, and extending missions.” UNIPOM had to supervise a ceasefire over a distance of more than a thousand miles. It could not facilitate accurate reporting about what was happening in the area. Yet, UNIPOM was a successful mission as it completed its mandate with very limited resources deployed in a complex environment in a short frame. Also, the mission’s peacekeepers negotiated an agreement with the two sides in mid-December to limit air activity, ultimately contributing to peace in the entire area. The work is also related to the current study in that the result of the study revealed that the consent of parties in conflict practically determines the success or failure of peacekeepers. This result confirms the findings of the present study.



Diehi (2014, p.9) conducted a research study on Emergency Force (UNEF II). He discovered that the mission made substantial progress in the resolution of its mandate. According to the study, the second UN Emergency Force (UNEF II) was established in October 1973, following its predecessor mission UNEF I. The study identified two criteria that made the operation to succeed: (1) limit armed conflict, (2) promote conflict resolution. Indeed, UNEF II kept the peace along the Egyptian-Israeli border and aided the conflict resolution that preceded the Camp David Accords. Also, UNEF II reinforced the experience of other UN operations, which suggested that “a traditional force could be better effective in interposition and monitoring missions.” Furthermore, it set new approaches for future peacekeeping missions, securing the outcome of the operation as a clear success. The study, like others, revealed that the operational success of the mission was basically due to the effective implementation of the mandate. The study however fails to explain factors that contributed to the success of the second mission. However, both studies analyze the same subject matter in a different scenario.

Baczko (2015, p.6) research on UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP). In his study, the researcher noted that this mission was a failure. According to the study, the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) was established to assist the two countries to ensure the implementation of the Geneva Accords and to investigate and report any violations of the Accord that the cooperation between the two sides did not go well as Islamabad and Kabul were not willing to cooperate with UNGOMAP. Instead, they were following their agenda and the UN mission had neither the political support nor the means to accomplish the mission. In addition, without the cooperation of the actors involved in the conflict, UNGOMAP was limited to registering the complaints from each side without investigating them in depth. Hence, it could not take any measures to coerce them to comply with the accords. The mission’s mandate had an explicit part of supervising the voluntary return of millions of refugees. Yet, Baczko and Gilles argue that because the mission was under-resourced, “UNGOMAP could not collect sufficient information.” Therefore, the operation could only register complaints, but not act upon them. Both studies are related because they show that when parties in conflict refuse to give consent to a peace process initiated by the peacekeepers, resolution of the conflict is difficult. The study also helps to enrich the literature of the current study. Though the study used a case study approach, nevertheless, they both discuss issues relating to conflict resolution

Research on the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) was conducted by Khan (2015, p.8) and found out that the mission succeeded in keeping peace in the area. The UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (IJNIIMOG) was deployed to verify and monitor the ceasefire between Iran and the mutual withdrawal of their troops. Brigadier General Shahedul Anan Khan states that “UNTIMOG was a successful example of a UN observer mission that managed to verify, monitor, and maintain a ceasefire between two former belligerents.” Although UNIIMOG faced several challenges and limitations in an extremely volatile environment, the mission “managed to contribute to the prevention of escalation to large-scale violence or a return to major inter-state conflict between Iran and Iraq.”

Furthermore, Dzinosa (2004, p.646) carried out a research study on UN Angola Verification Mission I (UNAVEM I) The first UN Transition Assistance Group (UNAVEM I) was created to monitor the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angolan territory. The mission is one of the first multidimensional UN peace operations that succeeded in carrying out its mandate. Particularly, the operation succeeded to verify consensual troop withdrawal, which corresponded closely to the category of first-generation peacekeeping operations. The result





shows that UNAVEM I “successfully discharged its tasks by monitoring the withdrawal of Cuban military personnel and equipment from Angola”. While the end of the overall conflict was far from being resolved, the mission can be regarded as successful as it formally ended the interstate conflict in Angola by successfully ridding it of its “overt international attributes.” Therefore, given its limited capacity, UNAVEM I designed a blueprint for the following missions (UNAVEM II, ITT, MONUA) even though their achievements are far being considered a successful exception. The study also indicates that UN peacekeeping remains indispensable in conflict resolution. It also confirms the fact that a change of review of the mandate is crucial when the initial mandate comes to an end yet the conflict is yet resolved.

On UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), Pushkina (2006, p.12) confirmed that UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia was in most respects a political operation tasked with creating and managing conditions for a democratic transition to independence following a prolonged colonial occupation. On April 1, 1989, when the ceasefire was to come into effect, South African forces clashed with the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) combatants, and the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in the northern border areas. Dzienesa claims that UNTAG “fulfilled its central objective of ensuring a peaceful, transparent electoral process and a smooth transition to independence.” Pushkina also states that the overall degree of consent and cooperation was high during the mission, and the South Western Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) and the Namibian regime (South Africa) complied and supported the UN peacekeepers, which contributed to the mission’s overall - success. The work is related to the current work because the outcome of both studies shows the credibility of UN Peacekeepers in resolving conflict. Both studies adopted the qualitative method and relied on secondary data.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted construal and descriptive research design and was conducted in the Western Sahara which is a strip of land along the Atlantic coast of Africa. The territory sits on 266,000 sq. km of land, which borders Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, and has a total coastline of 1,110 km and a total population of 522,928 (CIA, 2012). Data for the study was derived from secondary sources such as information on the evolution of the UN peace operative, assessing the success and failures of the UN peace operations, historical overview of Western Sahara higher, regional supremacy and the escalation of the conflict in the Saharawi Republic. The data collected for this study were quantitatively analyzed. The analysis of data for this study was based on an in-depth description of the information obtained, mostly from the source. This enabled the study to provide detailed narratives on the Saharawi conflict and relate the dynamics to UN Peacekeeping Mission.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### **Do the unresolved conflict in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic directly related to regional supremacy squabbles between Algeria and Morocco.**

#### **Evaluation and proof of hypothesis one:**

Analysis of data in view of hypothesis one in the study revealed that Algeria continued support for the Polisario have successfully challenged Morocco's attempt to incorporate the territory of Western Saharawi within its borders.

There is continued conflict in the study area after nearly forty years despite UN involvement because Algeria's support for the Polisario is a strategy by Algeria to become the sole regional hegemon in the Maghreb. The finding of this study is in line with the result of Michael (2012, p: 18)'s study. He revealed that Algeria's hegemonic ambitions and its strategy to counter Moroccan influences in the region have contributed to the unyielding influence of Polisario that makes a resolution of the conflict unrealizable.

The fact here is that to achieve regional hegemony in North West Africa, Algeria has attempted to oppose Morocco's objectives in regards to Western Sahara. By working against Morocco's interests in the conflict, Algeria would then be able to offer its voice on a regional and international level and strengthen its leadership position in the Maghreb. This would then allow Algeria to foster the perception that it is the sub-regional hegemony in the region.

Michael (2013, p.34) analysis point to this fact. According to the study result, Morocco's desire to incorporate Western Sahara creates many possible opportunities to enhance its position internationally and within the region. In doing so, they would be able to, not only challenge Algeria for regional supremacy but surpass their rival to be viewed as a possible hegemony for the Maghreb, to do this, morocco would need to achieve certain goals against both Algeria and the Polisario to weaken their status in the region.

One such opportunity over the territory would allow morocco to not only increase its boundaries but also consolidate international views on the issue in its favour. To this end, a final treaty between the government and the Polisario would allow the state to have its boundaries internationally recognized and allow morocco to shift its interests elsewhere internally, especially if the result leads to the Sahrawi population supporting autonomy or integration into the state. This would also allow the international community to recognize Moroccan claims on the area and create a greater level of stability in regional polities, weakening Algeria's position within the region and undermining the ability of the Polisario to exert influence within Western Sahara. As a result, such actions would allow morocco the ability to project leadership and stability within the region and create a sense of hegemonic superiority over its neighbours.

Secondly, a settlement of the Western Sahara matter would force states and organizations to end their support for the Polisario. As it stands, the continued recognition of the Polisario through recognition of the SADR damages Morocco's ability to exert control over the territory. Furthermore, it increases the international standing of the opposition and prevents morocco from achieving any of its long-term plans in the region. As long as other states continue to recognize either the SADR as the independent government for the Saharawi or the Polisario as the official representative of the people, Morocco is united in exerting full control over the



territory and must counter its rivals in the region for influence and position. By achieving incorporation of Western Sahara into Morocco, the Polisario would become marginalized within Morocco and would lose support in the international community.

The third point regarding Morocco's desire to incorporate Western Sahara deals with resource allocation. Once the territory is legally incorporated, Morocco would have greater access to maritime and land-based resources that would make its position in North West Africa much stronger. As noted by Soren Linid and Toby (2010, p. 86), questions over the control of phosphates, oil and fisheries within Western Sahara persist and have become central to Morocco's policy in the region. By having full legal access to the resources that have run into conflict with activist groups, international companies as well as the European Union, Morocco would be able to develop the Western Sahrawi better as well as profit from the resources found in the region. This would greatly increase its ability to lead in the Maghreb and better position the state compared to Algeria.

Finally, all these issues relate to making Morocco a more viable regional hegemony. Once the question on Western Sahara has been settled, Morocco would be able to build on greater support from its Western allies—the United States and France—and better position itself in a post-Gadhafi Maghreb region to be the central power base. As a result, Morocco would increase its mineral and fisheries wealth, the state would be viewed more viable economically within the region and decrease the influence Algeria currently has in regional politics. Ousting the Polisario from conflict over the Sahrawi would further increase Morocco's leadership capacity in the region.

Each of the goal analyzed above allows it a means to not only solve its own problems with Western Sahrawi but also to better position itself internationally and within the Maghreb as a major force. Further, by resolving the Western Sahrawi situation, Morocco would be in a better position to push for greater regional integration through the Arab Maghreb Union.

Algeria, on the other hand, has sought to utilize the invasion and Morocco's attempts to control the territory to its advantage. While Morocco views international resistance to recognizing its claim as based on Algeria Manipulation (Maghraoui, 124), some within Algeria fear that should Western Sahara be recognized as "the southern provinces" of Morocco, that it would not only throw off the balance of power in the region but will increase appetites in Rabat to pursue claims towards Timouf and southwest Algeria (Zoubir, 2007, p.30).

Considering Algeria's fear of conflict, it has sought to challenge Morocco's claims to the territory and back the Polisario and the SADR as the legitimate power over the area. This comes from its historical support for self-determination of people and Algeria's own history of conflict with France-Jacob (2010, p.3-4) says as much when examining Algeria's role in the conflict:

"Self-determination is an important aspect of the normative framework through which Algerian nationalism constitutes itself and through which the Algeria government has tended to articulate its foreign policy. The ideal of self-determination indisputably played a key discursive role in Algeria's struggle for independence and so there is a sense in which Algerian leaders seen in Polisario clear parallels with their struggle for independence support for Western Saharan resistance is thus, not only



consistent with Algeria's national values but also history (Jacob,2010, p.3).

Algeria has been most vocal on the international stage in its support for the Sahrawi cause and helped the state gain entry to the organization for African unity and the successor African union, which Morocco withdrew from in 1984 and remains the only non-member on the continent. Algeria has also seen other states, recognize the SADR or the Polisario as the official voice of the Sahrawi and support the idea of Sahrawi self-determination (Benabdallah, 2009, p.36). As states show support for the position made by the UN in the 1970s, that Western Sahara should be governed by the Sahrawi, Algeria has not directly created this development but has been able to benefit from the state's sympathies for the Sahrawi as a means of limiting Morocco's perceived aggression.

In the end, Algeria's greatest argument against Morocco's claims on Western Sahara is that no state besides Morocco, not even its strongest supporter France recognizes it. When Morocco made her 2007 autonomy proposal, Algeria and the Polisario were able to reject it outright as it failed to include an option for independence and positioned Morocco as the aggressor state. It is this conflicting development between them that has continued to affect the effective resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara. This finding is further supported by the views held by some UN peacekeepers. According to Mohammed Benouna (the Moroccan UN representative), Algeria's strict refusal to participate in negotiation impinge negatively on the peace process. Algeria's desire for a regional hegemon made her stay out of all negotiation regardless of pressure. This explains why Mohammed argued that Algeria should be forced to negotiate since Polisario cannot negotiate without the blessing of Algeria (International Crisis Group, 2009, p.6). Algeria has always maintained the position that it is only concerned with the Sahrawi and that the Polisario speak for the people. Tefian (2017, p.6) said that Algeria rejects any approach that attempts to force an Algeria-morocco dialogue on western Sahara, while it would be impossible to show that Algeria has directly weakened Morocco's ability to remove the Polisario from the global stage, Algeria shows its ability to undermine its rival. Rather than speak as a concerned party under the auspices of "self-determination", Algeria is able to press its news without directly involving itself in the negotiations. Should Algeria be forced to negotiate with Morocco, the Polisario's relevance would become rather nonexistent and the views of the Sahrawi would be diminished.

"whether the Moroccan government agrees to it or not, the Polisario is considered the voice of the Sahrawi people, and as long as Algeria stays, or at least acts, above the fray, the Polisario will be able to maintain support and recognition. Even with the money flowing to buy off states for support, Algeria's willingness to play by the UN's rules allows it to continue to undermine Morocco's objective and keeps the Polisario as a threat to the future integration of Western Sahara into Morocco.

Algeria and Morocco have fought against each other for well over a century, from French colonial rule to the Sand War of 1963. Both states have sought to expand their borders and influence within the Maghreb region.

The historical conflict between Algeria and Morocco helps to create political problems for both states in regards to Western Sahara and the future of the Maghreb. Both see the possibility of being the major power amongst its neighbours in the Maghreb and even beyond. As long as



the Western Sahara conflict persists, the tension between the two states will lead to questions over who has more power and influence in the region. In the case of Algeria, every attempt to weaken Morocco's claims and control over Western Sahara makes their ability to exert power over their neighbours much easier. Thus, Algeria's continued support for the Polisario Front and its backing of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic against Morocco's interest has contributed to the difficulties encountered in peacekeeping and resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara.

### **Do foreign interests in the region underlying the failure of the UN mission to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara?**

#### **Evaluation and Proof of hypothesis two:**

The continuing conflict in the Western Sahrawi Republic is directly related to foreign interest in the region.

The analysis of data in view of hypothesis two revealed that foreign interest in the region has contributed to the continuing institution in Western Sahara. Zoubir (2009, p.100) noted that the separation of Western Sahara from Morocco would damage its sovereignty. This is a position taken by the United States, unwilling to push for a strong and decisive solution.

Morocco has been a willing ally of the United States and from a geopolitical scope plays an important balancing role in North Africa for Washington (Zunes, 2014, p.8). Furthermore, it is the position of the United States that allowing a Sahrawi vote on independence could destabilize the Moroccan monarchy, which would threaten a major ally in North Africa that has become more important during the war on terror.

The outcome of this study is also in line with the position of Zunes and Mundy (2020, p.39) that in addition to the United States, Morocco receives more loan from France in maintaining the current situations. France has been a champion for Morocco within the security Covent and is in many ways a counterbalance to the objectives of its former colony, Algeria. Accordingly, it is advocating a solution to the conflict that would better support the regime in Rabat-one in which Western Sahara would be under Morocco's sovereignty. The French government was also instrumental in successfully altering the discussion over Sahrawi independence and was able to wedge themselves within the proposed Baker plan in 2001 (Zumes & Mundy, 2010, p.78).

This position allows Morocco protection from the UN when it comes to Western Sahara, and France was willing to endorse Morocco's proposal for autonomy for Western Saharawi with no possibility of self-determination (Sola-Martin, 2009, pp-117-140).

However, the position has been limited as France, the US and Spain did push for Morocco to provide a "credible" solution with the failure of the second Builer plan in 2013.

Furthermore, in 2009 US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton said the following in regards to Morocco's plan for Sahrawi autonomy.

“Well, this is a plan, as you know that originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration.



Now, we are supporting the united nations' process because we think that if there can be a peaceful resolution to the difficulties that exist with your neighbours, both to the east and to the South and the west that is in everyone's interest. But because of our long relationship, we are very aware of how challenging the circumstances are, and I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same (Smanowitz, 2012, p.86).

Under the administration of the president of the U.S, Donald Trump, the stance towards the conflict is still unclear. I do not foresee a drastic change in the position of the US concerning the Western Sahara Conflict (WSC), because the US is more focused on Iran, North Korea and Russia and there are no big motivations to change the positions

As long as the United States remains committed to the autonomy plan suggested by Morocco, Morocco gains enough international clout to push for her interest against pressure by Algeria and others to compromise with the Polisario and the Sahrawi nationals. With the United States maintaining a neutral stance officially on the territory even after its willingness to support the Baker plan in 2013, Morocco is further able to utilize her major allies' disinterest in allowing for an independent Sahrawi homeland to continue to propose its own plans for control over the territory.

Vogler (2012, p.30) and Wehrey (2013, p.106) analysis and findings on foreign interest and the Sahrawi conflict confirm the outcome of the present work. As revealed by the study, France and America have supported Morocco's position since the beginning of the Western Sahara conflict. The US support for Morocco solidified during the Green March while France's position has evolved over the years. Neutral at first, the French stood with Algeria in support of the Polisario before becoming Stanch Moroccan supporter.

France and the U.S both facilitated the Green march, France provided the logistical expertise and the US supplied C13Ds to transport civilian participants from Morocco (Kai, 2016, p.39). Since then, France has been a major arms supplier, second by the United States which increased its foreign military sales (FMS) to Morocco from \$242 in 1976 (Kai, 2016, p.39). Between 2009 and 2014 Morocco secured millions of dollars in military and becoming the second-largest beneficiary in the Africa continent after Egypt.

The US turns a blind eye to Morocco's illegal weapons deals through the US Arms Export Control Act and a 1960 US-Moroccan military agreement that forbid the use of U.S weapons beyond Morocco's recognized border, Morocco employs these sophisticated weapons in Western Sahrawi. As revealed in the study, the most crucial support that Morocco draws is French and American diplomatic cover in the United Nations. These nations have prevented the UNSC from imposing any strict sanction against Morocco (Zumes & Mundy, 2010, p.45). In 2009, 2010 and 2014, France blocked the proposed resolution giving MINURSO a human right component, defending its position by claiming Algerian manipulation and uses of the issue to undermine Morocco.

The US also uses its influence in favour of Morocco. In 2013, Secretary-General Ban KI-Moon urged the Security Council to implement a sustained independent mechanism to monitor human rights in the Western Sahrawi, which prompted the US to propose an update of the MINURSO mandate accordingly. As soon learned of the motion, however, Rabat cancelled the planned



US-Moroccan military exercise, thus suspending its security cooperation. In consequence, the US backed down and dismissed the drafted resolution.

France and American diplomatic support extend beyond the United Nations. In the Obama Administration, a majority of the House of Representatives signed letters calling on the president to endorse Morocco's proposal of Western Sahrawi autonomy under Morocco auspices. Eliza (2014, p.25) noted that this congressional involvement suggests the extent of U.S interest in the Sahrawi conflict.

Support for Morocco in the US and France is anticipated to grow in light of recent events in Europe and North Africa. Moroccan intelligence supplied the tip-off that led to the apartment in Saint-Denis where the French Police captured Abdel Abaaoud, the Jihadist behind the 13 November attacks in Paris. This cooperation demonstrated the value of an alliance with Morocco and elevated Morocco's bargaining power in the Western Sahrawi Conflict. These analyses evidently prove that regional and foreign actors aligned in an armed conflict involving Morocco and the Polisario Front in 1975, and clashes continued till today. The cease-fire did not end the conflict, however, for nearly forty years, the UN has been unable to wrap it up.

France tries to limit the veto power in the UN and wishes to regulate the use of it in the Security Council (Keith, 2011, p.687). The last time France had made use of its veto right dates back to 1989. However, a mere threat of using a veto from being called. This applies to the Western Sahara dispute, where France, which denies the accusations, apparently repeatedly threatened to use its veto power to block proposals to have MINURSO monitor the human rights situation in the area (Karim, 2007, p.288).

It is difficult to see the Security Council effectively resolve the conflict with France being part of it. The relationship between Morocco and France dates back a long time and is very tight for this conflict to jeopardize their connection (Boukhars, 2013, p.154). For example, France is the leading foreign investor in Morocco, with over 800 Million Euros invested in 2016, France is Morocco's second-largest trading partner in the world and Morocco is the leading beneficiary of the French Development Agency (AFD).

A significant recent discovery of oil and gas off the Moroccan coast, combine with a wealth of shale deposits and wind and solar energy in Western Sahara to introduce a new complication in the Western Sahara conflict. In Morocco, proper oil-shale deposit at Timahdit in the Middle Atlas Mountains contains estimated barrels, while the deposit at Tarfaya contains an estimated 22 billion barrels. These reserves are dwarfed by the reserves estimated in Western Sahara. The Tin basin, which stretches across central Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Western Algeria, contains an estimated 1.5 trillion cubic meters of recoverable shale deposit. Reportedly, over 40 companies rushed to acquire licenses to drill in the Western Sahara region, others invested in Western Sahara by constructing the largest wind farms solar plants in Africa (35). This level of investment has the potential to satisfy Moroccan energy needs and allow the export of a substantial amount of hydrocarbon and electricity to southern Europe. Despite Algeria and the POLISARIO Front's unsuccessful attempt to deter potential investors from establishing projects in the territory of Western Sahara, American and European investors continue their activities in the Western state thus complicating the Morocco-POLISARIO Front stalemate.



Analysis of foreign interest factor in the study and the unending conflict in the Sahrawi reinforce the finding of studies reviewed, for example, the Rwanda case study demonstrated that UN peacekeepers were deployed to facilitate the transfer of power from the Hutu majority government to the Tutsi minority rebel movement. The rebel movement enjoyed political, diplomatic and military support primarily from the Anglo-American alliance that wanted to dislodge French influence from the Central African Region. The ultimate objective for the peacekeeping mission in Rwanda was to have a strong Anglo-American footprint established in Central Africa in order to guarantee these foreign powers unlimited access to the vast natural and mineral resources in eastern DRC through Uganda and Rwanda (Herbert, 2017, p.188).

Robinstem (2010, p.16) observed that UN peacekeepers' prioritization of big powers' concerns and interest's wheel of those of host populations and governments is a practice reminiscent of earlier imperial policing strategies and tactics. Added to this observation, is the growing practice of unequal sharing of the risk burden in UN missions that are deployed in hostile and semi-permissive theaters of operations. (Unliffe 2009, p.20) noted that the riskiest missions are lopsided in favour of countries with the least ability to bear the burden, namely the poor and weak states on the periphery. Morocco received the braking of two prominent members of the Security Council. Consequently, it follows from the analysis that foreign interest in the region has contributed to the continuing conflict in Western Sahara.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out and appraised the UN peacekeeping operations in the Western Sahara conflict with the view to determine why is there a continued conflict in Western Sahara after nearly forty years of conflict and ceasefires, negotiations and UN involvement. From the analysis, the study concludes that incompatible position of the POLISARIO Front and Morocco combined with foreign actors aligned in armed conflict, UN incompetency in staffing and intelligence, Algeria's support to Polisario regional alliance, the pursuit by France and United States interests in the region and finally the social, political, and economic disorganization generated by evolving phases of the conflict made it difficult to resolve.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis, the following recommendations were made:

1. The UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara should resolve issues and inconsistencies surrounding the identification and registration of others to enable them to conduct a referendum as a key part of its role to conflict resolution in Western Sahara.
2. Algeria and Morocco should be less ambitious of their regional powers and work towards the collective security interest of the entire region. In these regards, both countries should work out amicable means of resolving the conflict in Western Sahara in African ways.
3. Major powers like United States, France, European Union and others should respect their internationally recognized responsibility for the UN peacekeeping mission and stop prioritizing their self-interests at the expense of the well-being of the generality of the local populations affected by the conflict in Western Sahara.





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