

Threats to Resume Armed Conflict

Between 1975 and 1991, the Polisario Front, a pro-Soviet bloc “national liberation movement” backed principally by Cuba, Libya, and Algeria, engaged in an armed insurrection to advance the revolutionary objectives of its Marxist allies by challenging Morocco’s attempts to re-assert its historical sovereignty over the area then known as “Spanish Sahara,” which had been part of Morocco prior to Spain’s colonial occupation of the region a century before. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its active support for such Marxist “national liberation” movements in 1991, the United Nations managed to negotiate a ceasefire in the war over what, by then, had become known as Western Sahara. The UN Security Council, as part of that ceasefire, negotiated an agreement between Morocco and the Polisario Front, along with its Algerian supporters, to hold a popular referendum on the future of the territory. Unfortunately, the proposed referendum proved impossible to accomplish due to fundamental differences between Morocco, the Polisario Front, and Algeria on who should be qualified to vote.

After the referendum process failed in 1999, the UN Security Council began to promote the idea that the parties to the dispute should instead seek to conclude a “mutually acceptable political solution” that would resolve this long-standing problem and provide for a peaceful future for the residents of the territory. After 2003, it became clear that such a political solution should be based on a fundamental compromise that would allow both Morocco and the Polisario Front the basic elements of what was necessary to ensure their essential demands. For Morocco this meant maintaining its sovereignty, and for the Polisario Front it meant some political arrangement that would allow the concerned population of the region to exercise basic control over its day-to-day governance of local affairs.

Morocco put forth such a plan, known as the “autonomy plan” in 2007, but the Polisario Front and Algeria refused to accept it or negotiate on a mutually acceptable political compromise. Instead, the Polisario has obstructed the process with repeated threats to resume armed conflict. Below is a chronology of more than two dozen threats over the last several years as the region descends into increasingly dangerous circumstances.

August 2013

Polisario official Bachir Mystapha Sayed warns that the “Polisario Front is ready for resistance and will announce it [return to armed struggle] the day when the international community and United Nations announce their failure in finding a just solution.” Several other Polisario officials, including the “Minister of Education and Teaching” and the “President of Parliament” echo these statements, delivered during a summer training program for Polisario officials.¹

May 2013

At a news conference, Polisario Front Secretary General Mohamed Abdelaziz threatens, “We have believed in the United Nations, but if it fails to organize a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara to allow the Sahrawi people to recover independence, then we will take up arms to liberate our territory.”²

March 2013

Mohamed Abdelaziz warns, “if necessary, we will resume the armed struggle to confront the Moroccan occupation in our territories.”³

¹ <http://www.spsrasd.info/fr/content/le-front-polisario-n%C3%A9carte-pas-le-retour-%C3%A0-la-lutte-arm%C3%A9e-si-le-maroc-persiste-%C3%A0-retarder-le>

<http://www.spsrasd.info/fr/content/seul-le-front-polisario-peut-d%C3%A9cider-la-reprise-des-armes-contre-le-maroc-ministre-sahraouie>
<http://www.spsrasd.info/fr/content/le-pr%C3%A9sident-du-parlement-d%C3%A9nonce-le-soutien-du-maroc-au-terrorisme>

² http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hLLnJXChABRhgbvEU1Fypu5vsk_w?docId=CNG.481ac8aab6040095cc700e62c5d22c1b.731

³ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/independence-western-sahara-president-abdelaziz-confirms-peaceful-struggle-does-not-exclude->

November 2012

After a meeting with UN Envoy Christopher Ross, Polisario Secretary of State for Documentation and Security Brahim Mohamed Mamud says, "Every stalemate will only make the Sahrawis more adherent to their cause, and determined to seize it by all means available, including that of peaceful uprising and armed struggle."⁴

August 2012

In an interview with the Basque newspaper *Gara*, Mohamed Abdelaziz says an eventual return to war was clearer than ever. He notes, "The armed struggle is latent. It is on our agenda, never dismiss, and we can return at any time."⁵

July 2012

In an interview with Italian magazine *Limes* Polisario 'Minister of Foreign Affairs' Mohamed Salem Ould Salek claims there is growing desire among the Sahrawi people to return to armed struggle and warns that it is becoming more and more difficult to contain the call to arms.⁶

December 2011

At a press conference on the sidelines of the Polisario 13th Congress, Spokesman Dr. Sidi Mohamed Omar says the priority is "raising the readiness of the Saharawi military, because the option of returning to armed struggle remains at hand." During his speech at the Congress, Mohamed Abdelaziz affirms this, arguing that "We maintain the right to return to war. The taking of arms is always possible."⁷

September 2011

Speaking in Italy, Polisario 'Prime Minister' Abdelkader Taleb Oumar argues that Sahrawis, increasingly exasperated by the lack of settlement of the conflict, are near the "point of no return," and may be forced to "take extreme decisions" to pursue armed struggle instead of diplomacy.⁸

July 2011

Mohamed Abdelaziz reaffirms that a return to armed struggle remains an option for the Polisario, calling it, "a right guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations."⁹

May 2011

Speaking at an event marking the 38th anniversary of the outbreak of armed struggle, spokesman for the Sahrawi National Council Khatri Addouh confirms that, "all the national options including the resumption for armed struggle remain" for resolving the Western Sahara conflict.¹⁰

May 2009

In an interview with Spanish news agency EFE, Polisario Front "Prime Minister" Abdelkader Taleb Omar warns, "If we reach the conclusion that things are not progressing, we will be forced to move to the stage of military preparations in order to resume the fighting."¹¹

⁴ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/ross-meets-saharawi-officials-and-representatives-civil-society>

⁵ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/morocco%E2%80%99s-intransigence-makes-eventual-return-war-more-clearly-ever-confirms-president-moham>

⁶ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/spanish-and-italian-authorities-asked-polisario-show-prudence-case-european-hostages-ould-sa>

⁷ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/congress-important-milestone-drafting-future-action-project-congress-spokesman>

<http://www.spsrasd.info/fr/content/13e-congr%C3%A8s-du-front-polisario-mohamed-abdelaziz-%E2%80%99option-arm%C3%A9e-n%E2%80%99est-plus-%C3%A0-exclure%E2%80%9D>

⁸ <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/sahrawis%E2%80%99-exasperation-may-lead-point-no-return-warns-sahrawi-pm>

⁹ <http://www.spsrasd.info/fr/content/mohamed-abdelaziz-rappelle-que-%C2%ABle-choix-de-la-lutte-arm%C3%A9e-est-toujours-de-mise%C2%BB>

¹⁰ http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/all-national-options-including-resumption-armed-struggle-remain-obtainable-saharawi-official?quicktabs_6=1&quicktabs_11=0

¹¹ <http://moroccotimes.over-blog.com/article-31682739.html>

May 2008

8,000 Polisario rebels, armed with AK-47 assault rifles, stage a marching procession in Tifariti to mark the 35th anniversary of the organization. Polisario leader Mohamed Abdelaziz tells the gathering, "We will continue to struggle as we have done for the past 35 years and all options are open."¹²

January 2008

Polisario official Mohamed Beissat says the Polisario is prepared to "pursue peace talks or resume armed struggle to speed up the process." In a later statement, Beissat asserts, "to win peace, you have to get ready for war."¹³

December 2007

At the Polisario annual congress, Mohamed Abdelaziz vows to continue the "war of liberation" against Morocco "by all means possible, by peaceful resistance and by armed struggle."¹⁴

February 2007

Polisario "Minister for Foreign Affairs," Mohamed Salem Ould Salek, renews threats of war during a press conference in Algiers, saying, " ...if the international organisation fails to impose the respect of the international law, none can ask the Saharawis to stay cross-handed nor stop them from defending their rights with all the legitimate means in their possession."¹⁵

October 2006

During an interview on Algerian radio, Mohamed Abdelaziz reiterates threats to return to fighting. He warns, "If the Moroccan government persists in its stubbornness, we will have no choice but to defend our rights by all legitimate means."¹⁶

June 2006

The annual conference of the Sahrawi communities abroad opens in Aghounit. Many speakers underline "the necessity of resuming war" if international efforts to resolve to conflict continue to fail.¹⁷

May 2006

Mohamed Abdelaziz declares that the Moroccan plan to grant autonomy to Western Sahara is a "plan that is born dead," saying, "The Sahrawi people have different ways of struggle that they use following the interest and the situation. Without abandoning the weapons, our armed forces are in fact inside the liberated territories ready [to] resume war and sacrifice."¹⁸

April 2006

Mohamed Abdelaziz claims that a report by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan amounts to "a plot against the Sahrawi cause" and threatens to return to armed struggle if the report is approved by the Security Council.¹⁹

December 2005

In Algeria, the Sahrawi Minister of Culture and Sports cautions that "if Morocco persists in its expansionist policy, the Saharawi people will be forced to resume with war."²⁰

¹² http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-20-437851886_x.htm

¹³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/01/07/idUS209200+07-Jan-2008+PRN20080107>

¹⁴ <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hgvlBza1QgTcFOALxj-J4HPkoaMw>

¹⁵ <http://archives.spsrasd.info/en/infos/2007/02/sps-e050207-a.html>

¹⁶ http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=258499

¹⁷ Sahara Press Service, June 2006

¹⁸ Sahara Press Service, May 2006

¹⁹ <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Polisario-threatens-UN-20060423>

November 2005

In Madrid, Mohamed Abdelaziz warns, "In our policy, resuming to arms was always considered as a possible perspective. When and how? I do not know. We do not exclude it. We hope not to be pushed to, but...we will defend our right this way."²¹

October 2005

The Polisario Front warns US oil firm Kerr-McGee and its partners that their personnel could be at risk if they proceed with plans to drill for oil off the territory's coast: "Existing ceasefire arrangements do not envisage such operations in a war zone, and consequently the Sahrawi army must carefully consider its position and response if these inflammatory activities proceed."²²

July 2005

Asked in Madrid whether the Polisario Front is ready, if need be, to militarily defend itself, Mohamed Abdelaziz claims that Sahrawis "do not hope to resume with war...But if this should happen, we will know how to answer."²³

April 2004

Asked in Algiers whether the Polisario Front plans to return to war, President Abdelaziz stresses that "the possibility of proceeding to armed struggle is not excluded."²⁴

March 2004

The Sahrawi Popular Liberation Army conducts military exercises in Mijek.²⁵

²⁰ Sahara Press Service, December 2006

²¹ Sahara Press Service, November 2005

²² "Polisario warns US oil firm on Western Sahara oil drilling," *Reuters*, 12 October 2005.

²³ Sahara Press Service, July 2005

²⁴ Sahara Press Service, April 2004

²⁵ <http://archives.spsrasd.info/sps-150304.html>