

WESTERN SAHARA

A war in limbo

by Sergio Ramazzotti



Boujadour refugee camp, Algeria. Celebrations for the 46th anniversary of the Saharawi National Union, taking place on October 12. On this day in 1975, the Saharawi people declared its unity under the representation of the Polisario Front.





THE PREDICTABLE RETURN OF A FORGOTTEN CONFLICT

As one of the last acts of his term of office, in December 2020 U.S. President Donald Trump effectively recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. This was in exchange for the restoration of full diplomatic relations between Rabat and Israel.

Trump's decision was in defiance of the 1991 United Nations resolution that ended the war between the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front troops – who for 15 years had fought for dominance over Western Sahara – and imposed the organization of a referendum to determine the sovereignty of the disputed territory.

Following the 1991 resolution, the Saharawi people spent almost 30 years waiting in vain for the referendum, while living in refugee camps in Algeria, to the general indifference of the international community.

The outcome of Trump's decision was predictable: after a ceasefire lasting three decades, the Saharawi troops, who are mostly elderly veterans from the first war and equipped with weapons dating back to that era, have resumed hostilities against Morocco. Despite their overwhelming strategic superiority, the Moroccan army is trying to maintain a low profile. This is in order to avoid attracting international attention and to enable Rabat to continue undisturbed in its exploitation of Western Sahara's vast resources.



Saharawi soldiers man a line of anti-aircraft defense made of old 23-mm twin guns in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.

Saharawi soldiers carry out a missile attack at dusk, shooting old Grad rockets towards Moroccan army posts from the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.





Kids play soccer in the Dajla refugee camp, one of the many Saharawi settlements in the Algerian desert.



Inside a family's house in the Dajla refugee camp, one of the many Saharawi settlements in the Algerian desert.



Saharawi soldiers during a patrol in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.



Saharawi soldiers in the Western Sahara desert, in the Mehairis area, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.

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Dajla refugee camp, Algeria. Women prepare tea under a tent during the celebrations for the 46th anniversary of the Saharawi National Union, taking place on October 12. On this day in 1975, the Saharawi people declared its unity under the representation of the Polisario Front.



Coronel Mohamed Fadel, 74, an artillery battalion commander in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region. These are the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war, of which Fadel is a veteran.



Dajla refugee camp, Algeria. Saharawi president Brahim Ghali attends the celebrations for the 46th anniversary of the Saharawi National Union, taking place on October 12. On this day in 1975, the Saharawi people declared its unity under the representation of the Polisario Front.



Fatima Al Kharouf, 64, in her tent in the Smara refugee camp, one of the many Saharawi settlements in the Algerian desert, where she lives with grandson Yusuf and other members of her family. Al Kharouf, who lost her husband and a son in the 1976-1991 war and whose younger son is fighting in the present conflict, was living in Mehairis, in the Western Sahara territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops. In November 2020, when the conflict between Saharawi troops and the Moroccan army resumed, she fled to refugee camps in Algerian territory like most of the town's population.



Saharawi soldiers man a line of anti-aircraft defense made of old 23-mm twin guns in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.



Boujadour refugee camp, Algeria. A painting in a Saharawi governmental building.



Saharawi soldiers observe from a distance the wall which splits the region in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.



Tindouf, Algeria. A woman in the kitchen block of the Saharawi protocol building in the Rabuni refugee camp.



Saharawi soldiers under the command of Coronel Mohamed Fadel, 74 (center), prepare to carry out a missile attack at dusk, shooting old Grad rockets towards Moroccan army posts from the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.



Dajla refugee camp, Algeria. An imam recites the Koran during the celebrations for the 46th anniversary of the Saharawi National Union, taking place on October 12. On this day in 1975, the Saharawi people declared its unity under the representation of the Polisario Front.

Saharawi soldiers in the Western Sahara desert, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.





Dajla refugee camp, Algeria. An elderly Saharawi soldier, who fought in the 1976-1991 war, attends the celebrations for the 46th anniversary of the Saharawi National Union, taking place on October 12. On this day in 1975, the Saharawi people declared its unity under the representation of the Polisario Front.



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A view of the Smara refugee camp, one of the many Saharawi settlements in the Algerian desert, at sunset.





Saharawi soldiers during a patrol in the Mehairis area of the Western Sahara desert, a few kilometres from the wall which splits the region, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.

Saharawi soldiers pray in front of the grave of Mohamed Abdelaziz, first president of the Polisario Front, in the Bir Lehlou area of the Western Sahara desert, in the territories reclaimed by Saharawi troops during the 1976-1991 war.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الشهيد المرحوم بآذن الله تعالى
محمد عبد العزيز
{ 2016 - 1948 }

