

# Review of the ESISC Report on the POLISARIO Front

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The *European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre* (ESISC), a research centre based in Brussels, released, in November 2005, a report entitled "The POLISARIO Front: credible negotiations partner or after-effect of the cold war and obstacle to apolitical solution in Western Sahara?"<sup>2</sup> The elaboration of the report is said to have been presided over by Claude Moniquet who is the President of ESISC and a self-appointed expert who seems to have made a carrier out of claiming expertise in the areas of terrorism, Islam and a host of other subjects.

The report presents itself as an academic examination of the genesis and evolution of the POLISARIO Front, but in reality it amounts to nothing more than a series of unfounded assertions and half-truths about its professed subject matter. Derived uncritically from unreliable and clearly biased sources, the report is desperately geared to demonstrating what Mr. Moniquet<sup>3</sup> and his team seem unable to prove relying on sound modes of scholarly enquiry.

The report can claim to be anything except an original, responsible and balanced academic study. By heavily drawing on selective and incoherent readings and clearly preconceived ideas about its subject matter, the report boils down to a preposterously biased, ill-informed, and politically motivated exercise of misrepresentation.

The treatment of the POLISARIO Front in this way is quite revealing of Mr. Moniquet's underlying politics and his keen interest in rendering a service (paid or otherwise) to those who have vested interests in propagating this type of reports on the POLISARIO Front. One has every right, though, to wonder about the purpose of publishing such a report at this time.

Since Mr. Moniquet and his team claim unimpressively that their report on the POLISARIO Front is "an academic case", I will therefore seek to demonstrate, from my own academic standpoint, that this claim is absolutely unfounded. In doing so, I will examine the series of assertions made in the report as well as its methodology and findings. In practical terms, I will treat each section of the report separately, and I will leave the summary and recommendations to the end.

## Framework

First, it is pertinent to examine the context in which the report has placed itself. As pointed out in the report, the aim of the ESISC is to observe and analyse the "international terrorism" and strategic questions. Consequently, it can be safely concluded that all subject matters dealt with in this context will necessarily have something to do, actually or potentially, with these thematic concerns.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Polisario Front: Credible Negotiations Partner or After-Effect of the Cold War and Obstacle to a Political Solution in Western Sahara?", under the leadership of Claude Moniquet, ESISC President, at: <http://www.esisc.org/THE%20POLISARIO%20FRONT.pdf> [retrieved on 29-11-2005]

<sup>3</sup> Due to the centrality of Mr. Moniquet in elaborating this report, and in view of his opinions on the POLISARIO Front, appearing in some magazines, I will take him as the source of this report and thus representative of the team that is said to be behind the report.

Even though any think-tank is entitled to research any subject of international interest or concern, it is obvious however that placing the POLISARIO Front in this context signals an intention on Mr. Moniquet's part to take as a starting point an extremely dangerous assertion, namely that the POLISARIO Front is (or could be) linked to international terrorism!

This assertion is further elaborated on in the subsequent discussion that is largely focused on making explicit the "ingredients" in the genesis and trajectory of the POLISARIO Front that could make of this national liberation movement a subject matter worthy of scholarly engagement within the ambit of the study of international terrorism. I will return to this serious issue when I examine the section dedicated to the POLISARIO Front and its alleged involvement in terrorism.

### **"Introduction of the report"**

The report places itself within the broad context of "some media manipulations around a so-called Saharawi *Intifada*,"<sup>4</sup> which is described as "some riots" staged by "young adolescents... [who] had been skilfully manipulated by independentist [*sic*] propaganda".

Demeaning as it appears, this observation is indicative of the clearly preconceived stance of Mr. Moniquet and his team regarding not only the Saharawi *Intifada* but also the POLISARIO Front itself.

Although Mr. Moniquet is entitled to his reading of the recent developments in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, the fact remains that the peaceful pro-independence demonstrations going on in those territories, since 21 May 2005, are a reality that has been well documented by international media, human rights organisations, and even by the few independent media and political forces in Morocco.

To describe those demonstrations as "some riots" staged by "young adolescents", therefore, can be construed only as a preconceived position that clearly echoes the official line propagated by the Moroccan media, which seek to belittle the peaceful struggle of the Saharawis in the occupied territories, by describing the protests as "riots" and "criminal behaviour". Obviously, the congruence between the two stances can hardly be a coincidence. Besides, taking such a clear position already tells something about the credentials of Mr. Moniquet and his team as far as their professed academic study is concerned.

As part of the broad context, the report touches on the release by the POLISARIO Front of the last group of Moroccan POWs, a move of which Mr. Moniquet and his team eagerly avail themselves to indulge in making all sorts of interpretations. I will come back to this point later on.

It is thus in this context that the ESISC team think that it is "interesting—and even essential—to take an interest in the POLISARIO Front" that is portrayed as an "independentist [*sic*] organization born during the last phase of the decolonization of the Maghreb and during the Cold War"<sup>5</sup>. There are two points that need to be examined carefully: first, the cause of interest in examining the POLISARIO Front; and, second, the assertion regarding its origin and evolution.

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to note that all quotations here are cited from the report, unless otherwise is indicated. However, in the absence of page numbers on the English version of the ESISC Report (which is the source of this review), I will indicate the number of pages starting from the first page as page 1. Therefore, this quote is shown as: ESISC report, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> ESISC report, p.10

Regarding the first point, as will be borne out in the subsequent discussion, the real causes of interest remain largely hidden and can only be gleaned from scrutinising the content of the report itself. What is clear, at this early stage, is that we are confronted with a set of preconceived ideas about the POLISARIO Front, which are made to pass off as common knowledge. The second point is, in effect, the key hypothesis for which substantiation Mr. Moniquet and his team appeal to all sorts of arguments, as will be seen later in their treatment of the subject under discussion.

Methodologically speaking, we are told that the ESISC report was formulated during a whole year in which the authors multiplied their meetings and research that were conducted "in Morocco, *the Sahara* and Europe"<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added). The report is also said to be the product of research, of dozens of meetings and "of the study of hundreds of documents and testimonies".

Worthy of attention here is the word "Sahara" which, as well known, is commonly taken to denote, in the African case, that vast desert area extending from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. However, I do not think that Mr. Moniquet had to cover that whole area for the purpose of his report. Therefore, the "Sahara" here cannot be but Western Sahara or, more precisely, the Saharawi territories under Moroccan occupation.

That Morocco, for instance, calls those occupied territories "Sahara" only does not change anything as to their internationally recognised name and status, namely Western Sahara. One has every right, however, to wonder why Mr. Moniquet has chosen to employ the word, in that particular sense, rather than the internationally recognised name of the Territory, given that the report itself talks about Western Sahara in other places! Once again, the congruence between Mr. Moniquet's terminological preference and the Moroccan official line can hardly be a coincidence.

Furthermore, since the subject matter of the report is the POLISARIO Front, it is particularly surprising that the team do not mention that they visited the Saharawi refugee camps and the liberated territories of the Saharawi Republic (SADR) where the POLISARIO Front is based and operates. The implications of such a gross omission are very revealing indeed.

The key purpose of the report, it is argued, is to "get a better picture of the past and present realities of the Polisario Front and to determine if it could be a player in the solution of the conflict or whether it was, on the contrary, an obstacle to it"<sup>7</sup>. A relevant scholarly concern as it may appear, this statement, when examined closely, is a loaded supposition.

Let us recall that already in the introduction, the report suggests that the POLISARIO Front can readily be placed within the ambit of the study of international terrorism, and that it is an "independentist" movement, which is a product of the Cold War—with all the implications that the latter statement may entail. It is thus clear that Mr. Moniquet, in his characteristically circular reasoning, intends to take for granted, from the very outset, that the POLISARIO Front cannot (or rather must not) be a player in the solution of this conflict because its past and present realities (sketched above) demonstrate this supposition *a priori*. This conclusion will be further borne out in his subsequent discussion.

Let us also recall that the report sets out to determine whether the POLISARIO Front could play a role in solving some "conflict", but noticeably it remains silent on

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*,

the nature and the two parties to this very conflict. I do not think that this omission is accidental.

Even though it is true that the ESISC team declare that their purpose is not to delve into an exhaustive study of the Western Sahara question, wording the objective of the report in this broad and vague way goes against the transparency and rigour of academic enquiry. Once again, one has every right to wonder whether this intentional vagueness has something to do with Mr. Moniquet's own understanding of the conflict itself and its nature, of which he makes no secret in his subsequent discussion.

It is also argued that the report seeks to introduce the POLISARIO Front because "even though much mediatized at certain times [it is] little known in Europe and in the United States"<sup>8</sup>.

Although it is not clear what the report means by "much mediatised", the claim that the POLISARIO Front is little known in Europe and the United States is somehow deceptive because it clearly eclipses the increasing diplomatic and mediatic visibility of this national liberation movement in those areas. Implicit in Mr. Moniquet's observation may be also the claim to have a vantage point from which the "whole truth" about the POLISARIO Front will be revealed!

## **"II A Conflict's Historical Roots"**

This section apparently aims at presenting a background to the conflict's geographical and historical roots, and thus presenting the "raw facts" relating to the whole issue. The fact remains that disappointingly the historical account presented here is mostly predicated on a series of half-truths, outright omissions and even gross historical inaccuracies. The following are some cases in point.

When it touches on the findings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the report argues that the Court "handed down a judgment recognizing that bonds of allegiance had existed between the tribes of the Sahara and the sultans of Morocco"<sup>9</sup>. In the same vein, it is claimed that, "the majority of the [Saharawi] tribes paid allegiance to the Sultans of Morocco"<sup>10</sup>.

This claim is a clear distortion of historical established facts as enunciated in the full text of the ICJ advisory opinion regarding Western Sahara that was issued on 16 October 1975.

In unequivocal terms, the ICJ stated that, notwithstanding the "legal ties" to the Territory invoked by Morocco and Mauritania, "the Court's conclusion is that the materials and information presented to it *do not establish any tie of territorial 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 General Assembly 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*"<sup>11</sup> (emphases added).

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10-11

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>11</sup> International Court of Justice, WESTERN SAHARA, Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975, at: <http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/idecisions/isummaries/isasummary751016.htm>, [retrieved on 30-11-05]

Furthermore, the *Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara*<sup>12</sup>, released in 1975, confirms the conclusions of the ICJ verdict. As it is well known, the mission's aim was to assess the sympathies of the native Saharawi population in view of the impending change in the status of the Territory. In its report, it pointed out that it became evident to the Mission that there was an overwhelming consensus among Saharawis within the territory in favour of independence and opposing integration with any neighbouring country, and that the POLISARIO Front appeared to represent a majority of Western Sahara's inhabitants.

On what basis then has Mr. Moniquet made his claims? It seems very clear that he has chosen to go against all these established facts; moreover, this largely reveals his real intentions and preconceived postures as to his professed subject matter.

It is also argued that as soon as Morocco became "independent", on 03 March 1956, the King of Morocco, Mohammed V, availed himself of his historical rights and claimed the return of the territories under Spanish control in the *Makhzen*. One has every right to wonder about Mr. Moniquet's insistence on assertively bringing up some "historical rights" for Morocco, a matter that the ICJ has already settled in a categorical manner.

In a characteristically partial way, the report refers to the Liberation Army and argues that the latter, "which was fighting Spanish forces especially around Tarfaya in 1958, had been destroyed by a combined Franco-Spanish offensive"<sup>13</sup>.

What the report leaves out of the whole picture however is the significant fact that the Franco-Spanish offensive (Operation Hurricane) would not have succeeded without the crucial cooperation of the Moroccan regime. Fearing the spread of revolutionary ideas amid the many Moroccans who were unhappy about the re-installation of the monarchy, the regime wanted the Saharawi anti-colonial resistance to be wiped out. As a reward for its cooperation, the regime was given Tarfaya that Spain ceded to Morocco in 1958.

In addition, the report goes on to talk about the so-called "Green March" and the annexation of the territory by Morocco and Mauritania, and then presents all these events as *the* "raw facts" about the conflict in Western Sahara.

Nonetheless, it remains silent on the key issues: the Moroccan-Mauritanian invasion of the Territory in 1975, and the bombing of Saharawi civilians in Umdreiga, Tifariti, Amgala, among others, in Western Sahara; the exodus of thousands of Saharawis into neighbouring countries, mainly Algeria; the treatment by the United Nations of the Saharawi question as a decolonisation issue; and, above all, the expansionist ideology of the Moroccan regime that has driven it to claim and invade Western Sahara in the same way as it had already claimed Mauritania and parts of Algeria in the sixties.

These are the raw facts without which a comprehensive understanding of the POLISARIO Front and its liberation struggle is impossible—facts of which Mr. Moniquet seems completely oblivious. In the coming section, I will draw the attention of Mr. Moniquet and his team to the *real* historical roots of the conflict in Western Sahara.

The report claims that, "Two arguments are, in general, put forward by the Front and its supporters to justify the independentist claim: that of the existence of a

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<sup>12</sup> Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara, 1975, United Nations General Assembly Official Records, 30<sup>th</sup> session, supplement no. 23 (A/10023/Rev.I). New York: United Nations, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> ESISC report, p. 13

“Saharawi Nation” and, *a contrario*, of the inexistence in the past of a “Kingdom of Morocco” which would have had some power over the region.”<sup>14</sup>

Regarding these two arguments, I would like to point out, first, that the existence or inexistence of the Kingdom of Morocco in the past is completely beside the point in exactly the same way as the hypothetically prior existence of colonial Indonesia had no bearing on the latter’s illegal occupation of East Timor, or the subsequent independence of this country. Furthermore, the ICJ has already settled the sovereignty matter in a clear way.

Second, as for the existence of a Saharawi nation, without any intention to enter into the lengthy ongoing debate on nationalism, I would like to point out however that *originally* all nations are constructed and even “imagined” in complex historical processes, and are by no means God-ordained. The Saharawi nation exists and its emergence has taken a historical trajectory similar, in many ways, to those taken by other nations in Africa and other parts of the post-colonial world. In fine, it is a result of the secular, anti-colonial and long-standing struggle waged by the Saharawi people for asserting their cultural, social and political distinctiveness as well as their internationally recognised right to self-determination and independence.

The report argues that “if the “Saharawi Nation” indeed exists, being a nation consisting of nomadic tribes... [it] should, consequently, include part of Southern Morocco, Northern Mauritania and South-western Algeria”<sup>15</sup>. This is obviously an absurd observation, for the simple reason that the Saharawi nation is already identified with a specific territory with its internationally recognised borders, namely Western Sahara. Besides, the then Organisation of African Unity, OAU, (the current African Union of which the SADR is a founding member) already affirmed, in 1964, the principle of the intangibility of frontiers inherited from colonisation.

Worthy of note here is that Morocco did express its reservation on this principle, because it had already been claiming Mauritania, Western Sahara and parts of Algeria as all integral parts of its “Greater Morocco”. One may rightly wonder (as many Moroccans themselves have already done) about how Morocco had ever since chosen to drop some of its territorial claims and to stick to others!

Mr. Moniquet goes on to ask, “But if a Moroccan State existed, did it encompass the region now known as Western Sahara?”<sup>16</sup> Expectedly, he answers the question in the affirmative, rehashing the argument that, “in 1974 [*sic*], the International Court of Justice of The Hague recognized the existence of bonds of allegiance established between Saharawi tribal chiefs and sultans of Morocco.”<sup>17</sup> Notice that he erroneously claims that the ICJ ruling was issued in 1974, instead of 1975!

It bears repetition to point out that the ICJ ruling was unequivocal. Hence, Mr. Moniquet’s attempt to distort the verdict to suit his purposes is a clear exercise of misinterpretation. I understand however that every text is open to interpretation, but when it comes to a clear-cut text, as that established by an international legal body, any interpretation cannot be but a desperate—albeit futile—attempt to project as facts what, in effect, is a series of preconceived ideas and prejudices.

### **“III Genesis and Ideology of the Polisario Front”**

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*,

In this section, the key assertion put forward here is that the POLISARIO Front is "a small left-wing independentist [*sic*] organization"<sup>18</sup>. The context of the emergence of the movement is characterised, at the regional level, by the conflict between Algeria and Morocco, which had given rise, in 1963, to the so-called *the War of the Sands*. The report goes on to assert, in a way that is revealing more of Mr. Moniquet's state of mind than established facts, that "for several years, Algiers, which had been vanquished and humiliated by Rabat, had been waiting for an opportunity to avenge itself on its Moroccan rival"<sup>19</sup>. Once again, Mr. Moniquet seems to have excelled at making the most simplistic and misleading of assertions.

As stated above, however, I would like briefly to refer to the origins of the conflict in Western Sahara to demonstrate the simplicity and hollowness of the much-trumpeted argument that stresses the "regional" nature of the conflict. In doing so, I will mention just a few works on the subject, which Mr. Moniquet and his team seem to have no time or willingness to consult, opting thus for consulting mostly some second-hand and unreliable sources. The aim, in sum, is to present what may be helpful for comprehending the true nature of the conflict in Western Sahara.

In his book, titled *Western Sahara*<sup>20</sup>, the researcher and writer on North Africa, Anthony G. Pazzanita, (1994) points out that in agreeing to occupy Western Sahara after the departure of Spain, Mauritania and Morocco enunciated superficially similar reasons for their policies but in reality their motivations were quite different. For Morocco's King Hassan, the issue may have been nothing less than the continued survival of the Alawite throne, as the monarch's popularity was at an all-time low by the mid-1970s and he had barely escaped two very serious assassination attempts in 1971 and 1972.

In the same sense, Professor Weiner (1979)<sup>21</sup> believes that King Hassan II's takeover of Western Sahara did not arise primarily from a desire to exploit the colony's vast reserves of phosphate rock, but instead was meant to galvanise the Moroccan public into greater nationalistic feeling and neutralise the opposition of political parties at the same time. By appropriating the intensely held opinions opposing Spanish colonialism among the populace, King Hassan was able to consolidate his power and provide a distraction from his country's severe economic difficulties.

In his report, *Morocco and its neighbours*<sup>22</sup>, Charles Gallagher (1967), observes that, throughout its history, the Kingdom of Morocco was a deeply dissatisfied country with respect to its present frontiers, and that Morocco was [*and is still*] one of the very few countries in the world to be pressing territorial claims against all of its neighbours at once.

These are just a few examples that demonstrate, in a clear way, the real causes of the conflict in Western Sahara, namely the expansionism of a monarchical regime that has always had a legitimacy crisis<sup>23</sup>. To try to implicate Algeria in the Moroccan-Saharawi conflict is simply an attempt to distort reality and sow confusion around a clear-cut case of post(neo)-colonial conflict in which the two

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>20</sup> *Western Sahara* Anthony G. Pazzanita Scarecrow Press; Second Edition edition (June, 1994)

<sup>21</sup> *The Green March In Historical Perspective*, Jerome B. Weiner. *The Middle East Journal* (Washington, DC), Vol.33, no. I (Winter 1979), p.20-33

<sup>22</sup> *Morocco and its Neighbours*, Part I: Morocco and Spain, Charles F. Gallagher. New York: American University Field Staff, Reports Service, March 1967.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the inherent crisis of legitimacy of the Moroccan regime, see the author's paper entitled "the Kingdom of Morocco: an absolute monarchy averse to democratic reform", at [http://sahara\\_opinions.site.voila.fr/](http://sahara_opinions.site.voila.fr/) [retrieved on 02-12-2005]

parties are a liberation movement (the POLISARIO Front) and a new colonial power (Morocco).

Worthy of attention is the fact that those holding the view of a "regional" conflict in Western Sahara are typically those who adhere to an increasingly criticisable conservative school of political realism that is exclusively state-based, and hence has always failed to see any other actors in the international system apart from sovereign nation-states. In fact, this reductive understanding of the complexity of the social and political realities of our world has already led to disastrous consequences not only in terms of academic research but also in the life-worlds of millions around the world.

As far as the Moroccan regime is concerned, it is well known that the regime has always resorted to propagating that the conflict in Western Sahara is a "regional conflict"<sup>24</sup> in order to blame its domestic failures on others and divert the attention of its own people.

It is surprising, however, that when the POLISARIO Front started its struggle against the colonial Spain on 20 May 1975, the Moroccan regime did not speak of any "regional conflict". This fact demonstrates that, as far as Morocco is concerned, the perception of a "regional conflict" is to be understood not only in the realm of politics but also in that of collective psychology.

In this sense, it is interesting to refer to the less publicised *inferiority complex* that the Moroccan regime and its co-opted political class have always felt vis-à-vis their neighbour. Algeria possess plentiful natural resources, while Morocco is short of them; Algeria has won its national independence against the colonial France by dint of armed struggle and the sacrifices of millions in one of the bloodiest wars in modern times, while Morocco had a negotiated independence that to-date many Moroccan nationalists remain dissatisfied with. Algeria has already embarked on a steady path of democratic reform and social and economic development, while Morocco is still ruled by an absolute Monarchy reminiscent of the Middle Ages, and, as a result, is facing increasing social and political problems.

An odd claim that the report makes, in this section, concerns the allegedly key role of the Soviets in boosting the POLISARIO Front. Those familiar with the history of this liberation movement know that this is simply untrue. For instance, Jon Marks (1985) states that, contrary to some popular perceptions, the Soviet Union gave no meaningful backing, either diplomatic or material, to the pro-independence POLISARIO Front in Western Sahara, mainly because the USSR had a very close and advantageous economic relationship with Morocco, notably in the area of agricultural products, fish and phosphate rock.

Another weird claim appears to be based on the testimony of someone called Juan Vivés, an allegedly former high-level manager of the Cuban intelligence services who had taken refuge in France for more than twenty years. According to Mr. Vivés, the POLISARIO was created by Cuba, and by Che himself, some time in 1973! This is a preposterous claim, for the simple reason that it is well known that Che Guevara had already died in 1967. This, however, shows the arbitrary way in which the authors of the report have chosen and checked their sources.

I perhaps need to underline that, throughout this section (and the entire report), Mr. Monquiet and his team always fail to present credible sources when discussing the origins and the nature of the conflict in Western Sahara. For instance, they

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<sup>24</sup> For more on this, see, for instance, "Memorandum of the Kingdom of Morocco on the regional dispute on the Sahara September 24, 2004" at <http://www.map.ma/mapenq/folder/speeches/speeches2004/memorandum260904.htm> [retrieved on 13-12-2005]

completely ignore the well-known authorities on the subject among Spanish scholars who have extensively written on the subject from different aspects. Instead, their sources are exclusively based on a group of defectors or a clearly pro-Morocco sort of self-appointed experts on the region.

The key sources on the genesis and present situation of the POLISARIO Front, for example, are derived from "several testimonies" of former members and allegedly leaders of the POLISARIO Front, which were collected in Rabat and Paris. These are in fact a group of defectors who, for various reasons, have chosen to side with the enemy of their people. A number of pertinent questions could be raised here: were Mr. Moniquet and his team really expecting to obtain credible testimonies from someone who has defected his/her people to join the enemy? Were the testimonies ever crosschecked? If the study claims to be balanced, then where are the testimonies of other Saharawis? Are Rabat and Paris the only places on earth where Saharawis reside? As already pointed out, why the authors of the report did not visit the Saharawi refugee camps and the liberated territories of the SADR?

These questions clearly show the unbalanced nature of this report. For no one seeks to achieve an exhaustive and objective coverage of such a significant subject will ever content himself or herself exclusively with this clearly biased sort of sources.

Furthermore, what this indicates is that Mr. Moniquet did really have a set of preconceived ideas on his subject matter and was interested only in the sources that supported those ideas—hence his reliance on the views of other like-minded and self-appointed experts on the issue. Otherwise, why did not the team consult the growing literature written in many languages rather than French (especially Spanish) on the POLISARIO Front? Why did not they consult the well-known authorities, especially in Spain, on the subject? Why exclusive attention was given, for instance, to a very dubious testimony of a single Cuban exile without seeking those of a host of Spanish diplomats, politicians and the military who witnessed the emergence of the POLISARIO Front, negotiated with it and even fought against it?

Indeed, these are relevant questions that Mr. Moniquet and his team should have thought of in line with academic detachment and scholarly rigour. However, they have chosen not to do so and instead let their biases and prejudices guide their report, a fact that makes them seem more of amateurs than serious scholars.

#### **"IV The First Fifteen Years (1974-1991): From Victories to Stagnation"**

It is claimed here that "the authority of the SADR's government extends only over a few square kilometres, in Algeria, around Tindouf, where the refugee camps and the principal infrastructures of the SADR/Polisario are gathered"<sup>25</sup>.

That the jurisdiction of the SADR extends over all the Saharawi liberated territories is an undeniable fact. The multi-national military observers serving with the UN mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) are stationed in the liberated territories of the SADR, and they can readily demonstrate that those territories are not a "few square kilometres", as the report erroneously claims. The thousands upon thousands of foreigners who have visited the liberated territories can also corroborate that fact. Besides, Bir Lehlou, the temporary capital of the SADR, is located in Western Sahara not in Algeria.

This attempt to belittle the SADR goes even a step further by describing it as a "phantom Republic of Sands". This phrase, which is inconsonant with scholarly

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<sup>25</sup> ESISC report, p. 26

ethics, clearly shows how prejudiced is Mr. Moniquet against the Saharawi Republic. Indeed, he may bear a deep-seated grudge against the Saharawis, for many historical reasons, but this does not entitle him and his team or anybody else to talk about the SADR in this demeaning way. All the same, the SADR, whether he likes it or not, is a full-fledged state and a founding member of the African Union. I do not think that Mr. Moniquet wants to tell us that he knows more than the African Union and the ensemble of states that have recognised the SADR as a sovereign state parts of which territory remain under foreign occupation.

The report goes on to claim that, "In 1976, it [SADR] was admitted to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as its 51st member". This is another proof of the arbitrary way in which the report has mostly been elaborated, which demonstrates that Mr. Moniquet and his team, willingly or unwillingly, did not do their homework well. It is a well-known fact that the SADR was not admitted to the OAU in 1976, but in 1984!

In the report, we are told that the main sources of the military information drawn on in this regard is derived explicitly from interviews conducted "with a senior officer of the French Army, Paris, 25 July 2005 and with a senior Moroccan officer, Rabat, 08 August 2005"<sup>26</sup>. Once again, I do not think that the exclusive reliance on French and Moroccan sources (notice again the centrality of Rabat and Paris in the "fact-finding" mission) is a coincidence.

#### **"V.2. At the Diplomatic Level: Stagnation of the International Settlement Attempts"**

The report claims here that "the tribal nature of the Saharawi society and its lack of experience of democracy" clearly indicate that it is necessary for any settlement, which would emanate from a referendum, "to have a huge majority"<sup>27</sup>. Otherwise, it is argued, there would be a very real risk of seeing one tribe or another purely and simply rejecting the result of the consultation and refusing to abide by it!

First of all, Mr. Moniquet should recall that the self-determination referendum in Western Sahara will not be for some tribes but for the Saharawi people and the choices are very clear: independence and integration. Second, it is well known that the Moroccan regime has recently been propagating the idea that the holding of any referendum might lead to a tribal strife in the territory. The fact remains that, for years, the Moroccan authorities have organised elections in the occupied territories of Western Sahara and there has never been a tribal strife as a result of the ballot. To rehash this argument in a different form does not lend it (or to the report itself) any credibility.

The report goes on to enquire whether the respect for the Saharawis' rights obligatorily involves the creation of an independent state. To answer this question, it presents a quote from someone called Olivier Pierre Louveaux (whose name will resurface in another context) on a completely different issue. The only answer, however, is that the respect for the rights of the Saharawis obligatorily involves enabling them to exercise their internationally recognised right to self-determination through a free, fair, transparent and internationally monitored referendum. To be independent or integrate with Morocco is the exclusive choice of the Saharawis, and it is not for Mr. Moniquet and his team, or anybody else, to decide that in advance.

#### **"V.4. At the Civil Level: Life in the Refugee Camps of Tindouf"**

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37

This section involves a heap of allegations made by Mr. Moniquet and his team regarding the situation in the Saharawi refugee camps. I think that the thousands upon thousands of NGOs personnel, MPs, journalists, senior officials, and ordinary people, who have visited the camps and the SADR liberated territories, could prove the falsity of these allegations. I would like however to mention one example of the kind of sources on which Mr. Moniquet has heavily drawn to form his assertions.

To sustain their allegations about the situation in the camps, Mr. Moniquet and his team contend that according to Pierre Olivier Louveaux, "who went to the camps under cover of a humanitarian mission"<sup>28</sup>, there is difference in treatment between refugees where some "*have been able to put all their children into boarding schools in Switzerland*"<sup>29</sup> (emphasis in the original). This is a laughably unfounded assertion, for the simple reason that there are no Saharawi refugee children studying in boarding schools in Switzerland! This fact, however, demonstrates the unreliability of Mr. Louveaux and the unprofessional (or overtly biased) character of the report manifest in blindly drawing on the testimony of an unreliable person<sup>30</sup>.

### **"VI.1. Was the Polisario Front a Simple Cover for Algerian Regional Ambitions?"**

Although the report states that, "It does not seem however possible to us to define the Polisario exclusively as an organization in the service of Algerian politics"<sup>31</sup>, it tends to subscribe to the same argument about the "regional" character of the conflict in Western Sahara. It even gives a number of reasons for this.

First, it argues that "the strategic rivalry between Algeria and Morocco as development models for Africa is a reality"<sup>32</sup>. As I have pointed out earlier, what is there is not a "strategic rivalry" or the like, but rather an expansionism being pursued by a regime inherently plagued by a crisis of legitimacy, of which prime consequence has been laying territorial claims on all its neighbours: Morocco's expansionist attitudes towards Mauritania in the sixties, Algeria in 1963, Western Sahara in 1975 and now, and even Spain (the islet of Perejil in summer 2002)!

What the report also does is rehashing the much-trumpeted argument that "if it wants to amplify its role in Africa, in particular from the regional security point of view, Algeria [...] could wish to have access to the Atlantic Ocean.", which would enable her "to secure its gas and oil exports, extracted from the Saharan sub-soil"<sup>33</sup>. Here again we are confronted with the most simplistic of arguments. Instead of engaging critically with this unfortunate assertion, I will refer the reader to an interesting article written by Khatry Beirouk<sup>34</sup> on this particular subject.

Secondly, they mention "the unconditional support for the Polisario that Algiers has demonstrated since 1975". An example of this support is the fact that "the camps of Tindouf are located in Algeria"<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>30</sup> In the same article referred to by the report, we can see how Mr. Louveaux also uncritically buys into Moroccan propaganda, when he says, "The Polisario Front, an independence and socialist radical movement, was supported by the USSR and all the socialist countries until the fall of Communism". At <http://www.rthonbrucegeorgemp.co.uk/pdfs/18.pdf> [retrieved 16-12-05]

<sup>31</sup> ESISC report, 46

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>34</sup> See Khatry Beirouk, "Algeria & the conflict of Western Sahara: Separating facts from fiction, in Morocco's media unrelenting attack" (24 Sep 04) at: [http://sahara\\_opinions.site.voila.fr/](http://sahara_opinions.site.voila.fr/) [retrieved on 15-12-05]

<sup>35</sup> ESISC report, p. 46

First, Mr. Moniquet and his team should know that Algeria courageously and generously has always supported national liberation movements around the world. Its unconditional support for the struggle of the Palestinians, South Africans, and East Timorese, among others, is well known. Its support for the POLISARIO, not least when Western Sahara is a neighbouring country, can be understood only in this context.

Second, that the Saharawi refugee camps are located in Algeria is an undeniable fact. Nonetheless, the report remains silent on the origin of those camps. Mr. Moniquet should already know that those camps were set up in Algeria in early 1976 to host people who were fleeing Western Sahara after they had been bombed by the internationally banned Napalm and white phosphorus, as the coverage of the international media of the time can demonstrate clearly.

Another indication of Mr. Moniquet's bias against Algeria is the allegation that "Algiers proposed, at the beginning of 2003, the pure and simple partition of Western Sahara between Morocco and Algeria"<sup>36</sup>. Yet he seems to fail to remember that it was no one but Morocco that partitioned Western Sahara with Mauritania in 1975. He also seem to overlook the fact that there is no one but Morocco that continues to divide Western Sahara by a 2,700 kilometre long defensive wall that is fortified with millions of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, and guarded by thousands of its soldiers.

### **"VI.3. The Situation Of Children Sent "To Study" Abroad..."**

To continue in their heaping of all sorts of allegations against the POLISARIO Front, Mr. Moniquet and his team argue that "more than 5,800 Saharawi children and adolescents could *currently* be living in Cuba, often in spite of the will of their parents, and under the pretext of "schooling"<sup>37</sup> (emphases added). These children are allegedly subjected to all sorts of maltreatment and exploitation!

The exclusive sources of these allegations are again the supposedly "Cuban former agent" and the group of defectors. It is hardly believable that here Mr. Moniquet and his team have drawn completely on a testimony of a former Cuban agent and other unreliable sources, without citing one single independent source. Above all, the Saharawi children in Cuba are supported by the UNHCR, among others, and it has never reported any of these sordid allegations made by the authors of the report. In fine, those familiar with the Moroccan propaganda in this regard will easily see how the report has simply and uncritically echoed those allegations.

A few words on the Saharawi children in Cuba may however be pertinent. First, it is well known that the Saharawi children had gone to Cuba in the first place because it was one of the first few countries that had generously offered to host Saharawi students, besides the fact that they would be educated in Spanish—the second language of their country. Second, it is also well known that Saharawi students will be very interested in studying, for instance, in the US or European institutions if they were offered scholarships to do so. In fact, there are already a few Saharawi students in the US, Spain, UK and Norway (to name but a few countries) and we have never heard about any allegations regarding their situation similar to those made by Mr. Moniquet and his team, or by the Moroccan propagandist machinery itself!

To point out once again the arbitrary way in which the report makes its allegations, I would like to draw attention to the testimony of one of the defectors. According to

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50

Mr. Rabani, who allegedly started the systematic sending of Saharawi children to Cuba and an ostensibly reliable source for Mr. Moniquet and his team, "*there would be permanently 2,000 of them [Saharawi children] on the spot*"<sup>38</sup> (emphasis in the original). Now, compare this figure with the 5,800 cited above to see who is to be believed, Mr. Rabani or Mr. Moniquet, or whether we could believe any of them at all.

#### **"VI.4. Accusations of Forced Labour"**

The report claims that, "it has been said on several occasions that the leadership of the Polisario Front obliged the refugees to work for the organization or for the SADR for nothing"<sup>39</sup>. Once again, no empirical data or independent sources are presented to substantiate this allegation. Besides, the UNHCR and a host of international and non-governmental organisations are present in the filed and could easily be approached for obtaining first-hand information on the situation in the camps.

In fine, what one sees very clearly, while reading the report, is that there is an intentional attempt to depict a grim picture of the Saharawi refugees and their situation. Therefore, there is absolutely no mention of the great achievements made by those refugees despite the hardships of exile and scarcity of resources.

As can be evidenced by many independent sources, the Saharawi refugees have achieved a great deal in educating themselves, for instance, reaching a literacy rate that exceeds not only that of their enemy (that has deprived them from their schools and resources) but also those of many countries in Africa and elsewhere. Their accomplishments in the areas of health care, social services and production are there for everyone to see. Above all, they have managed to build an enlightened, modern and democratic society where women, for instance, play a great role second to none in the entire region<sup>40</sup>.

These are just a few examples of the achievements of the Saharawi refugees, which are undeniable facts. I do not believe that remaining silent on these great accomplishments is in line with the professed purpose of the report that claims to "X-ray" the POLISARIO Front. I am afraid, however, that the omission is prompted by an attempt to depict a grim picture of the refugees in order to justify the premises on which the report is based. Indeed, this is a far cry from an original academic work.

#### **"VI.5. Accusations of Systematic Diversion of International Aid"**

The report claims here that, "it has been said for several years that the Polisario Front was systematically diverting international aid on a large scale"<sup>41</sup>. It is not clear who has said this, but we can easily read between the lines the presence of the Moroccan news agency (MAP)<sup>42</sup> and other Moroccan propagandist services.

The report itself mentions that the Moroccan press has on several occasions alluded to serious accusations brought by several top-notch NGOs, the organisations most often quoted, sometimes with a great wealth of detail, such as the Swedish NGO *Rädda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden)* and the French organisation, *Refugee Children of the World*. In the course of their research, Mr. Moniquet and his team

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, John Thorne's article "Sahara refugees from a progressive society" at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0326/p04s01-wome.html> [retrieved on 16-12-05]

<sup>41</sup> ESISC report, p. 52

<sup>42</sup> See "UNHCR letter addressed to the Moroccan News Agency (MAP) 24 March 2005" at <http://www.arsso.org/hcr240305.pdf> [retrieved on 13-12-2005]

say that they had contacted these two organisations, and that both “denied ever having complained about diversions by the Polisario and affirmed “*having been deliberately misquoted in a lying manner*”<sup>43</sup> (emphasis in the original). Besides, the report mentions no single international organisation, especially those working in the field such as the UNHCR, to affirm the allegations made in this regard.

## **“VII. The Moroccan Prisoner of War and the Report of France Liberté”**

As mentioned above, Mr. Moniquet and his team passionately draw on the report released by *Fondation France Liberté* of which a series of interpretations are made. As well known, being the party concerned with this report, the POLISARIO Front had already made public its formal response to the report<sup>44</sup>.

I would like, however, to make a number of observations regarding this issue:

- When it refers to the release of the last group of Moroccan POWs, the report remains silent on the context within which they were released. The context is conspicuously marked by the fact that there are still 151 Saharawi POWs who remain accounted for together with more than 500 civilians.
- It is well known that the Moroccan regime has already declared that it no longer holds any Saharawi POWs. However, how can one believe a regime that had once denied the existence of its own prisoners of war held by the POLISARIO Front? A review of the communiqués released by the Moroccan Radio during the war, and the large number of Saharawi combatants who were reported to have been captured by the Moroccan forces, belies this claim. Above all, the Moroccan regime has proved to be untrustworthy on many occasions by reneging on commitments that it has formally made before the international community, such as those relating to the holding of the self-determination referendum in Western Sahara.
- The release also took place while there were still more than 150,000 Saharawi refugees living in refugee camps for more for 30 years as a result of the persistent Moroccan occupation of their country. It also came within the context of the ongoing repression of civilians in the occupied territories, as has been well documented by international organisations and independent media.
- To remain silent on the whole context, in fine, makes one think that what happened was an isolated event unrelated to the broad context of the conflict itself.

This last observation leads me to touch on an issue that was recurrently raised in connection with the Moroccan POWs, namely the one relating to considering their case as a purely humanitarian question. In my view, the issue of the POWs, on both sides, has never been a purely humanitarian issue. The Moroccan POWs were captured within the context of a politically motivated war of aggression; the campaign that was launched for their release was purely political; and the decision to release them was a politically motivated decision made by the POLISARIO Front as a laudable expression of political will.

I believe that the separation, usually made between the political and humanitarian aspects of the Western Sahara conflict, stems only from those minds that tend, by habit or intellectual laziness, to simplistically perceive the human continuum in a compartmentalised way, thus severing all human actions from their inherently worldly interests. Obviously, I have no intention whatsoever to enter into the discussion about the ethics and philosophy behind the international humanitarian law, for instance, but rather to point out the selectivity with which some people

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<sup>43</sup> ESISC report, p. 52

<sup>44</sup> See “the complete text of Polisario response to France Libertés Foundation's report” at: <http://www.spsrasd.info/sps-e220903.html> [retrieved on 15-12-05]

tend to interpret and invoke this law in order to cover what, in fact, is an essentially political issue. The invocation by the report of this law is a case in point.

The report concludes by arguing that the “file of the Moroccan prisoners of war of Tindouf is certainly one of the greatest violation of human rights scandals in the Maghreb of the thirty last years”<sup>45</sup>. The people of the Maghreb know better than Mr. Moniquet and his team that the biggest ongoing scandal in the entire history of the region is the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, which has subjected its people to untold practices of physical, political and cultural genocide.

### **“VIII What future for the Polisario?”**

It is in this section that Mr. Moniquet goes on to make explicit his perception of the POLISARIO Front where he describes this national liberation movement as a “separatist organization”<sup>46</sup>. Once again, Mr. Moniquet and his team make no secret of their hostility towards the POLISARIO Front, though they never present any solid arguments to sustain their statements.

Therefore, to straighten the record, I would like to remind Mr. Moniquet and his team, and all those who think along these lines, that the POLISARIO Front is not a “separatist” organisation, but an internationally recognised national liberation movement. Unlike Mr. Moniquet, who seems to have unparalleled capacity to make all sorts of assertions without bothering to substantiate them, I will point out the following facts.

- Different bodies of the United Nations have described, in their respective resolutions, the presence of Morocco in Western Sahara as *occupation*. For instance, the 34/37 resolution of the UN General Assembly of 21 November 1979, besides reaffirming the legitimacy of the armed struggle of the POLISARIO Front, deeply deplored “the aggravation of the situation resulting from the *continued occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco* and the extension of that occupation to the territory recently evacuated by Mauritania” (emphasis added). Furthermore, it is obvious that Madrid Accords, signed by Spain, Mauritania and Morocco in November 1975, did not transfer the sovereignty over Western Sahara<sup>47</sup>.
- In accordance with the UN Charter, Western Sahara is a Non-Self-Governing Territory to be decolonised. Every year, the question is discussed by the Decolonisation Committee. This is one reason that accounts for the fact that, during the past thirty years, no state has recognised Morocco’s illegal occupation of Western Sahara. Therefore, Morocco is not the administering power of the territory, but an occupying power and has the same legal status as that of Israel in the Palestinian occupied territories.

In view of the foregoing, I cannot imagine Mr. Moniquet coming back again to us to insult our intelligence by simply parroting some propagandist material and make it pass off as an informed view on his subject matter.

### **“VIII.2. A Patent Absence of any Desire for Dialog”**

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<sup>45</sup> ESISC report, p. 57

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66

<sup>47</sup> In his letter addressed to President of the Security Council on 29 January 2002, the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, Mr. Hans Corell, states that, (para.6), “The Madrid Agreement [signed between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania on 14 November 1975] *did not transfer sovereignty over the territory, nor did it confer upon any of the signatories the status of an administering Power*—a status which Spain alone could not have unilaterally transferred. The transfer of administrative authority over the territory to Morocco and Mauritania in 1975, did not affect the international status of Western Sahara as Non-Self-Governing Territory”.

The report argues here that the POLISARIO Front has no desire for dialogue and therefore it cannot be a partner to the search for a "political solution", an approach that "requires a certain flexibility and an aptitude for compromise"<sup>48</sup>, as Mr. Moniquet puts it.

Once again, we are presented with broad, loaded terms that Mr. Moniquet characteristically shows no interest in specifying them. For one can pertinently ask, dialogue with whom and for what, and what is the nature of this "political solution"?

Nonetheless, Mr. Moniquet and his team seem to forget that the POLISARIO Front was the first party to call for a direct negotiation with the Moroccan regime. Does he know that the POLISARIO Front sent a senior delegation to meet the late King Hassan in Marrakech in 1989? Does he know that it cooperated fully with the United Nations in the elaboration of the Settlement Plan adopted by the Security Council in 1991? Is he aware of the many concessions made by the POLISARIO Front in order to enable the UN mission to implement this plan? Or, is not it the POLISARIO Front that has left no stone unturned in order to convince the new Moroccan regime to seek the peaceful way to resolve the conflict?

To project the POLISARIO Front as an obstructing party, while affirming that the only possible way for the Saharawis is to give up their legitimate struggle and become Moroccans is a pure reproduction of already known statements of which author is not difficult to identify. It may have been more pertinent academically for Mr. Moniquet and his team to seek other arguments rather than describing the POLISARIO Front in these reductive terms. Besides, the party that is unwilling to implement the UN peace plan is the Moroccan regime, as clearly acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General himself when he states, in his report of February 2002, (S/2002/178), that "Morocco has expressed unwillingness to go forward with the settlement plan" (para.48), which it had formally accepted in June 1990.

In his discussion of the future of the POLISARIO Front, the report draws on the view of a professor at the Paris school of war, Aymeric Chauprade. It is no coincidence that all these views are coming from French "scholars", who seem to agree on trying their utmost to misrepresent the POLISARIO Front. This makes one wonder whether these French scholars have more knowledge and expertise than the Spanish or the English to deal with Western Sahara issue. The fact remains that they do not have any knowledge better than the others, and the only difference is that they are more ready to violate the tenets of scrupulous and objective scholarship so as to render a service (paid or otherwise) to those who have vested interest in misrepresenting the POLISARIO Front and the liberation struggle of the Saharawi people.

### **"VIII.3. A Still Active Force for Destabilization"**

In this section, Mr. Moniquet goes on to describe the internationally recognised legitimate struggle of the POLISARIO Front for self-determination as merely "the destabilization of Morocco in the Western Sahara"<sup>49</sup>. He goes back to the uprising of May this year, describing it in the same demeaning terms that are indicative of a total lack of any sense of scholarly decorum. According to him, for instance, these demonstrations, "was [*sic*] to make, by the magic of words, the beginning of a small revolution"<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> ESISC report, p.68

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*,

He then accuses the POLISARIO Front of exaggerating about the demonstrations, in which, according to him, there was “not a single shot fire, not one death...”<sup>51</sup>. I would like to remind Mr. Moniquet to refer to the reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, and the coverage of international media of these demonstrations to see where he was all wrong. In those reports, he can have an idea—if he is willing to—about the horrors to which the Saharawi civilians have been subjected at the hands of Moroccan various corps of security and the army.

Besides, the Saharawi *Intifada* has already lost two victims, namely Lembarki Hamdi Salek Mahdjub and Lekhlifa Abba Cheikh Ould Embarek Ould Ely who were savagely beaten to death by Moroccan security agents. In Lembarki’s case, the Moroccan authorities themselves have already recognised the involvement of their agents in his death. Let us, then, remember that Mr. Moniquet’s report was released in November 2005, while Lembarki was assassinated on 30 October 2005. To affirm that the demonstrations have not led to any victims, besides being untrue, is a blatant affirmation designed to play down the impact of an ever-increasing *Intifada* and the brutality of the Moroccan occupying forces.

#### **“VIII.4. Is the Polisario Threatened by an Islamist Drift?”**

In this section, Mr. Moniquet points out that, “certain observers have believed that they could discern, over the last two years, an “Islamist” drift of the Polisario and especially of a fringe of its youth. In the context of the Maghreb and especially of sub-Saharan Africa, such a development would obviously be particularly worrying”<sup>52</sup>.

The same “military” experts are said to underline, however, that it is improbable that a “massive Islamic drift” takes place within the POLISARIO Front due to “the peculiar culture and sociology of the Saharawis”. Nonetheless, Mr. Moniquet does not content himself with this “expert” assessment and goes on to argue that, “the SPLA [the Saharawi People’s Liberation Army] was now forced to recruit in the North of Mali or Mauritania to maintain the level of its forces”<sup>53</sup>. This would imply, according to him, an “infiltration” of the Front by non-Saharawi elements of sub-Saharan origin won over by Islamist ideology.

This, once again, is another case of a series of unfounded assertions that Mr. Moniquet makes without characteristically presenting any empirical data or solid arguments to sustain them. That the POLISARIO Front is a group of “Malians, Cubans and other nationalities” is an old “line” that the Moroccan regime has been propagating for years. However, when Mr. Moniquet rehashes the same allegation to demonstrate, in an odd mode of argumentation, the *potential* link between the POLISARIO Front and “Islamism”, the whole endeavour seems particularly unfortunate.

Furthermore, the Saharawi refugee camps are not cut off from the outside world. They are being visited by thousands of foreigners every year that had never reported any extremism, be it in the content or the form, as to how the Saharawis are conducting themselves vis-à-vis their religion. Many visitors—if Mr. Moniquet cares about these firsthand sources—have repeatedly stressed the fact of having witnessed a remarkably tolerant, secular Saharawi society<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>54</sup> See again John Thorne’s article “Sahara refugees from a progressive society” at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0326/p04s01-wome.html> [retrieved on 16-12-05]

### **"VIII.5. Is a Terrorist Drift of the Polisario Possible?"**

To begin with, Mr Moniquet, as an ostensibly "expert" on terrorism, does not tell us what he and his team mean by "terrorism" as if there were a universal definition of this essentially contested term. However, he seems to have his own understanding of "terrorism", as will be demonstrated later on.

As in the previous section, Mr. Moniquet seems to leave no stone unturned to demonstrate that the POLISARIO Front is actually involved in "acts of terrorism". To prove this supposition, he cites an incident that took place in Mauritania in December 2003, of which he accuses the POLISARIO Front. Let us be reminded that the exclusive source on the incident is "the weekly magazine *Maroc Hebdo* of 23 January 2004"<sup>55</sup>.

I do not believe that this particular magazine can be a reliable source when it comes to reporting on the alleged involvement of the POLISARIO Front in what happened. This is for the simple reason that it is a magazine known for its declaredly biased reporting on the POLISARIO Front. Besides, Mr. Moniquet should have consulted other independent sources regarding this particular incident, as any responsible researcher would have done.

Nonetheless, Mr. Moniquet is at pains to establish the "involvement" of the POLISARIO Front in this incident employing a peculiar mode of reasoning. Given that the "suspected", according to him, were a "POLISARIO officer" and three Mauritians, "known for their sympathy for the Polisario", and that they were stopped in Z rouate, "one of the Mauritanian towns where the Polisario could count on the most sympathizers"<sup>56</sup>, the POLISARIO Front must have been involved in the incident.

I do not think that acts of "sympathy", if there were any, constitute a proof of the involvement of the POLISARIO Front in this particular incident. Obviously, given his allegedly wide relations with intelligence services, Mr. Moniquet should have presented us with more solid empirical data to substantiate his claim. To fall back on the reporting of a Moroccan magazine and some feelings of empathy to incriminate the POLISARIO Front is clearly a prejudicial move contrary to the tenets of responsible and rigorous scholarship.

As "expert" on terrorism, Mr. Moniquet informs us that the "terrorist risk must, in any event, be taken seriously in the area that goes from the South Morocco and Algeria to the North of Chad and the borders of Mali, Niger and Mauritania"<sup>57</sup>.

Although he does not indicate what "the South Morocco" means, it is most probable that he takes it for granted that the occupied territories of Western Sahara are included in that area. His mode of talking about those territories, as pointed out above, bears out this conclusion.

He cites another incident that took place also in Mauritania in June 2005. According to certain witnesses, it is argued, the POLISARIO Front "vehicles had taken part in the attack, and the attackers, *or at least some of them*, spoke Hassani"<sup>58</sup>, the dialect spoken in Mauritania and Western Sahara"<sup>59</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>55</sup> ESISC report, p.71

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72

<sup>58</sup> Notice that the Saharawi dialect is commonly called "Hassanya", not "Hassani" as mentioned in the report.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73

According to this line of reasoning, if some "eyewitnesses" had allegedly stated that vehicles (or rather kayaks) bearing supposedly Greenland registration plates had taken part in the attack and the attackers, or at least *some* of them, spoke Greenlandic, this would be enough to charge the Greenland Government with involvement in the same incident! I haven chosen to make this kind of argumentation obviously to demonstrate the absurdity of the inferences that Mr. Moniquet has made out of his reading of this incident.

Furthermore, the Mauritanian authorities have done their investigations and established the facts, which Mr. Moniquet seems to dismiss out of hand in pursuit of his accusation of the POLISARIO Front. As in the previous case, he should have consulted official records and provided us with something much more solid than mere conjectures and anecdotal accounts of "eyewitnesses".

The big question, according to Mr. Moniquet, is whether "the Polisario [could] be one of the vectors of the transformation of this area into a "grey area" and take part in the irruption of terrorism in the sub-Saharan space?"<sup>60</sup>

As usual, he presents no arguments or verifiable data to substantiate this supposition. However, for him, "certain elements, however, give cause for thought on the organization's development". The only case in point to affirm his assertion is the threat made by the POLISARIO Front, at the beginning of 2001, to "attack the Paris-Dakar Rally if it passed through Western Sahara"<sup>61</sup>.

As pointed out above, Mr. Moniquet does not tell us about his definition of terrorism. However, in the preceding assertion we could deduce some of his understanding of this essentially contested term. Obviously, he seems to think that if the POLISARIO Front had attacked the Paris-Dakar Rally that would have constituted an act of terrorism!

First, let me remind Mr. Moniquet and his team that if the POLISARIO had done that, it would have acted in self-defence against an intruder violating the sovereignty of the Saharawi Republic over its territory. Second, let me also remind him and his team that it was this awareness on the part of the sponsors of the Rally that made them meet the Saharawi authorities in order to have permission to pass through the occupied territories.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

## **“VIII.6. The Gangrene of Organized Crime”**

As in the case of terrorism, Mr. Moniquet mentions sporadic incidents to demonstrate the involvement of the POLISARIO Front in “organised crime” such as the charge of “human trafficking” through Morocco to Europe.

These are simply unfounded accusations. The many testimonies collected from Sub-Saharan Africans, who were interviewed by international media, clearly establish the responsibility of Moroccan officers in this objectionable business. The big question, however, that poses itself is how the Sub-Saharan immigrants managed to reach the occupied part of Western Sahara when that part is encircled by the Moroccan defensive wall, “the berm”, which, as indicated above, is fortified by millions of landmines, and is guarded by thousands of Moroccan soldiers? What this indicates, as has been revealed by international media, is that those immigrants would have never been able to enter the occupied Western Sahara without the complicity of the Moroccan officers who have thrived on this lucrative—albeit objectionable—business.

This is the fact, but if Mr. Moniquet would like to exonerate the Moroccan regime from this inhuman conduct, by blaming the POLISARIO Front, the facts are there for everyone to see.

## **“VIII. In Conclusion”**

In this section, Mr. Moniquet presents the findings of his “academic” study of the POLISARIO Front. He claims that this national liberation movement “is trying to take a hand again in the game being played around Western Sahara but its chances of participating in a political solution would seem to be null and void for as long as it fails to renounce its claim of independence”<sup>62</sup>.

Before commenting on this strange and ill-argued conclusion, I would like to remind Mr. Moniquet of the following undeniable facts:

- As the sole and legitimate representative of the Saharawi people, the POLISARIO Front is *already* an official and active partner and participant in all international efforts made to reach a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict.
- It is the other party—along with the Kingdom of Morocco—to the UN Settlement Plan elaborated by the United Nations and approved by the Security Council in 1990. It is the other signatory party—along with the Kingdom of Morocco—to the additional Houston Agreements that were signed in 1997 under the auspices of Mr. James Baker III, in his capacity as the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara.
- It is the party that has formally accepted the *peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara* approved by the Security Council in its resolution 1495 (July 2003).
- All these peace plans provide for the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination to be exercised through a referendum in which the Saharawi people could choose between *independence* and other formulae of integration with Morocco.
- Self-determination is the most basic of all human rights, the foundation upon which all other human rights depend<sup>63</sup>. The United Nations system is

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74

<sup>63</sup> The continued invocation of the right to self-determination in international law and practice has given it the status of a peremptory norm, meaning that it trumps other legal principles. See, e.g., Hector Gros Espiel, “Implementation of United Nations Resolutions Relating the Right of People Under Colonial and

built on the concept of self-determination as expressed in the UN Charter (Article 1, for example).

- Above all, any exercise by the Saharawis of their right to self-determination will be meaningless if it does not include independence as one option among others. The UN Secretary-General himself has reaffirmed this when he stated that, "It is difficult to envision a political solution that, as required by Security Council resolution 1429 (2002), provides for self-determination but that nevertheless precludes the possibility of independence as one of several ballot questions." (UN Secretary-General's report of 23 May 2003 (S/2003/565), para:52)

In view of these facts, it seems obvious that Mr. Moniquet's aforementioned conclusion is predicated on mere subjective conjectures that bear no relation to reality. More precisely, his implicit call (which he makes explicit later on) on the POLISARIO Front to renounce independence in exchange of recognition as a participant in a "political solution" is obviously a statement of unparalleled insolence.

Given the preceding appraisal of Mr. Moniquet's overall analysis of his professed subject matter, only this kind of conclusions could follow from his characteristically flawed mode of reasoning. However, in no way can they be valid in light of the undeniable facts outlined above.

Once again, it seems that he has let his wishful thinking and prejudices guide his analysis instead of grounding it on sound argumentation. It is this sort of bigheaded attitude that has apparently led him to rule out independence as an option in a way that mocks the position of the United Nations itself, as has expressly been enunciated by its Secretary-General regarding this matter!

Mr. Moniquet goes on to affirm that independence as an option for the solution of the Western Sahara conflict *must* be discarded, because, according to him, it is a "fact" that "Rabat will only accept a solution within the Moroccan context". What Morocco is today ready to discuss, he tells us, is "a status of broad autonomy for the Sahara"<sup>64</sup>.

If Mr. Moniquet considers the posture of the Moroccan regime as a "fact"—whatever that means—it is an unquestionable fact that the POLISARIO Front will only accept a solution within the context of the doctrine of the United Nations regarding the question of Western Sahara. This means a solution that scrupulously respects the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination. Of great importance also is the fact that the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, in particular, have been affirming this right in their respective resolutions regarding Western Sahara.

In an attempt to demonstrate the plausibility of the Moroccan position, Mr. Moniquet falls back on the opinions of "many experts" who have been involved in the UN attempts to settle the Saharawi question. One of these "experts", we are told, is Mr. Erik Jensen, who is described as "former official for the census operations with a view to the referendum". Mr. Jensen is reported to have said "*broad autonomy of the Sahara within Morocco would be the most realistic solution for solving the conflict*"<sup>65</sup> (emphasis in the original).

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Alien Domination to Self-Determination," Special Rapporteur, Document E/ CN.4/Sub.405 of 20 June, 1978, pp. 33-5.

<sup>64</sup> ESISC report, p. 74

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*,

First of all, Mr. Jensen served as a UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Western Sahara from 1994 to 1998, and I think that he can hardly be considered an expert on the issue of Western Sahara—although interestingly enough the expertise in the issue seems to be claimed by an increasing number of self-appointed “experts”!

According to Mr. Moniquet, the POLISARIO Front will have to meet a number of conditions in order “have a chance of [...] participating in a “peace of the valiant”, precisely by accepting Morocco's proposal of “an ambitious regionalization policy that would encompass the entire country”<sup>66</sup>. These conditions include, *inter alia*, “the total, definitive renunciation of the way of arms [*sic*], and the renunciation of the claim to independence and the disappearance of the SADR”<sup>67</sup>.

This, in effect, is another case in point that shows that Mr. Moniquet has a remarkable propensity to venture the most preposterous and pretensions of opinions about an issue that definitely goes beyond his comprehension and his supposed field of expertise.

One has every right to ask Mr. Moniquet on what basis does he present such conditions in the first place? Does he think that presiding over some “think-tank” entitle him to insult, for instance, the UN General Assembly resolution 33/31 (A), dated 13 December 1978?<sup>68</sup> Does this also give him the right to disparage not only the SADR but also the ensemble of the African Union of which the SADR is a founding member?

What is worse is that, by putting forward these conditions, Mr. Moniquet clearly wants to give the impression that he eventually has come up with the ideal and workable “roadmap” for settling the conflict in Western Sahara. The fact remains that he has only recycled—albeit in an ostensibly academic form—the well-known views of the Moroccan regime and its like-minded mentors regarding the conflict. Overall, this uncritical attitude betrays a gross ignorance on Mr. Moniquet's part as to the very nature of the conflict, its root causes, its dynamics and core issues as well as its regional and international ramifications.

### **“A. Summary”**

This section comes at the beginning of the report in which Mr. Moniquet and his team try to present the gist of their findings regarding the subject matter that they have set out to investigate. While rehashing the discourse dominant within certain quarters that there are “three parties” to the conflict in Western Sahara, Mr. Moniquet tells us that “although the independence of Western Sahara is as ever unacceptable for the Rabat government and for Moroccan society, the Polisario Front, for its part, wants to hear of no other solution”<sup>69</sup>.

Whether Morocco accepts independence or not, the fact remains that for the United Nations the key issue is the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination to be exercised in a fair, democratic and internationally supervised referendum.

Mr. Moniquet again makes no secret of his hostility towards the SADR that he describes as “purely fictitious”. In this sense, he wonders about the “the viability of “Micro States” in this globalization era”<sup>70</sup>. Although it is difficult to discern the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75

<sup>68</sup> In this resolution, among others, the UN General Assembly reaffirms “the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination and independence”.

<sup>69</sup> ESISC report, p. 3

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*,

bearing of globalisation (itself an essentially contested term) on the so-called microstates, it is perhaps helpful to draw Mr. Moniquet's attention to the fact that the SADR, in terms of area and even population, is bigger than some member states of the United Nations.

Furthermore, the UN Charter, in its preamble, underlines the determination of the peoples of the United Nations "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of *nations large and small*", among other things. Does Mr. Moniquet have other criteria for determining what states should inhabit this planet?

Worthy of note is also the fact that, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the ICJ and the legal opinion of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, as outlined earlier, Morocco does not possess sovereignty over Western Sahara. Since Morocco is not an administering power of the Territory, and is thus a mere occupying power, it cannot give what it inherently does not possess: sovereignty or independence.

On the basis of two sporadic incidents that took place in Mauritania, as has explained above, Mr. Moniquet reaches the following apocalyptic conclusion: "today, the way the Polisario is evolving is giving rise to new fears: those of seeing some of its combatants and leaders turn to terrorism, radical Islamism or international crime. This development would threaten the stability of the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa and therefore the security of several African states and, in the long run, of Europe as well"<sup>71</sup>.

Let us recall the fact that this conclusion, as indicated above, is based on the analysis of two incidents that took place in Mauritania in which Mr. Moniquet has tried, in defiance of any rational and empirical scrutiny, to implicate the POLISARIO Front.

I think that Mr. Moniquet would have done the academic world a great service if he had dedicated his energies and resources to investigating terrorism and the emergence of Islamic extremism in the Kingdom of Morocco. This is for the simple reason that the miserable socio-economic and political conditions of many Moroccans, brought about by an irresponsible authoritarian regime, has given rise to serious types of extremism. In effect, this Morocco-made extremism not only would threaten the stability of Africa but has actually struck Europe!

Another conclusion is that "the Polisario Front does not seem, for lack of in-depth reform, to be able to play a part in any possible negotiated political solution"<sup>72</sup>. First, the POLISARIO Front, as any social and political organisation, is always improvable and it is up to the Saharawis only to conduct whatever reforms they deem necessary. Second, although Mr. Moniquet remains silent on the nature of this so-called political solution, the fact remains that the POLISARIO Front is the other party to the conflict, and therefore no solution, whatever form it may take, can be viable and lasting without its full participation. This is the fact that Mr. Moniquet seems, wittingly or unwittingly, to ignore.

## **"B. Recommendations"**

In this section, Mr Moniquet presents a number of recommendations that, similarly to his conditions, exhibit an attitude of unparalleled pretentiousness. It is here where oddly enough he appears to appeal to the international community and the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*,

United Nations, where in the report he often seems oblivious and even disrespectful towards its resolutions regarding Western Sahara. Expectedly, the recommendations are based on the preceding analysis that has been shown to be flawed and outrageously biased.

## **MY CONCLUSIONS**

In view of the preceding overall review of the ESISC report on the POLISARIO Front, I would like to underline the following conclusions:

- The report presents itself as an academic examination of the genesis and evolution of the POLISARIO Front, but in reality it amounts to nothing more than a series of unfounded assertions and half-truths about its professed subject matter.
- By heavily drawing on selective and incoherent readings and clearly preconceived ideas about its subject matter, the report boils down to a preposterously biased, ill-informed, and politically motivated exercise of misrepresentation. As a result, it not only violates the tenets of scholarly detachment and academic rigour but also discredits a European institution that is supposed to produce informed and disinterested enquiries.
- This declared agenda of misrepresentation is quite revealing of the politics underlying the report and the keen interest of its authors in rendering a service (paid or otherwise) to those who have vested interests in propagating this type of reports on the POLISARIO Front.
- It is therefore very clear that Mr. Moniquet and his team have fallen prey, wittingly or unwittingly, to the Moroccan propaganda and have ended up merely rehashing the much-trumpeted assertions made by Moroccan officials and disseminated by the Moroccan official news agency, MAP.
- If Mr. Moniquet personally is prejudiced against the POLISARIO Front, for reasons best known to him, this is his own problem. However, his attempt to reformulate his prejudices into an ostensibly scholarly work on this national liberation movement is certainly an unobjectionable enterprise worthy of serious condemnation. Besides, to project one's prejudices as an academic research does not earn one but discredit and mistrust.
- The POLISARIO Front, as all internationally recognised national liberation movements, can be a very interesting subject matter for academic enquiry. Indeed, there has been a growing literature on the Saharawi question in general, in which the study of the liberation movement is a prime component.
- However, the serious blunder committed by Mr. Moniquet and other like-minded "experts", is to consider the POLISARIO Front as a homogenous movement that can be pigeonholed into a "leftist", or "Marixist" organisation. As the sole and legitimate representative of the Saharawi people, the POLISARIO Front is, in essence, an *umbrella organisation* encompassing a variety of ideological and political tendencies reflecting the different opinions of the Saharawi society. It has never been a single party or movement, and the Saharawis are very keen to maintain and boost its heterogeneous and democratic character. However, all these tendencies are united by the unwavering support for the *raison d'être* of the POLISARIO Front itself: leading the struggle of the Saharawi people for self-determination and independence and recovering the sovereignty of the

Saharawi republic over the entire internationally recognised borders of Western Sahara.

- It is an undeniable fact that the POLISARIO Front has never been associated with any form of terrorism during or after the 16 years of armed conflict with Morocco. The attempt to implicate this liberation movement, actually or potentially, in acts of terrorism, while falling back on two incidents that took place in a neighbouring country, is particularly preposterous.
- In fine, in view of the overall appraisal of the ESISC report on the POLISARIO Front, as shown above, I do not think that Mr. Moniquet and his team are qualified, either politically or academically, to make any recommendations regarding the POLISARIO Front or the future of the Western Sahara conflict. This is for the simple reason that throughout the entire report, they have shown themselves, beyond any doubt, to be untrustworthy and literally prejudiced persons regarding the POLISARIO Front.