

Western Sahara: The leader of the Polisario Front threatens to intensify the fighting against Morocco

The Polisario Front, a movement fighting for independence in Western Sahara, is still holding its 16th congress in a refugee camp in Algeria. In this first conference since the breaking of the ceasefire agreement in 2020, Brahim Ghali, the secretary general of the movement supported by Algeria, has appeared strong and issued a message to continue the armed struggle against Morocco. Is it a real outcome or a political strategy?

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Brahim Ghali, secretary general of the Polisario Front, in 2019. STRINGER / RYAD KRAMDI / AFP

And: RFI

The Western Sahara conflict is described by experts as a "movement". This conflict has been less tense since a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1991. But the resumption of fighting, in 2020, has brought the question back into the international arena. While Rabat clings to the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco in the Sahara region, the Polisario dismisses "Moroccan authority in the region".

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With Morocco endowed with advanced weapons, the Polisario claims it has no other option but war. "The only solution" it says is to gain independence. So is there a risk of new clashes in the coming weeks? Not necessarily, says Aboubakr Jamaï, a teacher of international relations in Aix-en-Provence. He says that Polisario's belligerent language is a strategy aimed at putting the conflict on the radar of the international community and a way to find a political solution.

"In my opinion, the Polisario intends to use bellicose language to tell those who can influence the resolution process, namely the United Nations, but above all the United States and the European Union, that the region is in danger of entering into uncertainty and that it is better to resolve this conflict as soon as possible and resolve it by holding a referendum as decided by the United Nations a long time ago and

which refers again to the mandate of MINURSO [the United Nations mission in Western Sahara], and whose main mission is to hold a referendum .This language of war comes above all from Polisario's desire to attract more urgency to solve the problem because the current situation favors Morocco more than anything else".

Since 1991, the United Nations has failed to find a way to overcome this conflict. The United Nations proposes the independence of the region for five years, then a referendum, but the obstacles to this plan, led by the former special envoy, the American James Becker, are many and come from every camp.

From time to time, the Polisario Front focuses on the resumption of fighting, but honestly I think that this is impossible, the Polisario Front probably has outdated weapons, explains Khadija Mohsen-Finan, an expert on politics in the Maghreb and the Arab world. Personally, I believe that the only way to overcome this crisis is a political solution. If it cannot be done between Algeria and Morocco, there is a need for a government or a group of other outsiders who can bring it back to the minds of these two nations, so that the Western Sahara conflict is not included in this structural conflict between Algeria and Morocco.

'The only way out of this conflict is a political solution'

Since 2020, Morocco has made the issue of Western Sahara its top priority. King Mohamed VI has called on allied countries to "clarify" their position and support him. As for the UN process of finding a solution through a referendum, it still seems broken. "It could not be done because sometimes Morocco said no, sometimes Algeria said no, and in fact Morocco is very afraid of a referendum that cannot prove that it is right, and Algeria with the Polisario position is completely bent on this concept of independence. A decision that suggests that it would lead to the independence of Western Sahara. It is clear that the United Nations is being overtaken by the steps taken by Morocco and Algeria for independence, but also by Polisario", according to Khadija Mohsen Finan.

But on the contrary, Algeria is gaining strength again, mainly because of the war in Ukraine which is changing the cards and making it an important player on the international stage: "There is a need for Algeria, to get energy, but also support in the international arena in the Sahel and in the issue of access to Africa", concludes Khadija Mohsen Finan. The Western Sahara conflict is still a major conflict between Algeria and Morocco.