

Politics

Upping Conflict With Morocco, Polisario Names New War Chief

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Move likely to stoke tensions between Morocco and Algeria

Appointment comes after UN resolution angered Polisario

Brahim Ghali Photographer: Ryad Kramdi/AFP/Getty Images

The movement fighting for Western Sahara's independence from Morocco picked a war-hardened former prime minister as its army chief, vowing to step up the struggle to end the kingdom's control over the disputed territory.

The Polisario Front named Mohamed Wali Akeik as the Sahrawi Liberation Army's chief of staff after President Brahim Ghali decreed a partial reshuffle in the ranks of a military backed by Algeria, the official Sahrawi Press Service reported.

His appointment to the top role threatens to both escalate the situation with Morocco and stoke tensions between the kingdom and its western neighbor, Algeria. The two countries are already mired in a diplomatic feud, with Algeria severing ties with Morocco in August.

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Akeik's naming to the post came a few days after United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution that angered both Algeria and the Polisario by not emphasizing the self-determination process as a way to resolve the conflict.

Akeik, who was appointed prime minister in 2018 and most recently headed the occupied territories and the diaspora ministry, has a long history of resistance. As a youth, he was among the thousands of Sahrawis who fled to camps in Algeria after a 16-year war broke out with Morocco in 1975.

He rose in ranks within the Polisario from the 1970s on the back of his taking up arms against colonial Spain, then against Mauritania and Morocco.

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