GUELTA ZEMMOUR AGAIN SCENE OF MAJOR BATTLES

One of the biggest attacks to date in the war in Western Sahara by Polisario guerrillas against the Moroccan invading forces took place on October 13, 1981, at Guelta Zemmour. According to Polisario sources 204 Moroccans were taken prisoner and over 1800 were killed in the operation which included shooting down a C-130 and three Mirage jets. (Moroccans admit to the capture of some 200 prisoners and the downing of three planes.)

In initial reports in the U.S. press, King Hassan was quoted as saying that the Soviets were involved in the operation. In later action a Moroccan raid in Mauritania on October 19, 1981, was, according to some sources, the first "hot pursuit" raid of the war. In later statements by Moroccan sources, Libya was accused of aiding Polisario forces.

The escalation of the conflict to the reported use of SAM 6-8 missiles by Polisario forces is due to the "sand wall" around the strategic triangle (Bu Craa, El Aiun, Smara) which may have required more sophisticated equipment by Polisario. It was reported that the Moroccans were attempting to install some of this same equipment in Guelta Zemmour. In the month of October attacks against the wall were reported at Bu Craa on several dates.

These recent attacks by Polisario are responsible most observers believe for the visit of U.S. Ambassador-at-large Vernon Walters to Rabat in late October and for a high-level U.S. military mission being sent to meet with King Hassan in early November.

The Reagan Administration may have some difficulty in convincing members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that Polisario is a "Red terrorist" group. Hearings held by that Committee since 1977 have all noted that Polisario is a nationalist movement and that the question of the Western Sahara is one of self-determination for the Sahrawis.

Although the U.S. State Department as early as 1977 stated the the U.S. is neutral in the conflict over the Western Sahara, the increase in sophisticated weaponry to fight a guerrilla war to Morocco, the acknowledgement that U.S. arms can now be used in the disputed territory, and the continued increase in arms grants and sales to Morocco make it difficult for many Third World and Non-Aligned nations to believe this.

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UP-DATE -------------------BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Struggle for the Western Sahara, Part I: Prelude, Part II: Contemporary Politics, Part III: The Sahrawi People, Barbara Harrell-Bond, American University Field Staff Reports, Numbers 37, 38, 39.
HAS ALGERIA CHANGED ITS POSITION ON WESTERN SAHARA? WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Several commentators, including State Department officials, have been predicting for some time that Algeria will gradually move away from its position of support for Polisario and for the Sahrawis' demand for self-determination. What do the Algerians say about all this? The following two statements are taken from Algeria's Memorandum presented to the O.A.U. Committee of Implementation at Nairobi in August, 1981.

83. Algeria accepted the successive recommendations of the O.A.U. on Western Sahara, as well as the resolution of the Nairobi Summit. Its consistent position embodies its dedication to the Sahrawi people's exercise of its rights to self-determination through a general and regular referendum.

How many Sahrawis are refugees in southern Algeria is a much contested fact. Most publications quote the Algerians as saying that there are 50,000 refugees.

144. The Algerian authorities estimate the number of refugees who have settled in southern Algeria at 150,000 today. This figure was officially communicated to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. It was also publicly announced by the Minister of Public Health of Algeria, who was the head of the Algerian delegation to the pledging conference for African refugees that was held in Geneva in April, 1981.

ASA ADDRESSES MAP QUESTIONS AT ANNUAL MEETING

The African Studies Association, at its 24th annual meeting in Bloomington, Indiana, October 21-24, 1981, called attention to the fact that major publishers of maps are misrepresenting two situations in Africa: the Bantustans of South Africa and the Western Sahara. This misrepresentation often passes quickly into textbooks, newspaper articles and other forms of mass communication.

Bantustans are occasionally portrayed as independent of South Africa. Maps should in no way reflect the independence of the Bantustans which are not recognized by any countries of the international community other than South Africa.

More frequently, the Western Sahara (formerly Spanish Sahara) is portrayed as a possession of Morocco. Control of the Western Sahara is intensively contested by Morocco and Polisario. The Moroccan declaration of annexation has not been recognized by the international community.

The African Studies Association and its Board of Directors calls on the publishers of maps to portray in their maps these geographical and political realities which reflect the consensus of the international community.

WANT TO ENSURE THAT THIS LETTER CONTINUES? YOUR DONATION OF $5 WILL ENSURE THAT IT CAN CONTINUE. SEND YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER FOR $5 TO S.P.S.C. LETTER, 217 E. LEHR AVENUE, ADA, OHIO 45810. YOUR CHECK SHOULD BE MADE OUT TO THE SAHARAN PEOPLES SUPPORT COMMITTEE.

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Enclosed is my donation of to help with mailing, printing, and publishing costs of the S.P.S.C. LETTER.

---Statement to be sent to major U.S. map publishers
SUPPORT COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE VISITS CAMPS

The first time I visited the camps was for a period of two weeks in 1977. What had struck me at the time, aside from the repeated comments from the women, children and old men living in those camps in the vicinity of Tindouf that they would return to an independent Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic (R.A.S.D.) one day and their energy in making the refugee camps habitable until the return, was the suffering that the people had undergone, the alimentary and medical needs of the people. I listened to story after story of the escape from the then Spanish Sahara, flight from the main cities to small towns of the interior like Guelta Zemmour and Angala where they were attacked by Moroccan soldiers and Airforce and Mauritanian ground forces. I heard from mothers how they had succeeded in escaping the bombardments in these refugee camps in The R.A.S.D., only to lose those children to a measles epidemic in the early days of the refugee camps around Tindouf.

In 1978 I returned to the camps for another ten days and saw that where before tent schools had existed, now mud brick constructions often housed children and classes. I noted improvements in sanitation and medical care, a continuation of a program to provide the children with dietary supplements, visited classes of women students, observed the program for the care of pregnant women and nursing mothers. In this visit I was impressed by the manner in which the refugees had improved their life in the camps, but I noted that the resolve to return to the R.A.S.D., once they could return to a free land, had not changed.

My 1979 visit to the camps was brief since the major part of that twelve day visit was spent travelling in the R.A.S.D. itself, going from the freed and devastated towns of Farsia and Jdiria to the Atlantic coast near Lemsid. I saw the outskirts of Bu Craa, visited the devastation of Tifariti, Haousa, Angala. Where before I had talked chiefly with the women who direct and manage the activities of the camps and some heroes of the exodus or with some Polisario military and political leaders, this time I met chiefly with a part of the fighting force, regional field commanders and guerrilla soldiers.

My most recent visit in fall, 1981, a stay of eight days, was an update of previous visits. A long interview with Fatimatou Allali provided a clear view of the role of the National Union of Sahrawi women (U.N.F.S.) in the political process of the Polisario Front. Visits with local women leaders who talked about how they managed health, education, justice, crafts and distribution of food and goods in their camps, their hopes for the future, and who asked how American women dealt with some of these concerns, put flesh on Fatimatou Allali's words. I noted remarkable improvements in the areas of health and sanitation, nutrition and education. I was intrigued by the new role that women play in the Justice Committee (marriage and divorce).

In 1977 and 1978 I had seen women, holding their children, in the tent schools trying to learn to read and write and do simple arithmetic. In 1978 I had visited schools for young girls in the camps and had talked with a young Sahrawi woman who was studying Arabic Letters at the University of Oran. In 1979 I had talked with Sahrawi boy scouts in the camps and had visited several co-ed schools for the young.

Now in 1981 I visited the School of February 27, what the Sahrawis call their defiance of the King of Morocco. The school's name, which recalls the date of the announcement of the R.A.S.D., and the school itself, a very much up-dated version of the tent schools (it is made of mud brick covered with cement) with nurseries for the children of the women students, dispensary and clinic, crafts areas, classrooms and administrative offices, is meant as a challenge to those who say that the Sahrawis...
VISIT TO CAMPS cont.

will be unable to govern their territory once they gain independence and who claim that once independence is achieved Sahrawi women will return to the subservient role they played in colonial times.

A group of young women administer the school, Emghei1i, the Director; Eghlie1i and Hennoune, who are in charge of military training for the women; Minatou, who directs the sports and gymnastic program; Gueba1, who is in charge of the crafts-training program. All women who come to the school (and about 700-800 women come every six months) learn to read and write Arabic, learn simple arithmetic, receive crafts and secretarial training, learn to drive a car, receive physical, military and cultural training. In the second half of the program the special aptitudes of each woman receive full attention. Those gifted in weaving concentrate in that area, those who excel in office management receive additional training in that, those who show aptitude for teaching begin to receive additional training, etc.

To be accepted as a student at this school a woman must be at least 16 years old. Husbands may visit their wives and children at any time. Because most Sahrawi women had no opportunity for education under Spanish colonization, most were illiterate at the outbreak of hostilities against the Spanish in 1973. Certainly the war years and the exodus in late 1975 and early 1976 did not provide a climate for women's education. Hence most women sixteen years old and older have had their first opportunity for education in the refugee camps. In answer to a question about her educational background, Fatimatou Allali said, "My studies? I've done them in the Polisario Front."

The advances made by the Sahrawis, men and women, in the camps does not mean that the refugees do not need assistance. The refugees still need food and medicine, clothing, tents (to replace those destroyed by the weather), books and school supplies, toys and games (particularly for the nursery in the schools and in the camps), craft materials. Some of these needs are being met by Support Groups in Europe and elsewhere. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has promised some assistance to the 150,000 refugees.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

(From the March 25, 1981 Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, "Arms Sales in North Africa and the Conflict in the Western Sahara: An Assessment of U.S. Policy." The speaker is Ulrich Haynes, former U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, who is talking about the war in Western Sahara and Polisario forces.)

...As a layman, I would make this observation. If we were dealing in a classic war situation, I would call it a stalemate. But we are not dealing with a classic war situation. We are dealing with one country, Morocco, which is fighting in rather classical military context against an adversary, the Polisario, which is fighting a guerrilla war effort. And in the guerrilla war effort decisive victories are not really essential. If you can hold the major power at bay, and they are doing so, if you can make it costly to the major power, indeed over the long run the process of attrition may result in victory for you.

The following is a continuation of the memorandum written by Sahrawi representatives summarizing the issues surrounding the decolonization of the Western Sahara. The first part of the statement was published in the S.P.S.C. LETTER of September, 1981.

Faithful to the framework of its action in favor of the decolonization of Western Sahara, the General Assembly dispatched a mission of inquiry which visited the territory in May and June 1975. Its report, adopted during the 30th Session of the General Assembly has been and remains an important testimony inasmuch as it clarifies the situation to the International Community about the choice and the will of the Sahrawi people. The report stated:

"...within the territory- the Mission has witnessed that the population, or at least all those persons encountered by the Mission, was categorically for independence and against the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania."

It concludes that the Sahrawi people have reaffirmed their commitment to their sole and legitimate representative, the POLISARIO Front.

(To be continued in the next S.P.S.C. LETTER)