

# Sahrawi arab democratic republic backup power

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The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) was proclaimed by the Polisario Front on 27 February 1976, in Bir Lehlou, Western Sahara. SADR claims sovereignty over the entire territory of Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony; however, at present the SADR government controls approximately 20-25% of the territory it claims.<sup>1</sup> It calls the territories under its control the "Liberated Territories", whilst Morocco claims its territories as the "Southern Provinces".

The SADR has been a member of the African Union (AU), formerly the Organization of African Unity (OAU), since 1984. At the time, Morocco withdrew from the OAU in protest, until 2017, when Morocco again joined the African Union.<sup>2</sup> The SADR also participates as guest on meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement<sup>3</sup>; or the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership,<sup>4</sup> over Moroccan objections.

Besides Mexico, Algeria, Iran, Venezuela, Vietnam, Nigeria and South Africa, India was the largest middle power to have ever recognized SADR, having allowed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to open an embassy in New Delhi in 1985. However, India withdrew its recognition in 2000.<sup>9</sup>

The conflict in the Western Sahara dates back to the early 1970s, when the indigenous Sahrawi Polisario Front sprang up an insurgency in Spanish Sahara, demanding an independent Sahrawi Republic.<sup>10</sup> In 1957, the then-Spanish territory was claimed by Morocco, who declared independence a year before.<sup>11</sup>

On 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion that, while some Sahrawi tribes held allegiance to Morocco, found that there were not any ties of sovereignty, from Morocco or Mauritania, over the territory of Western Sahara. Moreover, the ICJ invoked the right of self-determination for Sahrawis through their free and genuine expression of such will.<sup>12</sup> Morocco defied this advisory and staged a Green March across the Sahara.<sup>10</sup>

The Polisario's insurgency and subsequent international pressure led Spain to withdraw from the region in 1975, Spain agreed to the partition of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania despite the ICJ Advisory Opinion.<sup>11</sup>

In 1976, the Polisario Front declared a Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in Bir Lahlou. In 1979, Mauritania gave up its claim to Western Sahara, which led to Morocco taking over the Mauritanian-controlled portion of the territory. Armed conflict continued to break out until a 1991 ceasefire.<sup>11</sup>

Seeking to change the status quo, the Polisario Front blocked the Western Saharan city of Guerguerat, a key

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trade route between Morocco and Mauritania in 2020. This led to a Moroccan military operation and subsequently led to the 2020 Western Saharan clashes and prompted the Polisario Front to quit observing the 1991 ceasefire.

The parliaments of several states that do not recognize the Sahrawi Republic have called on their respective governments to recognize SADR. The parliament of Sweden was the first in the EU voted to recognize Western Sahara in December 2012, but this has not been enacted by the Swedish government. Declarations were also adopted by the parliaments of Chile and Brazil.

The following lists states whose parliaments have recognized the SADR.

But in 2007, Morocco began pushing instead for Western Sahara to be granted limited autonomy &ndash; while remaining under its sovereign authority. This was an alternative to the full independence claimed by SADR's Polisario Front and recognised by the African Union, many African countries, and others beyond the continent.

But the SADR's support is slipping in Africa. Around 22 states now recognise it, and several more have withdrawn recognition in recent years or frozen it, pending resolution of the dispute. Morocco meanwhile, also lists 22 African countries that have opened consulates in what it calls its 'Southern Provinces', implying recognition of its claim. So quite a few nations are sitting on the fence.

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