

THE SAHRAWIS OF WESTERN SAHARA

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**MINORITY
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- To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicising the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world.
- To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and
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THE SAHRAWIS OF WESTERN SAHARA

by John Mercer

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From the Universal Declaration
of Human Rights,
adopted by the General Assembly
of the United Nations
on 10th December 1948:

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

correct
✓

'Within the Territory, the Mission noted that the population, or at least almost all those persons encountered by the Mission, was categorically for independence and against the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania'

(Report of the UN Visiting Mission, 1975)

'The Court's conclusion is that the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. Thus the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory'

(Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, 1975)

'All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'

(Resolution 1514 (XV), United Nations General Assembly, 1960)

'Reaffirms the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence'

(Resolution passed by 90-10 votes, with 39 abstentions, by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 1978)

'We, the Heads of African States and Governments . . . convinced that it is the inalienable right of all people to control their own destiny . . .'

(Opening of the Charter of the Organisation for African Unity)



NORTH-WEST AFRICA

The Sahrawi people is fighting for its survival, working to reverse the illegal sale of its territory, in 1975, by the previous colonial power, Spain, to Morocco and Mauritania. The new forces of occupation are opposed by the Algerian-backed Sahrawi army. The greater part of the Sahrawi civilian population has fled to refugee camps in Algeria, and the rest are in the war zone – each group living in conditions of extreme hardship. The Sahrawi case has the support of major international and humanitarian agencies. Nevertheless, the course of events has depended less on justice for a suffering people than upon the enmities and calculating political interplay of the several nations with ideological and economic interests in the territory. At the time of writing (January 1979) it appears that international sympathy for the Sahrawis, coupled with the virtual collapse of the Mauritanian army and economy, is increasingly isolating Morocco. The Moroccan army, unlikely to be driven out by force, may perhaps be made to withdraw by international pressure.

1: The Sahrawi people before Spanish colonisation

The Moroccan and Mauritanian cases rest on claims of territorial sovereignty in the past. The distinction between the inhabitants of the Western Sahara (see map) and the peoples who live north of the Anti-Atlas and upon the River Senegal can be traced¹ from the opening of history some two thousand years ago; it stems from general factors such as climate and habitat and, in the south, also from racial differences. The earliest-known tribes of the western desert were the Sanhaja, one of the three warring Berber confederations which covered N.W. Africa. The desiccation of the Sahara had already turned the Sanhaja into nomads, treated to the present as barbarians by the settled farmers and citizens of the neighbouring regions.

The fragmented way of life and thought of the Sanhaja frequently suggested easy conquest to the kingdoms to the north and south – but on each occasion a temporary unification of the nomads coupled with the perennially difficult desert conditions and the long supply lines soon caused the invaders to lose control or become assimilated by the desert and the nomads². The Romans, during the first European colonisation of N. Africa, avoided the Sahara Berbers. Islam, carried into the desert not by Arabs but by Berber traders, brought an eleventh-century upwelling of energy which led the Sanhaja, as the Almoravids, to conquer from Ghana to N. Spain (incidentally allowing the Sahrawis to claim past sovereignty over Morocco).

The Arabs only reached the western desert in the fourteenth century: a Maqil tribe, not long arrived from the east – and now forced southwards by Morocco's Merinid dynasty – gradually spread down and took over the littoral Sahara. Conflict between the two ethnic groups lasted until the end of the seventeenth century. Maqil Arab culture, including dialect (Hassaniya), greatly supplanted that of the Berbers, aided by intermarriage. The descendants of these two groups are the present Sahrawi people.

In the sixteenth century, Morocco's Saadian dynasty sent four expeditions to try to annex the desert of the Sanhaja and Maqil nomads, to be followed at intervals by the armies of the ancestors of the present Alaoui monarch.

Europeans, catching slaves and fish along the Sahara coast, sometimes appealed to Morocco for protection from the fierce nomads – but were told the region did not fall within the sultan's jurisdiction³. Indeed, Morocco's own southern region was known as the *bilad as-siba*, 'the unsubmitted land'; the last expedition to the desert, in 1882, was partially intended to subdue the Moroccan south. It was at this point that the spread of European colonialism into N.W. Africa halted Morocco's Sahara ambitions, temporarily.

2: The European colonial period

The political complexities of the present situation began when, from the 1880s, the nomads, faced by the superior weapons and organisation of the French, closing in from both north and south, found it expedient to co-operate with their old enemy, Morocco. This has been said⁴ to have 'consolidated Moroccan control in the south' but, in fact, the nomads, unified under their own charismatic leader Ma el Ainin, separated in 1907 from the pro-French sultanate and, in alliance with the *insoumis* of the Moroccan south, went on resisting the Europeans for a further quarter of a century.

Spain's early presence was comparatively unimportant. Landing in 1884, the Iberians did not venture away from their few coastal forts until 1934, the year in which the French finally and reassuringly 'pacified' the desert between Tindouf and Zouerate (the major combat zone since 1975). In 1956 Morocco returned to independence and at once re-addressed itself to the annexation of the coastal desert: the following year an irregular Moroccan-Sahrawi force attacked the Spanish bases, the colonial power only narrowly re-establishing control through a joint counter-offensive with the French, this requiring 14,000 men and 130 aircraft. The Sahrawis have claimed that the Moroccan authorities deliberately restricted their support after the initial and rapidly successful stage lest the Sahrawis should achieve independence – and that, instead, the campaign was limited to the level of severe harassment, to force Spain to negotiate delivery of the coastal Sahara to Morocco.

If this aim was indeed reached eighteen years later, by then the Sahrawis had organised themselves – as the Polisario front, formed in 1973 – to fight for their own return to independence. Thus 1975 saw the opening of another peak in the invasion and unification cycle.

As will be discussed later, a broadly-similar conflict exists actively or potentially in each of the several states which, artificially created by the French in the 1960s, contain a part of the Sahara and the Sahel. The white Berber-Arab nomads, closely related to the Sahrawis, are hostile to the governments under which, without consultation, they have been placed; they differ from their administrators culturally and, often, racially. The people of the coastal desert have been able to resist this 'legal' assimilation as a result of having been a homogeneous unit under Spanish rule – had they been colonised by the French then they would doubtless have been shared in 1884-1934 between the Moroccan and proto-Mauritanian administrations and become reluctant inhabitants, in 1956 and 1960 respectively, of independent Morocco and Mauritania. But perhaps the only difference would now lie in a struggle for freedom rather than a resistance against the current invasion.

The colonial period forced the concept of nationality on the Sahara nomads. These had always moved freely over vast areas of the desert. The European administrators now issued them

with identity documents. The nomads acquired simultaneous citizenship of many territories and regularly crossed the artificial boundaries (see map). By the decolonisation period there were many factors influencing a nomad's enforced choice of 'nationality': his place of birth, his tribe's main pasture-zone, the arbitrary boundaries, the conflicts with the colonial powers. Above all, national identity was most rapidly crystallised by settlement. In the Spanish-held Sahara, many nomads became shop-keepers, truck-drivers, mine-workers and low-grade employees of the administration; a large number formed the ranks of the *Policia Territorial*. Thus, over the last hundred years, there have come into being the 'Sahrawis' of this paper, a people with a sense of their own distinctiveness from the nomads to the east and of their separateness from the states to north and south.

The later part of this report will return to the Sahrawi people: life in the occupied zone and in the refugee camps, their new social order and planned state. The motivations behind the 1975 agreement drawn up by Spain, Morocco and Mauritania had little to do with the Sahrawis themselves, so that the focus must be greatly widened to take in W. Mediterranean and, ultimately, world politics.

3: Events leading to the 1975 agreement

By the first half of the 1970s, six states had decided that, directly or indirectly, they had major interests in the Western Sahara. Spain, hard-pressed by Polisario guerrilla actions and by international anti-colonial opinion, could see its withdrawal ahead. It thereupon aimed at a pseudo-independence for the desert, to allow Madrid the continuing control of the world's largest phosphate deposit and best remaining fishing ground whilst at the same time retaining a shield on an approach route to the Canaries and Iberia.

The interests of Morocco (18m inhabitants) appear more complex than during any of the desert campaigns of its past rulers. Nationalism is a major impulse: 'Greater Morocco', since 1956 the obsession of the Istiqlal party, embraces not only Western Sahara (125,000 people) but also the present Mauritania (1.4m) and parts of Algeria (18m) and Mali (5m). Ahmed Laroussi, editor of the party paper, *L'Opinion*, has recently said that if the Sahrawis need outside help to defend themselves 'then it must be accepted that they are also incapable of organising themselves into an autonomous state', an extension of jungle law. Secondly, the acquisition of the territory's raw materials, including perhaps off-shore oil; this would also relieve Morocco's own phosphate industry of competition by the superior ore and organisation of the Bu Craa complex. A third aim, closely identifiable with the Moroccan king, Hassan II, has been the use of the Sahara campaign as a rallying ground for his discontented subjects and as an occupation for his military forces, the latter already the authors of at least two failed *coups d'état*. Fourthly, the presently growing enmity between Morocco and Algeria raises the spectre of an Algerian-influenced socialist Sahara in the minds of Hassan and his feudal regime — a pre-emptive annexation of the Western Sahara seemed the solution.

These last two problems, one internal and the other external, are of course closely linked. The division between Morocco and Algeria can be traced from the time of their

independence from the French. In 1963, the Algerian president, Houari Boumedienne, said that 'the Algerian revolution cannot be contained within our frontiers — it will only be successful if it is extended to Morocco and Tunisia'. The Moroccan demand for greater self-control had come from the bourgeois-nationalist Istiqlal and, being rapidly granted, both the French and the party avoided the development of a revolutionary liberation movement in the country. Thus, in Morocco there was only a pseudo-decolonisation in 1956: twenty years later, over 50% of Moroccan capital is still held by the French (who control the engineering, cement and chemical industries, for example) whilst some large French landowners retain their pre-1956 holdings. There is also massive US and European investment. The 1973 decree to Moroccanise foreign companies did not in practice affect the larger concerns, simply transferring control of the less-resistant smaller enterprises to the francophile royal family and top government officials; in 1975 French and other foreign investment in Morocco in fact increased by 20%. The resulting economy is oriented towards exports rather than towards development of a kind to benefit the poverty-stricken Moroccan masses.

Wealth has become even less equitably distributed since independence. Three percent of the landowners hold 80% of the land; urban unemployment has long stood above 30%, inflation at over 12%. The king has done nothing to alleviate the position: 'Hassan II is a counter-revolutionary who first showed himself as such when, still a prince, he destroyed the People's Army of Liberation'.⁵ The official Moroccan 'left' has done little to help the masses; in exchange for worthless concessions it readily absorbed the king's nationalist opium, the revived claim to the Sahara. Only the clandestine movements are in genuine opposition to Hassan: primarily the Frontistes (Marxist-Leninists, many hundreds jailed since 1974), the Union des Forces Révolutionnaires Marocaines (descended from the fiercely-repressed Union des Forces Populaires led by Mehdi ben Barka, assassinated in Paris in 1965), Illal Aman and, within the army, the 16th August movement. These groups concentrate the few Moroccans who have been actively in favour of self-determination for the Sahrawis.

Algeria, conversely, was genuinely decolonised in 1962 by the French and, in the process, underwent a social and economic revolution. The Algerian republic's initial policy towards the Spanish Sahara, as the now-disputed territory was called throughout Spain's rule there, was to co-operate with whichever of the other interested states were most likely to lend themselves to its aims of decolonisation and the installation of socialism rather than conservative Moroccan rule in the desert. Thus it worked with Morocco on the first issue until, in 1974, Hassan unequivocally claimed the desert. A Spanish observer, Goytisolo, said⁶ that, not long before the 1975 annexation, an arrangement was reached between Algeria, Spain and Polisario under which Spain would declare Sahrawi 'independence' in exchange for which Algeria would guarantee the Iberian economic interests in the desert; into the bargain would also be thrown the ending of Algeria's support for the Canaries' independence movement (MPAIAC). According to a highly-placed Mauritanian, Mohamed Salah, the colonial power had actually begun to transfer its posts and nomad soldiers to Polisario — but, under pressure from Morocco, Spain desisted.

Algeria also has an economic interest, hardly as sinister as its opponents make out, in an outlet to the Atlantic coast, far nearer than the Mediterranean, for the iron-ore from its still-unexploited deposit at Gara Djebilet (close to

Tindouf). In spite of implications⁷ to the contrary, Algeria has never laid claim to the Western Sahara. Though, equally certainly, the fulfilment of its aims for the territory would result in massive economic exchange, raw materials against development agreements, with the Sahrawis . . . *The Times* remarked^{8a} that 'interests do sometimes coincide with principle, and the weight of principle certainly seems in this case to be on the Algerian side'.

For Algeria, like Morocco, the Sahara has provided a distraction from internal problems: 'The Algerian regime has mobilised mass sentiment among its people, providing a focus for internal discontent and a vehicle for rallying the masses around the leadership' (Goytisolo). An active socialism has not spared Algeria the troubles of high inflation, unemployment and industrial unrest, exacerbated by the returning émigré-workers. Nor have its post-independence governments been free of the charge of repression against their own citizens. For example, the Kabyle Berbers, active in the independence struggle, were systematically excluded by the Arab leadership from participation in the government of the new republic^{8b}; in December 1978, as Boumedienne lay dying, Morocco tried to divide Algeria (thus weakening its stance over the Sahara) by parachuting arms to internal dissidents... significantly, the drops were planned to take place in the Berber strongholds, the Kabylie and the Aurès. Political forces competing with the ruling hierarchy have always been suppressed. Goytisolo has commented that, when the French had wanted a self-determination referendum for the nomads of S. Algeria, the FLN had rejected the proposal (made in fact for neo-colonial ends). In any event, from this to Goytisolo's dismissal of Sahrawi self-determination because it has Algeria's support is not a logical step.

The divergent regimes of Morocco and Algeria have already fought over a strip of the Sahara, roughly from Béchar to Tindouf (800 km); it holds Gara Djebilet and perhaps other valuable mineral deposits. Again the hand of France is discernible.⁹ The desert frontier had been vague during the colonial period. As Moroccan independence became probable, the French declared the mineral-rich zone to be Algerian . . . but, once it was seen that Morocco was continuing under French tutelage but that Algeria was fighting for a real independence, the colonial power tried to transfer the strip back to Morocco. However, the wide popular sympathy for Algeria's struggle made it difficult for the monarchy to accept such an offer. Instead, in 1962, during the difficult period of transition from French rule to self-government, Hassan invaded the debated zone of the Algerian Sahara. This action, supported by France (still interested in the minerals) and the US, had much the same aims as the 1975 invasion of the coastal desert. Although Algeria was unable to dislodge Morocco in the ensuing military actions, the weight of Third World opinion was on its side and, following Malian mediation and an OAU arbitration commission, the king's army was forced to withdraw (the OAU Khartoum summit in July 1978 has appointed a commission to examine the current Sahara conflict). In 1964 the two opposed regimes reached a provisional agreement: the boundary would remain as it stood but Morocco would share in the iron ore through a joint mining company. In 1972, the treaty was ratified by each country.

The 1963 war had results which affect the present confrontation. Escalation of military strength, with Algeria's defeat contributing to Ben Bella's deposition by Col. Boumedienne. Increased conservative-radical polarisation between the two states; the leader of the Moroccan soci-

alists (Abderahim Bouabid, USFP) has recently called for cancellation of the definitive 1972 agreement on the border. As the Western Sahara conflict has developed, so the unsettled-border zone has been increasingly militarised by each side — in the event of a direct armed conflict between Morocco and Algeria, the former can be expected to attempt the fresh annexation of the Béchar-Tindouf region.

To write a report on the Sahrawis is not to ignore the sufferings of the masses of the surrounding countries, forcibly or by nationalist intoxication brought by their leaders to bear the load of the conflict. Nowhere is this more so than in Mauritania. This state is frequently referred to as a hopeful link between white and black Africa but at present it would be better described as lying uneasily across the dividing line. The settled, black population along the Senegal River (35%) is distinct from the nomadic whites in the northern desert (36%); between there is now a zone of mixed economy and race. The northern nomads feel and are ethnically and economically indistinguishable from the Sahrawis; pasturing different areas of the desert, some tribes were placed in 'Mauritania' by the arbitrary frontiers of 'Spanish Sahara', forced by the French on the Spanish at the turn of the century. By comparison, Spain's colonial boundary in the north placed within Morocco only a small part of the nomadic population upon a narrow strip of desert.

It is never easy to assess the degrees of separate consciousness developed by colonised peoples whose territories were, in origin, arbitrarily separated from larger topographical, ethnic and economic unities, as was the case of the Western Sahara. The onus may be upon the opponents of a Sahrawi state to show that a century of separation has not produced, above all in the coastal settlements, a feeling of separate identity.

Conversely, Mauritania found that, at the International Court in 1975, it had to try to prove its own pre-colonial existence in order to back its assertion of past sovereignty over the Western Sahara. In fact, in the last centuries before European domination, the littoral Sahara had been divided into power units which were generally larger in the south than in the north: tribes with chiefs in the north, confederations of these, as emirates, in the south. The latter appear in no case to have had their seats within this disputed territory; the nearest was the Adrar emirate, just outside the south-east corner of the colonial frontier. However, the influence of the emirates certainly extended from time to time as far as the Saguiet-el-Hamra. At the International Court, Mauritania was to claim that it had existed — other than in name, imposed by the French — as the 'Chinguetti entity'. This concept attempted to group the littoral nomads in the name of the regional centre of Islam; Chinguetti was renowned for its scholars. Indeed, in the absence of an invader, this common faith was all that could be said to be shared, in practice, by the bitterly warring tribes of the western desert. Overall, an attempt was to be made to identify the ancient, intermittent influence of the northernmost emirates over the Sahrawi land with the modern state of Mauritania.

Colonial Mauritania¹⁰ officially came into being in 1903, as a French protectorate, though — as already remarked — the northern interior was not brought under control until 1934. The French ruled the country through the pre-existing hierarchy. In 1952, exploitation began of Mauritania's major asset, the iron-ore massif at Zouerate (see map). The capital of the mining company (MIFERMA) was controlled by French state and private organisations (59%), the rest

of the capital held by British, Italian and German interests; the Mauritanian state eventually obtained a 5% interest. In 1960, France announced Mauritania's independence — planned to be even less real than that of Morocco. The French continued to dominate industry and the economy, with their troops still stationed there under a 'mutual defence agreement'. Government was put in the hands of the francophile Mokhtar Ould Daddah (married to a French woman) and his party (later the Parti Populaire Mauritanien).

During the 1960s a contest developed between those Mauritanians who wished to continue under French control and a Moroccan-funded faction (Nahdati party) in favour of acceptance of Hassan's recently renewed claim to their land. Backed by the French, Ould Daddah emerged victorious. And, throughout the decade, Mauritania's struggle for international acceptance — since it was distrusted as a creation of the French — was supported by Algeria, obviously to counter both the Moroccan claim (muted since 1969) and the domination of the French.

The first half of the 1970s brought upheaval to the comfortable neo-colonial situation. In 1967, extraction had begun of the Akjoujt copper deposit; the company (SOMIMA) was funded this time by S. African, US and European capital, the French only managing to acquire 20%, with 22% Mauritanian state participation. The rapid and unbalanced economic development, entirely through the two mining corporations, disrupted society in a multiplicity of ways. Simultaneously, the catastrophic drought of 1969-74 forced the nomads to add themselves to the labour market (by 1977, the proportion of nomads had fallen to around a third of that in 1959¹¹). Out of these upheavals emerged a new urban working class — and this now confronted the large corporations and the francophile regime. Potentially the most threatening grouping has been the clandestine Marxist-Leninist Kadihines, broadly parallel to Morocco's proscribed left; the group supported the links with Algeria. Ould Daddah's response, once violent repression was seen to be counter-productive, was to announce a Mauritanianisation campaign. The two mining corporations were nationalised in 1974-5, the generous compensation paid to the foreign investors being particularly welcome in the case of SOMIMA, making a heavy loss due to the fall in copper prices; the minerals continued of course to reach the 'expropriated' countries. The French forces withdrew, Mauritania left the franc zone. The argument put to France was that this increased independence was the only alternative to socialism.

As the future of the Western Sahara was coming increasingly under discussion, so that of Mauritania was becoming acceleratingly dark. The initially positive balance of trade had by 1970 swung into a rapidly growing debt. Aid had to be accepted from all shades of ideology: primarily from China and Saudi Arabia, secondarily from Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait and the US, together with the European nations. A superficial radicalism was adopted internally, and where appropriate, externally. Relations with France reached a nadir.

At this point, Spain offered Mauritania an interest, never publicly defined, in the Western Sahara. This aimed to keep both Morocco's dream of empire and Algeria's ideology out of the coastal desert: the weakening Mauritania would be the most accommodating to Spain's planned neo-colonial control. Possibly a Sahrawi-Mauritania federation, to be mooted again late in 1978, was discussed. Until then, Mauritania had supported self-determination for the Sahrawis; Polisario (as Frelisario) had its first headquarters

in Nouakchott. By 1974, talks with the Spanish having broken down, Mauritania was claiming the desert for itself; though it accepted that a referendum should be held; under Moroccan pressure, the claim was by 1975 reduced to the southern region.

Ould Daddah had felt that the issue, as well as bringing in a share of the mineral wealth, would divert working-class attention from its hunger, unemployment and *bidonville* existence. But there was the further, perennial fear: Morocco's barely-hidden territorial ambitions. To allow Hassan to take over the whole of the Western Sahara would be to see his army on Mauritania's border. The Zouerate mine, then producing 90% of the foreign currency, is linked along the frontier by a vulnerable railway to the only good port, Nouadhibou (Cansado). Morocco had thus to be kept at bay. So, backed by the bourgeois nationalists (the Istiqlal equivalent), Ould Daddah launched a campaign to 're-unify Mauritania's oppressed Sahrawi brothers with their homeland'. There was repression of Polisario, leaving Algeria (Tindouf) as the movement's only remaining friendly territory. Had Ould Daddah co-operated with the Sahrawis at this point — perhaps in the mentioned federation — events would have been very different, certainly no more to Mauritania's disadvantage. Since, in fact, when the climax came in 1975, Ould Daddah found his role had become that of a minor *djinn* supping at the table of the Moroccan king — and he was henceforth to be firmly caught between Hassan and the blue men of the Sahara.

It only remains, in this section, to summarise the Western Sahara vortex from the widest viewpoint, that of the major non-African, interventionist powers. France, then, is concerned to perpetuate its past and fluctuating control of N.W. Africa, thus securing its southern approaches and satisfying its demand for raw materials. The ends of the US have been broadly similar, the means being civil and military aid to Spain and Morocco in exchange for bases in the two countries; in October 1978, it was announced that the US nuclear submarines had acquired a base in the Canary Islands (Gando, Gran Canaria). The US hopes to extend NATO to the West Mediterranean. Morocco is also supported to counter Algerian influence in the Maghreb: the installation of an Algerian-style state in the Western Sahara would be unacceptable to the US . . . whereas its possession by Morocco would, conversely, allow the spread of the US control network down the African coast.

Both Moroccan expansionism and European colonialism in the Western Sahara preceded by many centuries the limited Soviet aid which, through Algeria, has reached the Sahrawis since the war began in 1975. This support has been slight at the side of US, French and Spanish participation on behalf of Morocco and Mauritania. As will be seen, abandoned by Spain, threatened with genocide from north and south, only 30 km of eastwards-looking frontier provided the Sahrawis with a chance of survival.

4: The United Nations contribution

If, in 1975, its agencies were highly effective in bringing impartial opinion behind the Sahrawis, the UN has since had no practical impact and, in fact, has increasingly left the conflict to the Organisation for African Unity which, as will be seen, has been equally lacking in action. The passiveness of the two bodies has been achieved by the Moroccan lobby. In October 1976, Morocco could warn the UN General Assembly that discussion there was

'dangerous, premature and inopportune'. According to one international lawyer,¹² 'the disposition of the Sahara case by the United Nations has been monumentally mishandled'.

In 1964 came the first of a decade of General Assembly resolutions calling on Spain to allow self-determination to the Sahrawis. In mid-1974, Spain actually began to act as though it would indeed hold a referendum . . . expected to produce a demand for independence, hopefully manipulable and also weakening the growing Moroccan threat. However, following secret talks in New York, Hassan's UN lobby successfully countered with a resolution against the holding of the plebiscite and proposing instead that a fact-finding mission be sent to the desert and that an opinion should be sought from the International Court of Justice.

The Mission,¹³ consisting of observers from Cuba, Iran and the Ivory Coast, visited the territory in summer 1975. In spite of the pressure of the pro-Moroccan home governments of the last two and of the sand-storm of manipulations and accusations by the authorities of the several interested states, the UN team reached two clear conclusions: the majority of the Sahrawis desired total independence and their representative body was the Polisario Front ('Frente Popular para la Liberación del Saguiet-el-Hamra y del Rio de Oro', the two provinces under the colonial order).

The International Court¹⁴ also met in mid-1975: had the Western Sahara, upon Spain's appearance in 1884, been a land without an owner and, if not, what had been its relationship with Morocco and Mauritania? The Spanish delegate told the sixteen judges that the desert had indeed belonged to nobody although 'populated by independent tribes possessing full external political power' (the nomads had been induced to accept the usual colonial-style treaties); Spain argued for its proposed referendum. Morocco, in its turn, styled itself the 'immemorial possessor' of the desert, from which it followed that, as respect for 'territorial integrity' outweighed 'self-determination' in international law, the Western Sahara should be handed to it without a referendum. To present a united front, Morocco and Mauritania had agreed to avoid a clash over the area of overlap of their claims, saying it was 'not worth further definition'. The Mauritanian case for acquisition of the south was tempered by its acceptance of the referendum principle, though the options put should include not only independence but also association with or integration into Morocco or Mauritania. The Algerian delegate denied any binding association, other than Islam, between the Western Sahara and the adjacent states, including itself. Supporting Sahrawi self-determination, in doing so it pointedly wrested the lance from the ailing Quixote, affirming that the similarity of its proposal to that of Spain was simply the association of 'a profound conviction of the principle of self-determination with political opportunism'.

On 16 October the judges gave their almost unanimous opinion that neither Morocco nor Mauritania had demonstrated past sovereignty over the Western Sahara and that self-determination should be allowed to the Sahrawis. The only ties accepted by the Court were of 'allegiance' between some tribes and the Moroccan sultanate and of certain rights, some relating to land, held by the 'Mauritanian entity'. Since this day, the first part of the judgement has gone unmentioned by Hassan and his supporters,¹⁵ the vague or selective phrase 'historic ties' being used to justify the well-prepared annexation, begun the next day.

5: The Victory March

Projected abroad as a non-violent, 'green' or 'peace' march, its internal title, *massirat fath*, was more in keeping with the holy-war nationalism by which Hassan brought the Moroccan people behind him in October 1975. To the outside world, the march was presented as a brave crusade to free the Sahrawis from one of the last imperialists, Spain. This was easily enough contrived, given the media's lack of knowledge about 'Spanish' Sahara and the unsavoury reputation of the Franco regime. The dust of Hassan's 350,000 marching subjects on the coast diverted attention from the entry of the Forces Armées Royales (FAR) across the inland end of the frontier with Western Sahara.

The course of events from the view of the Spanish Army can be put together with the help of later statements by the commander, Lieut-General Gómez de Salazar, and by the secretary-general, Col Rodríguez de Viguri; the latter's public condemnation of the sell-out caused him to be relieved of his post even during the brief and effectively-nominal period of transitional administration. The course of the farcical 'confrontation' between the Moroccan marchers and the Spanish 'dissuasion line' had, by the time it had begun, been agreed between Hassan and the Madrid authorities. Franco, then dying, had been ultimately in favour of rapid withdrawal. Pro-Hassan observers, ignoring the subterfuge, can still write that Spain was left no option but to withdraw — even though they acknowledge that the march was 'harmless'.¹⁶ The Spanish army in the desert — its will to resist fortified only a day or two earlier by a visit from Prince Juan Carlos, about to become king yet also apparently unaware of the developing stratagem — was appalled and enraged by the abrupt order from Madrid to commence the handing-over of the territory to the approaching Moroccan troops; the two forces had been matched in numbers, 20,000 men each. The transfer of the interior fortresses began at once.

But the Moroccan army found one obstacle, still there in spite of three years' wishful denial of its existence: Polisario. The two top Spanish officers, speaking before the Cortes in March 1978, confirmed the UN Mission's conclusions: Polisario represented the Sahrawis in their wish for 'total' independence. The rapidly-conscripted and misled cannon-fodder of the FAR was confused to find that its 'Sahrawi brothers' had in fact no wish to be unified with 'the motherland', neither to the north nor to the south. The war began.

6: The Tripartite Agreement

Also prepared by the time the march took place, this treaty was signed on 14 November. Exactly a week earlier the report of the UN Mission had been published¹⁷ but, like the resolutions of the General Assembly and the month-old opinion of the International Court, this was blatantly ignored by the treaty's signatories, Spain, Morocco and Mauritania.

The full details of the agreement have been kept secret; seven out of twelve officials responsible for the Spanish side, including Arias Navarro, then prime minister, refused to appear before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Cortes, in March 1978, for an open discussion of the agreement. It is however clear enough that Madrid's right-wing Moroccan lobby, with US and French backing, effec-

tively drew up the treaty with Hassan. This pressure group held large investments in the Bu Craa phosphates and in Morocco, the latter mirrored by Hassan's own investments in Spain. Commercial profit triumphed over other right-wing priorities such as the honour of the army and the sanctity of the Catholic churches and cemeteries. The 'diplomatic lobby', preferring the described pseudo-independence strategy, had by now become ineffective. Only the Spanish left, still repressed itself, supported the Sahrawis right to freedom.

The effect of the Tripartite Agreement, no matter its exact clauses, can be summarised:

- 1) A three-power transitional administration, to end on 28 February 1976, was announced but, in effect, control was at once transferred to the neo-colonial states. The greater part of the Spanish army had left by mid-December.
- 2) With the lesson of Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea) in mind, the shocked civilian population was offered inducements, by Madrid, to leave.
- 3) Spain would have a 35% share in the phosphate mine, with a right to take a similar proportion of the output at the current price. Other Spanish assets would be transferred against compensation.
- 4) Limits were placed¹⁸ on Spanish fishing on the Saharan bank: 800 vessels in the annexed waters, 200 vessels in the pre-existing Mauritanian zone. Such a condition, striking in particular at the livelihood of the Canary fishermen, was inevitable once the Western Sahara was decolonised, no matter to whom it were passed. However, a second and unnecessary part of the deal, publicly formalised in February 1977, was designed to profit the industrial lobby at the expense of Spain's fishermen: Morocco would be lent \$44m of public money to buy boats, set up a processing industry, improve its port facilities and open a training school . . . the vessels, plant and expertise would be provided by the large Spanish boat-building and other appropriate concerns. This can be contrasted with the total lack of past government support for the small, primitively equipped Canary fleet and its associated enterprises.
- 5) A period of Moroccan tolerance for the Spanish *presidios* (Ceuta, Mellilla) in Morocco was agreed. The issue had been placed on the UN agenda by Morocco in 1975, menacingly.
- 6) Morocco might withdraw its labour force from Gibraltar, to help Spain's pressure on the British *presidio*.
- 7) There was discussion of the possibility of future Spanish military bases in the Western Sahara.
- 8) The wishes of the Sahrawis, to be represented by the tribal assembly, were to be respected.
- 9) Morocco occupied two-thirds of the territory, above a line from just north of Dakhla (Villa Cisneros) to the Zouerate curve. Mauritania took over the southern third, also obtaining an unknown share of the phosphate exploitation.

The Cortes, then still no more representative than the Sahrawis' tribal assembly, dutifully set its seal upon the treaty, by 345 votes to four, on 18 November. In El Aaiun, the territory's capital, the tribal assembly was also called together to ratify the agreement.

The assembly, only in name resembling the pre-colonial *djemaa*, was a 1967 creation of Spain designed originally to demonstrate a desire for the continuing presence of the adopted motherland and, latterly, manoeuvred within the pseudo-independence tactic. The 1975 UN Mission felt that the members 'depend considerably for guidance on

the Spanish authorities' and were 'largely of the older and more conservative element in Saharan society, owing to the method whereby they are chosen'. Not least, the Mission described how the Moroccan authorities themselves had 'denounced a "so-called assembly" empowered to speak in the name of the population of Western Sahara and which, in reality only endorsed decisions taken by the colonial authorities'.

Nevertheless, immediately after the signing of the agreement, Morocco felt it worth claiming that it had been approved by about two-thirds of this puppet assembly; simultaneously, Polisario declared that, instead, two-thirds of the hundred elders, proclaiming the dissolution of their own assembly, had rallied to its side in the still-unoccupied eastern massif of Guelta Zemmour. Hassan had offered inducements to the members of the *djemaa*; the president, Sheikh Said ould Khatri ould Youmani, changed sides probably for the last time, receiving, it was said, an enormous sum to make his public transfer of allegiance, with the Spanish probably adding to his existing wealth on the Peninsula.

The truth appears to have only become clear with the publication two years later of the memoirs of Areilza,¹⁹ the foreign minister at the time of the official transfer of the territory at the end of February 1976. In a meeting on the 14th with his Moroccan counterpart, Laraki, he brought up the clause respecting the wishes of the Sahrawis and proposed that these should now be asked to ratify the agreement. Laraki tried desperately to avoid this, eventually falling back on the claimed approval of the November meeting of the tribal assembly. Areilza investigated this: monitored, as usual, by the military governor, Gómez de Salazar, it had in fact been attended by only a quarter of its members.

7: The military conflict

Heavily outweighed by the Moroccan troops and airforce, the small Sahrawi army was rapidly confined to the small area running from Guelta to the Algerian border. In one of the most heroic if over-optimistic actions of the war, Polisario had entrenched itself at La Guera in the extreme south-west: Moroccan jets, air-lifted troops and artillery took the stronghold — in the name of the tiny Mauritanian army — after a ten-day siege.

Confused with the fighting were streams of old people, women and children fleeing from the invaders, crossing the desert eastwards on foot, on camels, piled into Landrovers and lorries. An independent organisation from Geneva, the International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR), visiting the refugee camps in February 1976, wrote:²⁰

'The invasion has been accompanied by innumerable exactions on persons of all ages and conditions . . . the soldiers of the two occupying countries have butchered (*égorge*) hundreds and perhaps thousands of Sahrawis, including children and old people, who refused to publicly acknowledge the King of Morocco . . . some have seen their children killed in front of them, by way of intimidation . . . women described to us how they had been tortured . . . and how soldiers had cut off young men's fingers to make them unable to fight . . . 80% of the inhabitants of El Aaiun have left . . . defenceless refugee camps have been bombarded'

(these had been within the territory, in particular in the Guelta massif, the occupants of the latter only escaping across the frontier in April). The use of napalm bombing against civilians was confirmed by the International Red

Cross Committee in January and by a team of Swiss doctors in May. After a second visit to the camps, in October 1976, the IFHR wrote:

'Genocide. Having read countless documents, having analysed the reports of various commissions of enquiry, having sent out two missions ourselves, it seems clearer and clearer that a collective crime, a crime against a people, may be taking place in the Western Sahara'.

Independent estimates of the number of refugees at Tindouf rose steadily during the first year of the war, eventually reaching about 100,000 people (this was the figure given by Medico International and Terre des Hommes during their joint relief operation in October 1977²¹). Moroccan sympathisers, following Hassan's own lead, have made claims such as that 'there can be no doubt that Algeria is trying to pass off as refugees . . . not only her own Rguibat tribes but also tens of thousands of Touaregs, Chaambas and other nomads from Mali and even Niger (and who abandoned their usual pastures as a result of the dramatic drought in the Sahel^{22a}. During the first half of the 1970s, the drought forced many nomads into refugee camps on the margins of the desert^{22b}. In particular, the Mali Tuareg, with a decade of conflict with their own government (discussed later), preferred to move north into Algeria. According to the Moroccan press^{22c}, in March 1974 the Algerian Red Crescent received international aid on behalf of 50,000 Tuareg from Mali and Niger; the article claimed that the League of Red Cross Societies (Geneva) had recently sent a report to AOSARIO (a Moroccan-formed association for Sahrawis in Europe, membership unverifiable) showing that, in 1975, these Tuareg were metamorphosed into Sahrawis by the Algerian administration; the League refused to send any of its reports to the present writer, so the charge remains unsubstantiated. The just-quoted Minority Rights Group report by Marnham, whilst noting that, for fear of reprisals in their own country, the Mali nomads had preferred to stay on in the camps in Algeria, Upper Volta, Niger and Nigeria even after the drought had broken (conditions have fluctuated since 1974), went on to say that 'The great majority of the refugees who found their way to the camps in 1973 have since returned to pastoralism'. It is probable that there has been opportunism both by the Algerian government and by non-Sahrawi nomads - but would it anyway make any difference, from a humanitarian viewpoint, if there were 50,000 rather than 100,000 Sahrawis in the refugee camps at Tindouf?

Morocco also claims that those Sahrawis who are at Tindouf have been forcibly taken there by the Algerian army, some even in a pre-1975 plot with the Spanish; they are said to be held at Aouinat Bel Graa, 250 km south-east of Tindouf. It is also claimed that 247 Sahrawis who refused to join Polisario were executed by the Algerians. The humanitarian agencies have considered these charges and, after their visits, have affirmed they found no evidence of an elaborate masquerade (the other claims are amongst the many made by each side which cannot be proved or disproved). For example, the IFHR wrote in October 1976:

'Everybody we met came from the Western Sahara . . . all those questioned said they had never seen anyone in the camps who was not from the Western Sahara . . . all said they had left because of the invasion, to escape the massacres and the exactions'.

In February 1977 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said that the people in the Tindouf camps had appeared to him to be genuine refugees.

The progress of the war, now entering its fourth year, need not be judged by the conflicting reports of the two sides (though the French and CIA intelligence networks have

apparently felt that Polisario's 1976 claims were accurate). Instead, it can be assessed through the pitches of the propaganda campaigns, the rhythms of diplomatic activity, the arms deals, the economic statistics of the participating states.

The invading forces soon took over all the settlements and outposts and Polisario was forced to realise that, though it could recoup these piecemeal, it could never hold them for long since it had no air cover. Instead, its major tactic has been the lightning strike by the highly mobile force, typically a couple of dozen all-terrain vehicles carrying machine guns, recoilless cannon, rocket launchers and anti-aircraft guns. Polisario has a base within the territory (Oum Dreiga) as well as its headquarters in the Tindouf area.

The targets have been those vital to the invaders' economy, morale and international images as the rightful and accepted owners of the Western Sahara; a fourth aim has been to bring pressure on the states directly supporting the annexation. The multinational Bu Craa phosphate mine, linked by a vulnerable 96-km conveyor belt to its port near El Aaiun, had been a target in the penultimate year of Spanish rule, being then spared whilst, during 1975, there were discussions of Sahrawi independence, only to be attacked again once the war began, its closure coming in June 1977. The production figures (million tons) reflect Polisario's effectiveness:

1972-3	1974	1975	1976	1977
c2	.65	2.7	.27	0

The Moroccan authorities claim that the damage to the Bu Craa complex all dates from the Spanish period. The Zouerate iron-ore mine in Mauritania itself has been attacked directly and through its long railway: the 1974 output had been 11m tons but the first half of 1978 produced only 3m tons.

The invaders' morale has suffered from Polisario's ability to strike unexpectedly at every point in the territory, including the capital - and within Morocco (up to Goulimine and Tata) and Mauritania (as far south as Nouakchott and even Nema). The Sahrawis are said to bury themselves in the sand and breathe through straws . . .

The conflict has been forced on the attention of those states which had been comfortably participating at a distance: attacks on Spanish vessels fishing in Sahrawi waters (the fleet was officially withdrawn in December 1977), the capture of members of the French population at Zouerate (some of whom were unofficially servicing the military equipment), the shelling of the US embassy at Nouakchott.

Losses of men and war material have certainly been high on each side; numbers of Moroccan planes have been brought down by Polisario's guided missiles (SAM6 and 7, with training in Algeria, Libya and Cuba), their only advanced arms and notable aid, through Algeria, from the USSR. In November 1977, five deserters said Polisario had 5000 men, a usual estimate, implying however only one able-bodied man to 20 refugees. Many Polisario men have been trained in the Spanish army. The Sahrawis' main assets are that they are at home in the harsh desert conditions and that, with the additional stimulus of their developing social revolution - probably not a usual feature in the past unification phases in the cycle - they have an unyielding determination to regain their land.

During 1975-8, Morocco has poured men and equipment into the desert; its 'defence' budget, trebling since 1973, has reached \$760m for 1978 (13.77% of national expenditure). In September 1978, the Institute of Strategic Studies estimated Hassan's total forces at 80,000 men, with 61 combat planes. There is also a small navy, based on three corvettes. The desert troops are supported by armoured cars, tanks, helicopters, C-130 Hercules transport planes and F-5 and Mirage strike aircraft. The pilot of an F-5 shot down on 10 September was reported in the Algerian press to have said he had trained in Iran, the US and France.

After their rapid initial success, the Moroccan forces, entering the second part of the invasion phase, have found themselves on the defensive against the nomads and the environment (during the comparatively low-key Spanish period, Villa Cisneros was known as Villa Neurosos due to the mind-warping effect of the heat, the sand-laden gales and, above all, the boredom). Spanish citizens who have experienced the Moroccan administration have described²³ the demoralisation, indiscipline and corruption in the occupying army. There is a ban on radios and on letters to and from home (in Morocco itself, the soldiers' families listen for news, clandestinely, to the 'Voice of the Free Sahara', as a result of which the Moroccan troops were stopped from carrying identifications papers — and the funerals of dead soldiers have to be held with a minimum of publicity). Young conscripts mutilate themselves by firing sand-filled rifles against their hands. Money for food was begged from the Canary drivers of the phosphate lorries (ultimately said to be paid \$300 a day in a vain attempt to replace the damaged belt). According to a sergeant captured by Polisario in mid-78, the men, unpaid, can only survive by buying Canary contraband from their officers, with leave acquired in the same way. These officers spend their time drinking in the once-Spanish bars. There is a strong general antipathy both towards the king and to his war, as it is now seen. The Algerian press reported²⁴ that, late in 1977, a FAR battalion drawn from the Atlas and the south mutinied and tried to join Polisario, but was caught near Hauza and wiped out by Moroccan aviation.

Moroccan energies, after the initial phase, were concentrated on defence fortification, the main posts being ringed with concentric trenching and barbed wire. From time to time a large contingent crosses the open desert, either on a supply run or to help another post under siege by the Sahrawis. For these Moroccan troops, now comparatively aware of the true nature of the conflict, the war, like the desert, must appear, endless, barren, difficult to survive: they have every reason to think back with bitterness of their fervour during the 'victory march'.

The perspectives for the Mauritanian soldiery have been even worse. At the opening of the war, Ould Daddah's army totalled about 2000 volunteers, risen with conscription to about 12,500 men by 1978 (International Institute for Strategic Studies). Movement across the enormous desert has been, throughout, in well-armed all-terrain vehicles, such as Polisario soon came to use. The airforce has consisted of a few reconnaissance and transport planes, with delivery expected in 1978 of Argentinian Pucara JA-58 fighter-bombers. The navy is limited to a few gunboats. By mid-1978 the war was absorbing a third of Mauritania's budget.

Information on events in the south of Western Sahara and in Mauritania is comparatively sparse, due to its remoteness and to the absence of the pro-Sahrawi Spanish workers.

Once the initial fervour had been eroded by reality, the Mauritanian forces divided into two groups, opposed both to the war and to each other. The blacks, in the majority in the army, saw the war as a purely 'Moorish' affair; the white nomadic northerners, perennially cool towards the Nouakchott administration, did not wish to fight the Sahrawis, a people distinguished from them by little more than a line on a map and whom they had at first believed they were to save from the colonial power. As a result, desertion to Polisario's ranks appears to have been common, including even high officials such as the commander of the key post of Bir Moghreïn.

The army's mixture of inability and unwillingness to deal with Polisario has forced Ould Daddah, from the start, to invite in Hassan's forces, sometimes in emergency conditions (Ain ben Tili in January 1976, Zouerate in July 1977). Early in 1978 there were at least 6000 Moroccans in Mauritania: 2400 men were at the Zouerate mine, along the railway line and at the port at Nouadhibou, 600 were at the Akjoujt mine, 2800 garrisoned the two northernmost frontier posts (Bir Moghreïn and Ain ben Tili) and Dakhla, the Western Sahara's only real harbour. In January 1978, the Mauritanian presence in the annexed port was only four soldiers and a flag, according to a defecting officer. The less important Mauritanian settlements, such as Atar, also had Moroccan contingents. Only the capital, Nouakchott was not obviously open to a Moroccan take-over — but the joint military command of Mauritania was said to be led by Hassan's officers. Ould Daddah himself was by now the centre of three converging forces: Polisario, the Moroccans — and the plans of the senior officers of his own army.

The arrival of the Moroccan troops had not been welcomed by the common Mauritanian soldiers either, so that there have been violent clashes, notably at Dakhla and Nouadhibou, with deaths on each side. In 1977, there was a mutiny of Mauritanian troops at Nouadhibou, in protest at their lack of pay and at their posting to the harsh interior whilst the Moroccans garrisoned the port.

Hassan and Ould Daddah, having begun by dismissing the war as 'minor policing operations', soon found to their chagrin that the true extent of the Sahrawis' resistance was becoming international knowledge — so they have since claimed that the opposition consists of Algeria's troops, African mercenaries and miscellaneous communist-bloc bogeymen. In making these assertions, Hassan has in mind that the allegiance of his people and army depends to a great extent on national success and prestige in the Sahara.

In fact, Algeria's direct participation appears to have been limited to two clashes early in 1976: an army unit supplying Polisario was surprised at Amgala and badly damaged by the Moroccans, Boumedienne's forces retaliating soon after by routing a detachment of Hassan's troops at the same post. The king has tried to intimidate the Algerian leader by threatening a full war between the two countries, to be perhaps sparked off by his menaced 'hot pursuit' across the border. But neither side can feel certain, with the 1963 confrontation in mind, that a direct conflict would be in its interests.

Polisario has certainly recruited men from amongst the nomads of the rest of the Sahara — ethnically and culturally closer to them than the Moroccans and black Mauritians and, as will be seen later, feeling themselves to be suffering much the same oppression within their own territories. A glance at the next section will show that the direct French intervention has far outweighed the Sahrawis' recruitment

of a few hundred more easterly nomads . . . it seems no worse to fight in somebody else's war for Algerian dinars than for Mauritanian iron-ore.

There is no evidence at all to show the direct entry of communist-bloc forces, such as Cubans, in the war. The already-quoted report by the Institute for the Study of Conflict, straining to the utmost for evidence of Moscow participation, recalled that, in 1977, a Moroccan squad came across 'the headless body of an uncircumcised Caucasian, conceivably E. German'.

By the end of 1977 it had become clear that the invasion, far from being the panacea for the problems of the Moroccan and Mauritanian leaders, had been rendered utterly counter-productive by Polisario's resistance. The Mauritanian army and economy, in particular, were approaching collapse.

8: French military intervention

In December, continuing its own sequence of military aggression against the nomads of the coastal Sahara (1898-1909, 1934, 1958, 1977-), France entered the war on the side of Morocco and Mauritania. Ould Daddah, in inviting this participation, had also in mind that the French would co-operate in both the short and the long term to keep at bay Hassan's own designs on Mauritania.

During the first two years of the war, the French had claimed neutrality whilst continuing to supply weapons to Hassan; as soon as the invasion began, the French hastily delivered fifty tanks, for example. In mid-1977 there were perhaps 3000 French citizens in Mauritania,²⁵ mostly there under inter-governmental schemes, a few officially as military advisers, some less officially helping to service the war machinery, as noted. On 9 May a 60-vehicle Polisario convoy had attacked the Zouerate mine: amongst the dead were two French, with six more taken prisoner. The French government's representative, R. Galley, said then at Zouerate that 'the protection of French citizens is a Mauritanian government responsibility in which France would not interfere directly'. The mine is dependent on its French engineers and so their evacuation would seriously affect production and thus the Mauritanian economy – and also French imports of iron-ore.

By December the French 'facility' at Dakar held six Jaguar strike aircraft with their supporting reconnaissance Breguets and mid-air refuelling C-135s, together with Noratlas transports and their cover and rescue Puma helicopters; the Jaguars, unlike Morocco's F-5s, have both the range and the counter-missile electronics necessary for operating against Polisario. By November a complete aerial survey had been made of the desert. A ground-control network for the Jaguars had been spread across N. Mauritania, the posts manned and defended by units of the French forces. Paratroops were moved as inconspicuously as possible into Mauritania and Senegal.

The first French air attack came on 2 December against a Sahrawi force besieging the Mauritanian post of Bou Lanouar, near Nouadhibou. On 14th, Polisario announced the release of the six French prisoners. Simultaneously it engaged the Moroccans and Mauritanians elsewhere, only to be attacked there also by the French aviation. The prisoners were released on 23 December. However, French air attacks, ostensibly to protect the *co-opérants*, went on intermittently. In January, March and June there were

French strikes against the Oum Dreiga stronghold. In May, a Moroccan column, surrounded by Polisario within the Western Sahara (at Azeig Petrag, 100 km south-east of Bir Nazaran) was only relieved after two attacks by the Jaguars. The Algerian airforce, part of its 200 combat planes based at Tindouf, has at no stage intervened. The French aviation has forced Polisario to reduce on its daylight raids.

In February 1978, Giscard d'Estaing said that military assistance to Mauritania would continue indefinitely. Many French civilians were evacuated, being replaced by military personnel (including *paras* at the Zouerate mine). The new tripartite command was co-ordinated by General Méry at the Centre Opérationnel des Armées, dominated by French officers. There were military training schools, at Atar and Rosso, under French and Moroccan officers. The Dakar force was strengthened. The French navy patrolled the waters off Mauritania's zone of the annexed desert. Arms also continued to be supplied to Morocco during this third year of the war, notably jets and, at \$200m, a Crotale anti-aircraft missile system (obviously with Algeria in mind).

The French intervention appears to have had two main effects. It slowed Polisario's erosion of Mauritania and it polarised yet further the attitudes of the two camps and their supporters, perhaps as a result protracting the war.

9: International politics since the war began

The UN at once entered its period of ineffectiveness. The Security Council took no action over Hassan's invasion (it did condemn the march, though only after it had begun). The secretary-general's proposal of a cooling-off period of six months, with UN administration (aided by 700 *casques bleus*²⁶), was ignored. In December 1975 the General Assembly passed two conflicting resolutions over the beleaguered Sahrawis. Algeria's self-determination motion was agreed by 84 votes to three, Spain now amongst the abstentions . . . yet a pro-Moroccan motion accepting the partition (and ignoring the report of the UN Visiting Mission and the opinion of the UN's Court, with the contents of the Tripartite Agreement unknown) was passed by 48-32 votes, again with many abstentions. In February 1976, the UN official sent to prepare and supervise the self-determination referendum was told the Sahrawis would again be consulted through the tribal assembly; the subsequent charade was declared meaningless by the UN secretariat, in whose opinion Spain still continues as the administering power. Throughout the whole period of the transitional administration, the UN did not even send observers to the Western Sahara, though this had been suggested in mid-75 both by its Visiting Mission and by the Spanish authorities. Subsequently the Moroccans have refused to let a UN observer into the territory. However, the shift of world opinion – for a variety of reasons – towards support for the Sahrawis may yet allow the UN to make a further positive contribution. In December 1978, the General Assembly passed a resolution affirming 'the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence'; the voting was 90–10 with 39 abstentions (against were the Central African Republic, Egypt, Gabon, Grenada, Indonesia, Israel, Nicaragua and Zaïre, together with Morocco and Mauritania).

On 28 February 1976, parallel to the transfer of the colonial deeds in El Aaiun, Polisario and the refugees formalised Sahrawi unification by declaring the inception of the

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). According to Goytisolo²⁷, the Sahrawis had been 'psychologically conditioned by the colonial authorities for five years, to embrace, for obvious reasons, the independence idea'; but it had been a puppet independence at which Spain had aimed and, if psychology is to be discussed, it must be recalled that the majority of the present Sahrawis will have had grandfathers and fathers who fought against the French under the blue sultans from 1898-1934, to say nothing of the closer effect of the 1957-8 war.

By January 1979 the Sahrawi Republic had been formally recognised by fourteen African states (Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burundi, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinée-Bissau, Malagasy, Mozambique, Rwanda, São Tomé e Príncipe, Seychelles, Tanzania, Togo) and by three other countries (Democratic Republic of Korea, Panama, Yemen Republic); part of this recognition has been helped by Algerian diplomacy and exchange agreements. In general, support has come from left-wing governments and opposition parties, from trade unions, youth movements (the Sahrawi student body has been accepted both by ISMUN, the UN co-ordinating agency, and by the Union of Arab Youth) and from the humanitarian agencies. The Sahrawis' right to self-determination has also been upheld by the Non-Aligned Countries, the International Conference of Solidarity with African and Arab Peoples, the Socialist International and the European Interparliamentary Union. Morocco and Mauritania, in protest at such acknowledgements, have refused to take part in numerous political, cultural and sports meetings.

The majority of E. European and Asian communist countries have individually demonstrated support for the Sahrawis without according formal recognition to their republic. Polisario has acknowledged²⁸ aid from Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and N. Korea. In January 1978, Boumediene visited Moscow, leading to a joint Soviet-Algerian declaration of support for Sahrawi self-determination. The active backing of the USSR can be seen in its refusal, early in 1978, to be used by Morocco to lend credibility to the Tripartite Agreement: the Russians refused to sign a fishing treaty until a reference to the waters off Morocco's 'Sahara provinces' had been removed. Similarly, in an agreement to jointly develop the Meskala phosphate deposit (between Essaouira and Marrakesh), a sovereignty-implying reference to the Bu Craa mine had to be taken out (it is interesting that a joint Moroccan-Spanish exploitation of the Meskala deposit formed a minor clause in the Tripartite Agreement — but then Spain, as opposed to a few businessmen, appears likely to gain little but dishonour from the whole manoeuvre). However, the Russian inversion of \$2bn into Meskala came at a moment when Morocco's phosphate industry had slumped due to a fall in world prices — and it will establish Morocco as the USSR's largest trading partner in Africa, a hard fact which the Sahrawis and Algeria cannot ignore. China, deeply involved in Mauritania by its civil aid (eg \$200m in March 1978) and participation in development projects, has taken no evident part in the conflict.

The Moroccan-USSR intermeshing has however been balanced by two material adjustments in the US position. Full diplomatic relations with Algeria were restored in 1977, the effective impulse being the US energy crisis. In that year, 56% of Algerian crude oil and 28% of its liquefied natural gas went to the Americans, the quantities and proportions expected to rise steeply in the future; conversely, these fuels represent 8% and 2% respectively of US imports. At the same time, exports to the US reached \$3bn, partly

corresponding to a US investment of \$10bn in Algeria. There may be 2500 Algerian students at US universities. Whilst these ties may reduce the US support for the Moroccan annexation, they could equally come to be used to hinder Algeria in its aid to the Sahrawis; the Algerian radicals in the FLN dislike this recent development in general.

The more immediately vital issue, the outcome of which has been a great relief to the Sahrawis, concerns the supply of US weapons to Morocco. In 1960, American policy towards the unstable decolonising N.W. African states led to its 'security assistance programme' with Morocco. The arms supplied were, of course, for defence only. In 1975, US military aid to Hassan had totalled \$14m; in 1976, following hasty meetings triggered by a feared escalation to result from the two Amgala clashes, US aid was increased to \$30m; in 1977 it rose to \$45m. In March, Hassan declared, so that the US should hear, that 'the Sahara was to have been a springboard for a revolutionary movement manipulated by Polisario and certain Spanish officers, as happened in Portugal'. With the US line on Soviet expansion in Africa hardening, Morocco was then sold two dozen F-5 fighters in a deal said to have been negotiated in 1974, before the war began...officially for internal use, the remains of some of these planes are now scattered across the Western Sahara.

The change of policy can be first discerned in the statement by Veliotis, deputy assistant secretary of state, in October 1977: the US, neutral, accepted only Moroccan and Mauritanian 'administrative control' and had not concerned itself with the issue of sovereignty... however, aid to the refugees would be considered, hardly acceptable to Morocco. By early 1978, there was an influential lobby (expressed through the *New York Times*) against further involvement in the Western Sahara, in part because of its Vietnam-like perspectives, in part out of concern for the Sahrawis. In April, the State Department requested Morocco to withdraw its F-5 fighters from the war (without effect, of course). At the same time it indefinitely postponed the \$120m sale of two dozen helicopters and reconnaissance planes. However, events such as Morocco's support of the conservative Mobutu regime and of the US-associated Arab participation in the Middle East negotiations have also kept the State Department mindful of its 1960 policy, leading it in October 1978 to reassure Hassan, through the National Security Council, that Morocco was still the warhead of its African policy. Encouraged, in November Hassan went to Washington to try again for the aircraft, apparently unsuccessfully. However, his continuing cooperation may have been ensured instead by US agreement to instal an electronic detection network in the occupied Sahara (Project Westwind); costing \$200m, offered by the Saudis, the system consists of buried or camouflaged sensors which relay human or vehicle movement to control maps at headquarters. A similar system was installed along the Ho-Chi-Minh trail in Vietnam, another network is now functioning in the Sinai desert. It is thought that, in order to get round its own Arms Exports Control Act, the US will classify the system's installation in the war zone as a non-military contract.

In 1978, the US and Britain allowed their major oil companies, Phillips and British Petroleum (BP, state-controlled) to effectively endorse the Tripartite Agreement by taking 25% interests in a Moroccan company (50% state participation) to prospect for oil in Sahara waters (El Aaiun to Cape Bojador). This may be compared to the Soviet attitude to the fishing and phosphate agreements. In a letter^{29a}, BP

wrote in August that 'No undertakings were given to the Moroccans with regard to our recognition of their claims to the territory'. But such a contract tacitly recognises the legal right of the Moroccans to prospect there — it is also hoped, opportunistically, that, should there be a change of authority, an accommodation will also be reached with the new power. In the meantime, it's the oil that counts. Yet, simultaneously, the British Foreign Office sent a representative to Algiers — and in April the British Labour Party officially recognised Polisario, supporting the Sahrawis' right to self-determination, promising to consider further aid to the refugees and also the issue of arms sales to Morocco. The Moroccan press both denied this recognition and affirmed that, through diplomatic channels, the British government had stated a lack of commitment to the Sahrawis. And, indeed, it has done nothing about BP's involvement — yet the company is under the British Labour government's direct control.

The French president has said he supports the partition of the Western Sahara because the Sahrawis are too few to form a viable state, a pronouncement to be compared to his attitude over France's own small African colonies (in November 1978, the British colony of Dominica became independent, with only 80,000 inhabitants and a land-area and resources minute at the side of those of the Western Sahara). French policy, by 1978, has to be seen in the context of France's interventions in several other African struggles and of its lead in the inception of a covertly colonial and openly paternalistic club, preferably with its own *gendarmerie*, for European heads of state concerned to manipulate the course of African affairs. Enlarging on Moroccan ambitions, one observer has asked: 'Is France looking to a 'Grand Maroc Français'?'³⁰. Its interest in the western zone of the desert has even been heightened lately by the approaching exploitation of the massive Guelb deposits of iron ore, north of Zouerate, whilst there is still the hope of a share in the eventual extraction at Gara Djebilet (in fact under study, in 1978, by US experts). French aid to Morocco was budgeted at \$232m in 1978, to be greatly returned in arms sales; financial support for Mauritania has been much smaller.

The approach of the French general elections early in 1978 brought an apparent reversal of Elysée policy: public overtures of friendship to Algeria, private intimation that France would withdraw from the war. The French socialists and communists were each against the intervention. The elections resulting in the return of the previous shade of government, the French forces were put back into a fully-offensive role.

There was no effective change in Spanish official policy during the first two years of the conflict. However, with the *bunker's* hold on Spain weakening, the socialist opposition (PSOE) forced practical action over the Sahara. The mentioned cross-examination, early in 1978, of the officials responsible for the 1975 agreement, brought the issue firmly back before the nation. The left's struggle against ratification of the fishing deal was however lost, the Cortes approving it in February by 174-142 votes. The foreign minister repeated the usual formula that this recognised Moroccan 'jurisdiction' but not 'sovereignty' over the Sahara waters; Hassan had visited Madrid just before the vote, to bring pressure on Suárez. The left has continued to press for a more responsible official attitude to the Sahrawis, centred on general revision of the agreement (drawing a parallel with Britain's re-attachment to its obligations in Rhodesia).

Hassan successfully manipulated the Suárez government during the first three years of the war. The period saw the development of a second though still lesser conflict point in the region: the Canaries³¹. The pro-independence terrorists, MPAIAC, though utterly without support in the islands, received material aid from Algeria in order to bring pressure on Spain over the Sahara. This inhumane manoeuvre added the sufferings of innocent islanders (a hundred bomb attacks by 1978) and the related deaths of several hundred tourists in the world's largest air-disaster to the misery of the N.W. African armies. As will be seen, the Canary pawn, MPAIAC, was to be strategically discarded by the African Quixote, Algeria, in mid-78, coincidentally with a radical change in Spain's official policy towards the Sahrawis. In the meantime, Hassan was able to adapt Suárez's fear of the increasing 'destabilisation' of the Canaries to his own aims of eliminating the pro-Sahrawi campaign in the islands: Moroccan and Spanish police, in secret operations, have co-operated in catching and deporting the Sahrawis, including those with residence permits. This can also be seen as a Spanish counter to Polisario's attacks on the Canary fishing boats. The Moroccan king has also given his international support over the Canaries as a further inducement to co-operation by Suárez. He has also tried to keep Spanish workers in the annexed territory, as another lever; his most recent scheme is the recruitment of Canary building squads (in spite of Morocco's massive unemployment) to construct a 2000-house settlement at Cape Bojador. However, even the huge wages have kept only 200-300 Spaniards, civilians, in the Western Sahara.

Hassan's position within Morocco has worsened during the course of the war. In June 1978, the king declared: 'The revolution (sic) which has no period of repose is heading for problems'. The economy was by now in a disastrous state due to the cost of the war and the low phosphate price; borrowing had multiplied fifteen-fold since 1973, leading to an enormous external debt; a UN report forecast that by 1980 the trade deficit would only be passed, in Africa, by Egypt and Zaire (coincidentally). Saudi Arabia supports Morocco financially because of a shared conservatism. Hassan has tried to soften the abandoning of various current economic plans: 'Morocco has never built and invested as much as in the past five years'. But the masses have gradually lost their unifying and diverting nationalist fervour: the bad 1977 harvest, the still-rising inflation and unemployment, the war taxes, these have brought many strikes and, in the Rif, open revolt. Devaluing the dirham, Hassan called for 'a social peace in Morocco' whilst blaming the economic crisis on the cost of 're-integrating the Sahara provinces'. The King's much-publicised 'Plan d'Urgence' for the desert, to transform it economically and culturally, is now but a mirage — such projects as are actually under way are for military purposes (roads, airports, communications, houses for officers). By mid-1978, only the ancient tactic of blaming the war on Algeria appeared left, as an internal strategy, to Hassan.

Relations between Mauritania and Spain have remained at the cold level brought by the breakdown of negotiations late in the Spanish colonial period. There was formal co-operation in the preparation and implementation of the Tripartite Agreement. Ould Daddah later tried to give substance to this treaty by capturing numerous Spanish boats fishing 'illegally' in Mauritanian-controlled waters, Madrid sending down a warship in October 1977.

Mauritania's internal situation had, by 1978, evolved to much the same state as that of its partner in annexation. The pre-1975 problems had simply been heightened: the

economy was now internationally adjudged bankrupt, with the national debt (\$500m) at 92% of the GNP, inflation ran at 33%, unrest was now spreading into parts of society. There was particular dislike of the war taxation: three days of each person's monthly income, 2% of company turnover. With 60% of the budget going on the conflict, the FAO had to send emergency food supplies. In January, even Ould Daddah's party (PPM) demonstrated its antipathy to the war. The developing opposition took three forms: the businessmen, the army, the clandestine left. The Mauritanian leader now announced a national policy which, turning about from the Mauritanianisation of the early 1970s, was intended to bring at least the business-cum-middle class sector back behind him: in February he re-opened the state enterprises to foreign investment. This coincided with the re-appearance of the French armed forces, as described, and the Mauritanian conservatives looked forward to the return of the franc too.

Simultaneously, the iron-ore massifs in the north entered a new role in the war. Foreign earnings from the Zouerate mine were dropping, as described. But the deposit has anyway only ten years to run at normal output and so Ould Daddah sought finance for exploitation of the mentioned Guelb deposit, forecast to provide a century's output. Funds of \$460m were raised from conservative sources (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, European Investment Bank, World Bank), these imposing two conditions: the jettisoning by the state of loss-making concerns (in particular the Akjoujt copper mine and also the idling Nouadhibou refinery, designed for Algerian light oil) and the ending of the all-crippling war — in 1977, for the first time the Zouerate mine had made a loss (\$41m).

The swing away from socialism in both internal and external policy was badly received by the left wing of the PPM and by the Kadihines. The army had by now grown to ten-times its pre-1975 strength. Ould Daddah desperately tried new tactics: 'anti-corruption' re-organisation of the administration, a visit to China, an increased Islamisation of the state. This last measure, in June 1978, if it increased fraternity with the conservative Arab states which have gladly replaced Algeria's pre-1975 aid and influence, significantly coincided with practical support by Gaddafi, known as a fervent Moslem (Libya's role will be discussed shortly).

Ould Daddah's policies did not satisfy any of his opponents — not even the economic sector, this feeling his measures had not gone far enough towards open capitalism. On 2 July, a mysterious document was published³² in the name of the 'Mauritanian Democrats': the state, bankrupt and dependent on Saudi aid, menaced by famine, was on the verge of disappearance; its troops were mere cannon-fodder, untrained, ill-armed, under-fed, misinformed and with unshaped convictions; the war budget had gone into villas, herds, luxury cars and private bank accounts; the fervour raised by the misleading propaganda, including the stimulation of inter-tribal rivalries, had died away; unemployment, rural depopulation and general emigration were massive; change was needed. However, it was in fact an army coup which, a week later, removed Ould Daddah from office. Events subsequent to this upheaval will be brought together in the final section, a consideration of the future course of the Sahara conflict.

Algerian support for the Sahrawis has remained publicly unchanged throughout the war. There have been intermittent and unproved rumours of official negotiations with Morocco above the heads of the Sahrawis, to lead to an

accommodation against their interests. There is popular sympathy for the Sahrawis, gradually dropping; partially it has reflected the Algerian masses' nationalistic hostility to Morocco. The \$50,000 a day^{33a} perhaps going in aid to the Tindouf refugees and to Polisario has brought the Algerian economy to a situation approaching those of Morocco and Mauritania.

In July 1978, at the Khartoum summit of the OAU, Boumedienne said: 'Between us and the French army there is a sea of blood'. In early May, following the Jaguar attacks on the Sahrawis, the Algerian official paper, *El Moudjahid*, gave much space to descriptions of the massacres of Algerians by the colonial power in May 1945. The Sahrawi independence struggle is of course to be paralleled with that of Algeria rather than of Morocco. Economic ties appear at a low level: Algeria had hoped that, through a progressive government in Paris, it would establish a special relationship with the EEC, but this aim seems to have been postponed by the lack of Algerian-French understanding, in favour perhaps of the links with the US, uncertain in their results. Since January, Boumedienne has nationalised various French firms and ordered Algerian companies to reduce on imports from France. French terms are anyway poorer than with other countries whilst, within Algeria's general trade deficit, there is an adverse balance with France. Plans were announced to replace French, as a second language, by English. In May, Boumedienne spoke out strongly against the increasingly-wide French intervention in Africa. There were of course angry reactions in Paris to all these measures, with reprisals by right-wing groups (eg Delta) against the 800,000 Algerian worker-hostages in France. The French official attitude can be judged from a radio programme in June: 'Algeria,' an interviewer began a question, 'is doing its best to destabilise the present situation in Africa . . . ?' . . . he was talking to King Hassan.

Algerian strategy towards Spain — from which it is really only separated by the Mediterranean — appears more successful. Its main 1975-8 bargaining points have been the supply of natural gas and its described support for the Canaries' independence movement, the latter issue leading to the recall of the Spanish ambassador between December 1977 and February 1978. The PSOE leader, González, then initiated a new phase, the assurance of his party's continuing support for the Sahrawis bringing to an end MPAIAC broadcasting from Algiers. The discarding of the Canary terrorists in midsummer by Algeria and the release of eight captured Spanish fishermen by the Sahrawis in the autumn has brought the recognition of Polisario by the government party (UCD) in Spain. Their spokesman said: 'Contrary to the Moroccans' affirmations, the Polisario Front exists and is not an Algerian invention'. In November, a Canary fishing boat, CRUZ DEL MAR, was boarded off El Aaiun by a squad of Africans who, after accepting the crew's invitation to supper, then lined them up on deck and machine-gunned them; detailed study^{33b} has suggested that this was the work of Morocco, the aim being to make it appear to have been a Polisario attack, thus weakening the latter's improving relations with Spain.

Spain's only official counter-lever (Air Algérie's Madrid office was bombed) had been to remind Algeria and the other members of the Front Arabe de la Résistance that it had never yet recognised Israel. The Sahrawis' struggle is viewed with sympathy by this Arab grouping; the PLO has acknowledged Polisario. Conversely, a visit in August 1978 by Shimon Peres to King Hassan — Morocco being in the

US camp over the Middle East negotiations, as noted — may result in Israeli pressure on the US to deliver the postponed military planes to Morocco.

10: Evolution at the OAU during the war

If the focus is now turned southwards, the Western Sahara can be seen to have become, by 1978, one of the several battlegrounds between two further international alignments, the African 'progressives' (including Algeria) and 'moderates' (including Morocco and Mauritania), those respectively refusing or accepting Western re-intervention in the continent. Once again, it is not justice or humanitarian considerations which have decided the attitudes towards the Sahrawis. But, before the OAU's ineffectiveness is described, a survey is needed of the policies of three other states with an interest in the conflict.

President Senghor of Senegal, looking ahead, has also thought of supping at the table of the Moroccan king — equally he does not want Hassan's troops along the north bank of the Senegal River. So, paralleling Ould Daddah's ambitions a zone higher up, Senghor has considered the division of Mauritania between himself and Hassan. In January 1978 he said that half his neighbours are 'ethnically and culturally Senegalese' and could be allowed self-determination 'under certain conditions', a delicate reference to Mauritania's impending collapse and the possible further push southwards, then, by Hassan. Relations with Mauritania are cool; the Senegal River irrigation scheme, shared also with Mali, requires co-operation, however.

Senegal, 'independent' in 1960, has remained tied to France, with Senghor (also married to a Frenchwoman) firmly in the moderate camp (Arab links are with the conservative states such as Saudi Arabia). In February 1978, Senghor and his Parti Socialiste received 82% of the general election vote; the three opposition parties and the student union all support the Sahrawis and, in varying degrees, are against the French presence in Senegal. In August 1977, Senghor condemned military intervention in Africa by 'the great European and American powers', from December watched the French jets leaving their Dakar base in operations against the Sahrawis, in mid-78 (Socialist International conference, Dakar) again denounced foreign military intervention.

Senegal's consistent OAU vote for the Moroccan annexation (and against recognition of the Canary terrorist group) has made Senghor fear a Polisario attack, so troops have been posted along the borders with Mauritania and Mali. Senegal has 6500 soldiers and security treaties with the US in addition to French protection. In January 1978, the semi-official *Le Soleil* affirmed that Senegal would not passively watch 'an Algerian colonisation of Mauritania'.

'Greater Morocco' would include northern Mali. President Traoré began by supporting the partition of the Western Sahara as a way of keeping Hassan out of Mauritania and away from the long frontier with Mali. However, Algerian diplomacy swung Traoré right across to the Sahrawi camp at the Mauritius OAU summit in mid-76. Yet Mali is, for several reasons, in a difficult position. Traoré's *coup* against Modibo Keita, in 1968, replaced an anti-French radical government by the present 'moderate' and 'interim' military regime. Undeveloped, usually drought-struck, Mali has to accept civil aid from all ideologies: China, USSR, N. Korea, Cuba, the US, the Arab conservatives. In mid-1978, uranium

was found there, bringing Japanese and French investment; the US was prospecting for oil, the USSR for gold. Military aid has come from the USSR and also China; the forces consist of 4000 men, light tanks and MiG planes.

The Sahrawi army has bases in the Malian desert; clashes with Mauritanian forces have occurred within Mali's territory. In February 1977, Giscard paid the first official visit to Mali since its independence: an increase in French aid (to 11bn Malian francs in 1977) may have carried with it pressure leading both to the Malian army's subsequent attempt to eject Polisario and to Traoré's refusal to hold the OAU special summit on the war.

Mali has a further, entrenched problem, shared with Mauritania to the west and Niger to the east — a country divided ethnically and culturally between north and south. Suggestions of a federation of Sahara states would not solve the desert-wide division. The white Berber-Arab nomads of Western Sahara, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Libya and Chad are closely related in many ways and perennially antipathetic to the administrations of the states within which they have found themselves in recent times. In 1962-3, the nomads of Mali's Adrar des Iforas attempted to secede — the death penalties on five leaders were, by coincidence, carried out soon after Giscard's visit, fifteen years later . . . Polisario, in retaliation against Mali's military campaign to eject it, was just then threatening to re-arm Mali's northern dissidents. It was because of the conflict that, in the early 1970s, Mali's drought-struck nomads had preferred the refugee camps of the surrounding countries to those set up by their own government; at the time of Mali's independence, its nomads had attempted to get Algeria to take over their region and it was this continuing preference which led many to go to the Algerian camps during the drought, as was discussed earlier. It is likely that there are many nomads in the divided Saharan states who would like to live in — and be willing to fight for — an ethnically-unified state in the western desert.

The Sahrawis are known to have recruited 600 'mercenaries' amongst their fellow-nomads in the Niger³⁴. Though the French-associated government's policy has followed much the same pattern as that of Mali, including support for the Sahrawis at the OAU, it fears the return of a trained, experienced and politicised nomad force in the north. Ould Daddah tried to convince the leaders of Senegal, Mali and Niger that Polisario is part of a strategy by Boumedienne to bring about their downfall.

Libya is perhaps the most unpredictable element in the Western Sahara conflict. On most issues there is agreement with Algeria. Prior to the annexation, Gaddafi's emphasis on Arab unity had led him to work for a voluntary union between the Sahrawis and their eventual invaders. During the first two years of the war, Gaddafi morally and materially supported the Sahrawis' struggle for self-determination but not the formation of their republic. Simultaneously, Libya has given civil aid to Mauritania, to counter the French and Moroccan presences. This, however, brought Gaddafi the news that Libyan arms held by Polisario had damaged Libyan-funded development projects; Gaddafi then limited his military aid to the Sahrawis.

The French interventions all over Africa and, in particular, against the Libyan-backed Frolinat rebels in the Chad, have led Gaddafi to publicly re-affirm his support for the Sahrawis throughout 1978. The supplying of missiles capable of coping with the French Jaguars has been discussed; Gaddafi's powerful Soviet-equipped forces have very advanced weapons. To judge by his continued civil

aid to Mauritania — in particular since the July *coup* — Gaddafi feels the southern country is the key to a solution to the conflict. Hassan indeed fears Gaddafi's influence there and, though the Algerians are said³⁵ to have been irritated by the pre-*coup* aid to Mauritania, a reversal of the latter's policy over the annexation will need to be backed by the certainty of aid from the pro-Sahrawi grouping.

The OAU had, prior to the invasion, supported Sahrawi self-determination. On Mauritius, in July 1976, the assembly — to which the UN majority vote formally transferred the Sahara issue — passed a resolution, by 29-2 votes with 16 abstentions, expressing unconditional support for the Sahrawis' 'just struggle' and calling for the rapid withdrawal of 'all foreign occupying forces'. The Liberation Committee had recognised Polisario at Maputo in February. However, the next OAU proposal, to hold a special summit meeting on the Sahara, has never been implemented, being postponed several times: officially due to cost (at least once underwritten by Algeria) and lack of a quorum (25 countries, in fact four less than the Mauritius support), in practice because the host-country was in the Moroccan lobby (eg Gabon) or was under pressure from this (Sudan). The 1978 summit at Khartoum brought little change; the appointment of a committee to study the issue will result in a delay favourable to the Moroccan group (Morocco, Mauritania, Gabon, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Zaire, these also the core of the francophile 'moderates'). The only result of its first meeting, in December, was to set up a sub-committee to study the problem (already thoroughly enough examined by the 1975 UN Mission); this sub-committee apparently told the Sahrawis that it could only do its work properly once the Polisario-Morocco fighting had also stopped, a cease-fire which would be in the Moroccans' interest. The 1979 OAU summit will be in Liberia, probably favouring Morocco, though the new secretary-general is from Togo, one of the states to have formally recognised the Sahrawi Republic.

It should be noted that there have been well-publicised 'mediation' proposals by conservative states such as Saudi Arabia and Senegal. Intending negotiation with Algeria to the exclusion of the Sahrawis, these have been barely disguised attempts to obtain acceptance of the annexation. The Arab League has played the same role. Goytisolo³⁶ argues that the Mauritians are just as Sahrawi as Polisario, so that the Arab world cannot be expected to take sides.

'To attempt a wholesale redrawing of the map of Africa on the basis of ancient claims or tribal links could only lead to chaos, war and the unravelling of a continent's state system', wrote Franck.³⁷ The OAU charter envisages that each African people, upon decolonisation, should be allowed to determine its own future within the established colonial boundaries. Franck states that it is widely observed that, no matter how these people came to be shaped, they 'soon develop a cohesive logic of their own which should not be lightly over-ridden'.

11: The Sahrawis at the start of 1979

The SADR, brought into being on 28 February 1976, groups the 100,000 people in the camps, the 5000-strong army and, at the most, a further 20,000 Sahrawis still in the occupied territory (eg 80% of the population of El Aaiun had already fled to the camps by February 1976, according to the IFHR report). Supreme authority is in

the hands of a revolutionary council, drawn from and controlling the government and the army. The prime minister since the beginning has been Mohamed Lamine, but the founder and first secretary-general of Polisario, Sayed el Wali, was killed in mid-1976 and replaced by Mohamed Abdelazziz. The equally vital post of foreign minister is held by Ibrahim Hakim. The 1976 provisional constitution, aligned with those of Algeria and Libya, describes the new state, in its most decisive aspects, as Arab, Islamic, socialist, working for Arab unity.

Radical social change is a central principle: tribal, racial, caste and sex discriminations have been outlawed. Already in January 1976, a Sahrawi spokesman told the writer that 'it's now an insult to ask a person's tribe'; the divisiveness of tribe, once an invader had been neutralised, was always a major factor in breaking up the Sahrawi unification. Slavery, notably of blacks, was current throughout the Spanish administration; it is a regular claim by the Moroccan camp that Polisario sometimes kills its black prisoners. The privileged position of the hereditary patriarch (*sheikh*) is said to be ended — the leaders are in fact all young. 'It is our aim to make a reality of the political and social rights of women and to open up new vistas to them in national construction within the limits of our national resources and Islamic religion^{38a}'; women receive training in the use of weapons. There are unions of students, women and general workers. The mineral wealth is national property. Goytisolo has acknowledged that the Sahrawis 'present a series of social, cultural and economic characteristics different to those of their Maghreb brothers (Moroccan and Algerian)'. If the desert people put the outlined principles into practice, they will demonstrate in the most convincing manner a further major difference from the Moroccan regime.

It remains to describe the lives of the Sahrawis in the invaded desert and in the refugee camps. Those few thousands who remained behind in November 1975 saw Spanish control replaced by a barbaric and yet more repressive occupation. The fate of those who demonstrated the least resistance (such as refusal to kiss Hassan's portrait or the Moroccan flag, each forcibly distributed in quantity) will have been gathered from the refugees' experiences. The Spanish passed their lists of Sahrawi dissidents to the invaders, these rounding up whole families, in particular in retribution for Polisario attacks; the women especially suffered. The Sahrawis were made to live in camps around the military posts, to act as human shields against Polisario raids. Nomadism, already greatly reduced by Spanish policy aided by the long drought (to 28% by 1975), was entirely halted; all domestic animals were appropriated or killed. A curfew was declared, movement was restricted. Petrol was rationed, Sahrawi-owned vehicles had to be painted red and white so that, if their owners fled, they would be easily recognised in the open desert. The invaders also took measures to avoid petrol and food reaching Polisario. As amongst the occupying forces, bribery rapidly became the key to survival: food, water, lodgings, permits, all reached extortionate values. The Sahrawis have claimed that their staple food and drink, roasted and ground barley and tea, have been deliberately kept in short supply to lower their morale.

One further element in Hassan's strategy has been the steady implantation of Moroccan and Mauritanian civilians in the annexed desert. Designed to sway any future referendum in the invaders' favour, the immigration would greatly increase the task of holding a valid consultation. The manoeuvre, doubtless encouraged by the Israeli precedent,

was at its peak late in 1978: with a cash inducement, families from the Agadir and Marrakesh regions were being taken down to the Sahara in weekly military convoys. One report^{39b} is that between a third and a half of the inhabitants of the Moroccan-occupied zone are now of non-Sahrawi origin.

Moroccan propaganda attempts to conceal the truth behind an idyllic picture of life in the territory which, thanks to the Plan d'Urgence, will soon become the best of all possible deserts. In January 1978 a Spanish journalist described⁴⁰ the dominant sensation there: fear.

There are civilian detention and torture camps near El Aaiun (El Jreida, El Bachicha) and Dakhla (Punta de la Sarga). Sahrawi civilians are similarly held in Morocco (Ouarzazate, Sidi Ifni, Casablanca, Kenitra) and in Mauritania.

Repression of Sahrawis resident in Morocco and Mauritania, particularly in the former's Sus region, has been the subject of detailed Polisario reports.⁴¹⁻² The zone below Goulimine is forbidden to all except those who live there. Many are Sahrawis, a proportion of these having moved north from Spanish territory after conflict with the colonial authorities, in particular the 1957-8 war. Moroccan repression of these Sahrawis began after a well-known 1972 demonstration, at Tan-Tan, in favour of independence from Spain — rather than absorption by Morocco. Subsequent peaks of police activity have come during the visit of the UN Mission, during the 'peace' march and, throughout the war, after Polisario attacks. In the Sus too the Sahrawis have been forced to move into the settlements. School, work, social events, all bring the enforced homage to Hassan and Morocco. The Sahrawi reports list dozens of men and women who have disappeared after being arrested without warrant and imprisoned without trial; many were taken at Tan-Tan, Tarfaya, Goulimine and Zak. Families have been transported entire, including that of Mohamed Lamine, the Republic's prime minister. To look, speak or dress like a Sahrawi is to be open to arrest; meetings, even festivities such as weddings, risk police intervention. The entire south being under military control, the forces of repression behave without restraint. In the more northerly cities where there are Sahrawi quarters, such as Agadir, the police operate an unofficial curfew, sometimes beating up Sahrawis out after dark. Sahrawi students, all over Morocco, have been arrested just before the end of term, to stop them joining Polisario (this was at the beginning of the war). Nothing can be done, internally, to help these people; the pliant political left has ignored their plight. Amnesty International's general report on Morocco⁴³ implies a dark future for its Sahrawi residents.

Similar repression in Mauritania appears led by the Moroccan forces; in February 1978 they apparently opened fire, at Dakhla, on civilians demonstrating against their exactions. A month later, following a Polisario attack on Nouadhibou, both Moroccan and Mauritanian troops fired on Mauritanian civilians thought to be sympathetic to the Sahrawis; the war and the behaviour of the two armies stationed along the railway have combined with the drought to cause the people of the region to flee southwards. The railwaymen have struck rather than carry the troops; a derailment in December 1977 was the work of Mauritians, according to Polisario. The Algerian press⁴⁴ claims that even members of Ould Daddah's own party had demonstrated at Nouakchott against the annexation and the war, being then arrested and sent to a special camp set up by Morocco's notorious Col. Dlimi.

In addition to the counter-accusations of Algerian abduction, imprisonment and killing of Sahrawis at Tindouf, listed earlier, Morocco has charged Algeria with the persecution of Sahrawis resident in Europe.⁴⁵ It was claimed that all of them, some 700, took out Moroccan or Mauritanian identity documents and joined AOSARIO (the Moroccan-formed association for Sahrawis), then receiving threats through the Algerian *amicales* (similar associations for Algerians in Europe). Both Morocco and Algeria have alleged the expulsion of enormous numbers of their own citizens, with expropriation of their possessions, by the other country.

Life in the Tindouf camps is preferable to that in the occupied settlements but the combination of burning sun, sand-storms and cold winter nights with the lack of adequate food, medicine and shelter again provides a harsh existence. By October 1976 there were 22 camps, the largest of those visited by the IFHR⁴⁶ having 7800 inhabitants in 660 tents. Eighty percent of the refugees were women and children. Only 10% of the tents were of Sahrawi manufacture (woven animal hair), the rest, rapidly wearing out, gave little protection; there was not a blanket per person.

The region's natural resources are limited to a few wells: food, fuel and water have to come by truck from far away. In May 1976 a team of Swiss doctors reported^{47a} that a person had to live for a month on a few kilos of cereals, dried vegetables, sugar and powdered milk, a few dates and a ration of oil and tea; the diet was deficient in fats, protein and vitamins. The IFHR reported malnutrition, dehydration, rickets, with a list of the common diseases: hepatitis, bronchitis, TB, trachoma, conjunctivitis, chronic diarrhoea, with anaemia by 1977. The Swiss doctors said that one in four babies died in the first fifteen days. The Sahrawi Red Crescent looks after the refugees but has few skilled workers and a chronic shortage of medical supplies. Morocco has claimed that aid goes to finance 'Algeria's mercenary army' or simply into Algerian pockets but the IFHR wrote:

'We feel it important to underline that we were struck by the perfect organisation of the camps. The distribution of aid is rapid and very fair. Our delegation felt that here was one of the rare instances where international aid will be used to the full'.

In 1979, the many camps have been grouped into three wilayas (provinces, as in Algeria), named after the main settlements of the Western Sahara: El Aaiun, Dakhla, Smara. These large units are ultimately divided into cells of eleven adults each; every adult is responsible for an aspect of the daily life (eg education, medical care) of the families in the cell. The refugees were originally grouped in their psychologically-reassuring pre-exodus social patterns but this has now been changed, in order to break down tribalism. Each cell elects a representative to the council of its own camp (see cover photograph); the camp councils each elect a representative to a national council.

Daily life for the 100,000 refugees brings a steady emphasis on Sahrawi identity and independence, ranging from the Republic's flag to the recollection of Polisario's dead heroes from before and after 1975. In February 1978, the official representative of the British Liberal party described the camps 'well-organised system of democratic control' and the continued 'unanimous support amongst the refugees for total independence under Polisario'. The people spend much of the day being educated in school subjects, Arab culture, politics and warfare. All except the very aged, the sick and the smaller children take part in the camps' home-guard network. There are frequent festivities, in particular on important anniversaries, beginning with processions and

communal discussions and ending with singing and the acting of Sahrawi plays and mimes. These occasions bring together the greater part of the Sahrawi people.

12: The current situation

The July 1978 *coup* in Mauritania was the work of the army's recently-appointed chief of staff, Col. Mustapha Ould Mohamed Salek. The constitution was suspended, the government, parliament and the PPM all dissolved, being replaced by a 'Military Commission for National Rehabilitation'. One of the first statements made by Salek, once the director of the National Import-Export Company, was that 'The road to economic success requires a total return to liberalism'. As foreign minister he appointed the president of the association of Mauritanian businessmen. In August, the *ouguiya* was aligned on the French franc. A group of wealthy civilians issued a public approval of the *coup*. Relations with France would remain close, confirmed Salek.

It appears that France in fact guaranteed the success of the *coup* against a Moroccan intervention — and did actually dissuade Hassan from a counter-*coup* under Col. Mbarek, another leading Mauritanian officer. It is possible that, equally, both Salek and the French acted to prevent Ould Daddah implementing an agreement — the first since he turned away from them in 1975 — with Boumedienne and Gaddafi, the result of talks in May. The Mauritanian army, assured of French support, was willing to continue the fight with Polisario. However, by the end of 1978, radical opposition to Salek was making itself heard within Mauritania, including in the army.

However, immediately after the announcement of the *coup*, Polisario unilaterally declared a cease-fire in its highly successful southern campaigns, the Sahrawi leaders offering to negotiate a settlement with Salek. Judging by past proposals, both before and during the war, the Sahrawis may have offered an equal-status federation and co-operation in the exploitation of the two states' mineral resources in exchange for a return to the 1975 frontiers. This would not of course affect the continuing campaign to regain the north from Morocco and, in fact, a plan to limit the Sahrawi Republic to the Mauritanian third was rejected by the Sahrawis in October (according to one journal^{47b}, it was supported by Algeria as well as by Mauritania and Libya, with Morocco against it). The cease-fire may also have effectively neutralised the French forces, ostensibly only there to defend Mauritania in order to protect French nationals working in the country.

The *coup* and the cease-fire at once led to attempts by various interested states to influence the new regime. Boumedienne talked to Salek at Khartoum. The discussed aid from Libya was balanced by another \$110m from Saudi Arabia and lesser aid from Morocco and France. French business interests rejoiced as production at the Zouerate mine rose again, their press urging Morocco and Mauritania not to change their positions. The French government — only now recognising, in spite of the lead by the US, that it had involved France in an indefinite and costly war — added themselves to the 'mediators'. However, Giscard d'Estaing's proposal was part of a broader plan aimed at tidying up the W Mediterranean prior to its integration into NATO. Britain, reassured by this NATO cover, would transfer Gibraltar to Spain; the latter, pushed by the pro-Hassan businessmen's lobby, would then give Ceuta and

Melilla back to Morocco; and Hassan would in turn accept that the Sahrawis should go and live in the southern third of their territory, in a federal union with Mauritania. There would also be a referendum in the Moroccan-occupied region, an unworkable proposal due to Hassan's deliberate implantation of Moroccans in the territory and to his refusal to accept impartial supervision (eg UN, OAU). Giscard's plan had US approval. However, Suárez has created adverse conditions for its implementation: UCD recognition of Polisario in September led Morocco to renew its claim to Ceuta and Melilla (and to hint that pressure might be put on the Canaries again) the cordial atmosphere for the series of exchanges does not exist at present. But, in any case, the Sahrawis would reject the French plan as far as it applies to them.

Algeria has not yielded to pressures on it, in particular by the French, to accept the existing situation. The foreign minister, Bouteflika, stated in August that Algeria would never exchange the Sahrawis and 'the credibility of Algeria' for material gains; at Boumedienne's funeral, in December, he repeated that there would be no change in Algeria's attitude over the Sahara.

Hassan of Morocco has been equally unmoved. Publicly approving Mauritania's military regime, his epitaph on his disappeared partner, Ould Daddah, was that 'his desire for reconciliation at times led to an inability to take decisions'. However, the king also reassured his people that the new leaders would not take any decision or accept any offer without consulting him first. 'If Mauritania decides on a course, we must be at its side, on condition that the chosen solution obeys two imperatives: no infringement of our territorial integrity, no insertion of a foreign frontier between Morocco and Mauritania. And I would add to our Mauritanian brothers: "Don't be misled . . ."'.⁴⁸ The king also said: 'We will never accept the existence on our southern frontier of a regime which differs ideologically from those of Morocco and Mauritania'. A few days later, *Le Matin du Sahara* (as it has been called since the 1975 march) indignantly denied rumours of peace plans reported in *Le Monde*, calling the French paper 'the spokesman of the Algerian regime and its mercenaries'. The transfer to the northern desert of the 600-man garrison at Akjoujt, in August, was interpreted as the opening of a withdrawal of Hassan's troops from Mauritania — but, in fact, the loss-making copper mine, having just been closed, was no longer a target and so the unit was sent to reinforce those at the Zouerate mine, bringing to 2500 men its Moroccan contingent. The Sahrawis have kept up their attacks on the FAR in Morocco's annexed region. Hassan and Salek did not meet for two months after the *coup*. It is clear that the Moroccan king is having to think hard about the new situation.

In December, a fifth round of negotiations between the Sahrawis and Mauritania was announced; the earlier talks, with intermittent Moroccan participation (surveillance?) had proved fruitless. Polisario's cease-fire in the south was continued and, as a further aid to discussion, 150 Mauritanian prisoners were released. If Polisario decides to re-open hostilities, the northerners and the black in Salek's army will be more reluctant than ever to fight. If Mauritania were to return the south to the Sahrawis, Morocco would be encircled. The swing in attitude of the Spanish government has rapidly cooled relations between Madrid and Rabat, though this will, on its own, have no effect on the *de facto* occupation of the desert; it is noteworthy that official Spanish releases refer to Sahrawi 'liberty' rather than independence — little should be expected from the present Spanish

government. Recent official contact between Spain and Mauritania may have brought the offer of aid in exchange for a referendum which would allow Madrid to claim that it wanted to fulfil its duty to the Sahrawis. One good reason for Algeria's continued support for the Sahrawis is that to abandon them would be to invite further territorial expansion by Morocco and thus yet further hostilities; though this could lead to an even wider conflict through which the remaining Sahrawis and their territory might emerge in union with Algeria. The French, interested in all the states involved and clearly at present unable to realise all their ambitions by force, would like to see an end to the conflict.

Hassan, the most recalcitrant factor, will only withdraw under strong and practical international pressure, difficult to achieve in view of the wealth and influence of his supporters. If he were forced to leave, the king would need a scape-goat – possibly the Istiqlal nationalists might be blamed for the desert adventure. An army *coup* is always possible but would probably bring no change in policy towards the Western Sahara. The Moroccan masses appear far from effective revolution. Yet the Moroccans will never militarily 'pacify' the Sahrawis within the present situation.

The Sahrawis themselves have only the choice between fighting and disappearance, the latter presumably by assimilation into the S. Algerian desert – their forced return to the occupied zones would clearly add a further entry to the charges of genocide already held against humanity. The current conflict in the desert's cycle is now entering its fourth year. Seen against the past, there are many new factors to affect the outcome, in particular the number of states involved. The Sahrawis, their land on previous occasions invaded without even the knowledge of the rest of the world, are this time aware of and fortified by the increasing support of international opinion. They can encourage themselves further by recalling that, if the states to north and south have often annexed the desert in the past, they have never been able to hold it for long.

Appendix

Extract from 'Forgotten Prisoners Today',
Amnesty International documentation for
'Prisoners of Conscience Week', 15–22 October 1978

'In Africa, for example, the Sahrawi people who originate from the area of the Western Sahara face indiscriminate detention without trial in Morocco. The Sahrawi are a culturally distinct people, characterized by their dress, diet and dialect, having strong ties to the nomadic population of Mauritania. The Sahrawi detainees come from all walks of life: students, mechanics, cattle herders, peasants and nomads. The political situation in the Sahara and the severe drought in the early 1970s caused many Sahrawis to move north from their homeland and settle in Southern Morocco. After they had been pressured in 1975 to show open loyalty to King Hassan II of Morocco, arbitrary arrests began. At least 150 Sahrawis, possibly many more, have been detained without charge or without trial. Numbers of Sahrawi students and even schoolchildren were arrested especially in the spring holidays of 1976 and 1977. All the detainees are civilians who, it is believed, have not in any way participated in the military conflict in the region. After arrest they were initially held incommunicado at police centres such as Moulay Cherif in Casablanca where there is reason to believe they were ill-treated during interrogation. Neither their detention nor any dissent from the government's policy of annexing the Sahara can be discussed openly inside the country.'

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- ²³ *Primera Plana* (Madrid), No. 33, June 1976.
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DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Telco no:

- 754263 *"Sahara: Contested Sand."* (55 minutes). Paolo Meucci shows the changing face of the Sahara where the Berbers and Tuaregs are joined by geologists and prospectors; camels work side by side with bulldozers and excavators digging up the phosphates, uranium, gas and petrol riches. Film also shows the political tension these riches have brought about, the rebels in Chad etc. E-15 Sept. 75 RAI (in Sestante). Via del Babuino 9 Rome.
- 754765 A report on the Spanish Sahara by J.T. Roland (30 minutes, colour). B-22 Oct. 75 NOS/Holland; 4 Nov. 75 Danish TV. P-J.T. Roland, 13 Destelheide, B 1512 Gworp, Belgium.
- 760163 *"Spain's Withdrawal from the Sahara"* (8 minutes 31", colour) shows El Aiun, civilians leaving by ship, Polisario guerrillas, Spanish soldiers, phosphate mines, etc. B-28 Nov. 75 ZDF (in Auslandsjournal), Postfach 4040, 65 Mainz, Germany.
- 761154 *"The Green March" (La marche verte)* (9 minutes 29", colour). C. Schwieter and W. Frequin's film shows the march of the Moroccans into the Spanish Sahara (2'14". P-NOS/Holland). "Sahara". N. Sundaram's film shows the departure of Spanish troops, phosphate mines and includes interviews with J.O. Jamani (President of the Djema) and Col. Dmili B-4 Mar. 76 Swiss Italian TV/Lugano. P-WDR/Cologne (in Weltspiegel) Postfach 101950, D-5000 Cologne 1, Germany.
- 761251 *"Spanish West Sahara."* (9 minutes 23", colour) H.H. Stein reports on the last days of Spanish rule. El Aiun is almost deserted, there is no sign of the Polisario Liberation Movement and the population seems to support Morocco in the dispute. B-27 Feb. 76 ZDF (in Auslandsjournal), Postfach 4040 65 Mainz, Germany.
- 761363 *"Sahara in Morocco's Hands" (Sahara in Marokkos Hand)* (8 minutes 21", colour). H. Stein shows the provincial assembly, Spaniards leaving, parades, Spanish hospital and cemetery; B-12 Mar. 76 ZDF (in Auslandsjournal), Postfach 4040, 65 Mainz, Germany.
- 761541 *"Power Struggle in the Maghreb" (Machtkampf im Maghreb)* (45 minutes, colour). Peter Scholl-Latour's film alleges the Spanish Sahara dispute is not only a territorial struggle but a confrontation of two political systems. Its outcome will be crucial to the position of Morocco's King Hassan and Algeria's President Boumedienne. Film includes an interview with Algerian President Houari Boumedienne and a look at Libya's involvement in this power struggle. B-19 Apr. 76 ZDF, Postfach 4040, 65 Mainz, Germany.
- 761959 *"Front Polisario"* (colour). In September 1975, before the clashes over the Spanish Sahara, French journalist Gérard Sebag spent three weeks with the rebels. Film includes an interview with the leader of Polisario about the Spanish Sahara situation. D-Syigma, 5 rue des Vignes, Paris 75016, France.
- 765145 *"Western Sahara: Independence or Genocide?"* (27 minutes, colour). (Sahara Occidental: Indépendance ou Génocide?). B. Muel and T. Robichet record the fight of the Saharan people for their independence. The struggle is developing with the Front Polisario at its centre. Film claims the only alternatives are genocide or independence. The Front Polisario movement is putting into practice lessons learned from the war in Vietnam. P-1975 B.Muel/T. Robichet. D-UNI/CI/TE, 50 rue Edouard-Vaillant, 93000 Bagnolet, France.
- 770740 *"The Polisario Front,"* (colour), the Spanish Saharan independence movement backed by Algeria and Libya, is visited by D. Sells. Film shows how tribesmen are drilled, refugees, a visit by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadruddin Aga Khan who is interviewed, Saharan women making mud bricks for a hospital, female soldiers marching, press conference by the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic's defence minister, captured Moroccans etc. (9'43"). B-1 Feb. 77 BBC (in Foreign Report) Villiers House, Haven Green, London W5 2PA.
- 771160 *"Western Sahara, a Second Palestine?" (Sahara Occidental, une deuxième Palestine?)* (10 minutes 21", colour) was filmed in the Tindouf camp in Algeria, where some 100,000 refugees from the Spanish Sahara live. Film includes an interview with Dr.E. Canevascini who visited the camp with a Swiss delegation. B-10 Mar. 77 Swiss Italian TV, P-Swiss German TV, Fernsehstrasse 1-4, 8052 Zurich.
- 771838 *"War in the Sahara."* (60 minutes, colour). John Fielding's film shows how heavily Morocco has invested in its new territory and has transformed El Aiun. Although the Mauritians are reported to be on the point of quitting the war, the Moroccans shrug off the Polisario threat. Nick Downie accompanied Polisario guerrillas on their raids against Moroccan convoys. B-21 Apr. 77, Thames TV (in This Week), 306 Euston Road, London NW1 2BB, U.K.
- 771842 *"Polisario"* (14 minutes 38", colour) follows a group of Polisario guerrillas on their 2,000 km journey through the Sahara with the aim of blowing up the phosphate conveyor belt at El Aiun. Film shows their life-style and way of fighting and includes interviews with guerrillas and with Mauretanian and Moroccan prisoners (French and Spanish language) B-21 Apr. 77 BRT (in Panorama), Reyerslaan 52, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium.
- 780746 *"Sahara - The Courage Comes With the Wind" (Sahara - Der Mut kommt mit dem Wind)* (26 minutes, monochrome) shows how in the former Spanish Sahara efforts are being made to create a state to lead the people out of their backwardness. P-Paul Correia Mendes, Televisão Popular de Angola, P.O. Box 2604, Luanda, Angola.
- 780950 *"The Sahara is Not for Sale." (Le Sahara n'est pas à vendre)* (58 minutes, colour). A report by Jocelyn Saab on the western Sahara, filmed in Morocco, Algeria, Spain and Mauritania. Film shows both sides of the conflict, the Moroccan and Mauritanian troops and the Polisario troops on the other side, their fighting tactics, life for these soldiers in the desert, an actual battle and a Polisario attack at Zouerate. B-9 Feb. 78 Swiss Italian TV (in Reporter TV). P-Jocelyn Saab, 3 rue des Ecoles, Paris 75005.
- 784250 *"Fourth National Congress of Polisario"* (12 minutes 55", colour) reports on the Spanish Sahara. B-12 Oct. 78 Swiss German TV/Zurich. P-C.M. Froehder, Roseggerstr. 8, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

X76271 Seuil Audiovisuel, 29 rue Guénégaud, 76006 Paris produced a 52-minute documentary (filmed by invitation of and under the protection of the POLISARIO). It includes the proclamation of independence and the second session of the provisional National Congress, interview with UN delegate and Swedish diplomat Mr. Rydbeck, Moroccan and Mauritanian prisoners, evidence of Moroccan bombardments (napalm), refugees, interviews with leaders (90% Arabic, 10% French), the Moroccan "Green March" and evidence of the presence of the Spanish army, etc. The film covers the period of December 1975 – Mar. 20, 1976 and was filmed by M. Hondo and J. Meppiel.

"War in the Sahara" (24 minutes, colour) shows the Polisario, Moroccan and Mauretanian prisoners, refugees etc. P-A, Chrudinak, Hungarian TV, Szabadsag ter 17, Budapest 1810 (Won Honourable Mention, Leipzig 1978).

The above film list was provided by Richard S. Clark, TELCO, 19 Gurnells Road, Seer Green, Beaconsfield, Bucks. HP9 2XJ, UK.

Enquiries regarding these films should be addressed to the broadcaster or distributor listed, and not to TELCO.

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The cover photograph is by Gérald Bloncourt



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