



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



18 April 2007 No. 4

WESTERN SAHARA

Expected Council Action

The Group of Friends of Western Sahara (France, Russia, Spain, the UK and the US) are discussing the report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the unveiling last week by Morocco and the Polisario Front of their respective proposals for a solution for Western Sahara.

The Council is expected to hold consultations on 20 April prior to renewing the mandate of MINURSO, which expires on 30 April. It remains to be seen how the new proposals may impact discussions on MINURSO and whether the Council is inclined to give weight to those plans as a basis for pushing the parties into direct negotiations.

Recent Developments

As outlined in our April *Forecast*, the Council has been expecting a Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara since last year. This plan, entitled “Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region” was transmitted to the Secretary-General on 11 April. It is a proposal for an autonomous region (within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty and national unity). The region would have its own legislative, executive and judicial bodies and the necessary financial resources for development (mainly coming from tax levies and the allocation of proceeds by the Moroccan state from the exploitation of natural resources in the region). The Kingdom of Morocco would maintain exclusive prerogatives in the domains of defence, national security, external relations, constitution, religion and the “attributes of sovereignty”. Refugees in the Tindouf camps would be repatriated to Western Sahara, along with an amnesty. It also provides for a process of self-determination via referendum after the plan is agreed by the parties. Morocco said that the plan was limited at this stage but could be a basis for renewed negotiations as it is “by no means a unilateral decision, nor a rigid offer.”

The Polisario also presented to the Secretary-General a “Proposal for a Mutually Acceptable Political Solution that Provides for the Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara”. This proposal was a surprise. It appears to have already achieved

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one goal—that of preventing Morocco from capturing all the attention. In substance it draws on parts of the 2003 Baker Plan that the Polisario still considers valid. The proposal includes a referendum on self-determination with three options: independence, integration into the Kingdom of Morocco and self-governance. However, the Polisario also seems to guarantee an intimate strategic relationship with Morocco even under the independence option. This would include elements of partnership in the fields of economy, trade and security—including joint-ventures for the exploitation of natural resources and security arrangements—in addition to citizenship for all legally established Moroccan settlers that would apply for it.

Both parties insist that their proposals contain elements that are open to negotiation, and they stand ready to resume direct talks. But they also insist that the negotiations can only start on the basis of the parameters laid out in their own proposals. At face value these are fundamentally different starting points.

Morocco wants any negotiation based on the autonomy principle while the Polisario wants negotiations based on the principle of self-determination in conformity with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) which includes independence as an essential option. The Secretary-General has called for negotiations without preconditions.

The report of the Secretary-General was issued on 13 April. The plans are not included in the annex but the Secretary-General mentions that they have been transmitted to him. He underlines that the Moroccan plan, in its covering letter, is characterised as a basis for dialogue, negotiation and compromise. The Secretary-General suggests that the Council should call on the two parties, Morocco and the Polisario, to enter into negotiations without preconditions.

These developments, especially the possibility of discussions now taking place on the basis of not one, but two plans, are likely to affect the dynamics within the Council.

France and the US have already said that the Moroccan plan was serious and credible and could create a window of opportunity for renewed negotiations between the parties.

Recent terrorist incidents in Casablanca and in Algiers may also impact the Council's attitude, perhaps inclining it towards a more cautious approach.

Key Issues

The main issue remains whether the Council is ready to go beyond a traditional technical renewal of MINURSO and actually provide support for the proposals and/or follow the Secretary-General's recommendations. In the absence of signals from the parties that they are willing to enter into negotiations on the basis of both proposals, a continuation of the stalemate is likely.

UN Documents

Latest Security Council Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S/RES/1720 (31 October 2006) rolled over the MINURSO mandate for an additional six months.
Latest Secretary-General's Reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S/2007/202 (13 April 2007)• S/2006/817 (16 October 2006)
Other Related Documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A/1514(XV) (14 December 1960) Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples• Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (16 October 1975)

Other Relevant Facts

Special Representative of the Secretary-General
Julian Harston (UK)
Secretary-General's Personal Envoy
Peter van Walsum (Netherlands)
MINURSO Force Commander
Major General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark)
Size and Composition of Mission (31 July 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Authorised strength</i>: 231 military personnel and six police officers• <i>Strength as of 31 January 2007</i>: 215 total uniformed personnel, including 28 troops, four police officers, 183 military observers
Key Troop Contributing Countries
Malaysia, Egypt, Russia, France, Ghana, China, Honduras
Cost
1 July 2006 - 30 June 2007: \$44.94 million