

The Western Sahara Conflict: Is Peace Possible in Today's Changing Global Landscape?

Abstract

The history of Western Sahara and the decades-long conflict between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Sahrawi Polisario Front has often been overlooked in international relations. While a UN ceasefire agreement was implemented in 1991, leading to a period of relative peace and a cessation of direct hostilities in the region, recent years have seen a resurgence of violence. Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara has led to human rights violations and the displacement of over 200 000 individuals, forcing many to seek refuge in neighboring countries, particularly in Algeria. This situation has escalated political tensions in the region, yet the international community has largely ignored the issue or, such as the U.S. and France, supported Morocco's territorial claims. Meanwhile, regional actors, particularly the African Union, have taken a more active position, calling for greater support for the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, though their efforts have been undermined by Morocco's withdrawal of the organization during over 30 years. The United Nations, as mediator of the conflict, has struggled to make significant progress due to fundamentally diverging positions and a lack of enforcement power. As the geopolitical landscape rapidly evolves, it is increasingly important to assess how these dynamics may impact the Western Sahara conflict, exploring whether they offer new prospects for peace or risk further engrain the conflict. After outlining the historical context of the territorial dispute, this paper will analyze recent developments shaped by the shifting geopolitical panorama and conclude by considering the potential pathways to peace in the region.

Biography

Lucie Calléja has a PhD in International Relations, Security and Defense at the Institute for Political Studies of Universidade Católica Portuguesa and researcher at the Research Centre of the Institute for Political Studies (CIEP). She completed her PhD in 2024 and was Research Fellow at the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) between 2021 and 2024. Before that, she completed the MA in Governance Leadership and Democracy Studies at the Institute for Political Studies (IEP-UCP) in 2017 and obtained a bachelor's degree in Political Science at Université Lumière Lyon II (France) in 2015. Her research interests focus on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, particularly in Africa, with a specific emphasis on community-based initiatives and women's participation.