

## **Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum – Tuesday, November 8, 2005, 9:00 am – 11:00 am**

### ***Self-Determination and the Sahara***

Speakers:

Dr. William Zartman, Jacob Blaustein Professor of International Organizations and Conflict Resolution and Director of Conflict Management at the John Hopkins University.

Walt Landry, Executive Director of the Think-tank for National Self-determination, Inc.

### **Dr. William Zartman**

*He will focus on the political and legal background of self-determination and take up the question of self-determination in Western Sahara and other countries of the Sahara Region.*

With ideology gone, self-determination seeks to tear the state apart.

Resolution 1514 (established in 1960) of the UN General Assembly honors independence, secession, and/or territorial autonomy of groups seeking self-determination so long as there is an agreement with the home country.

### ***Principles of self-determination***

- Determination of the self
  - Established as a civilized way of handling conflict
  - “Squeaking wheel” principle – principle that states that being a nuisance can help groups gain self-determination
- Confounded with secession and independence
  - But can be within a larger or independent unit
- Frequently an unending procedure
  - People within an independent state will want it, and so will groups within the new state, and groups within the newer state, etc., etc.
- Should states be determined along ethnic national units or state national units?
  - Possible answer: They should be determined dependent on how the units were left in their current condition.

Problem: Will states have enough resources (economic and otherwise) once they achieve independence?

*Western Sahara*

Frente POLISARIO (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro) – Algerian-backed separatist movement seeking independence for Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro, two regions that combine to form Western Sahara.

Western Sahara was administered by Spain until 1976. The Spanish laid claim to the coastal region of Rio de Oro in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and later occupied the northern interior, Saguia el-Hamra, in 1934. The two became united as Spanish Sahara in 1958. Morocco and Mauritania both sought control over the territory and divided the land between them when the Spanish departed in 1976. The indigenous Saharawi people opposed the claims, forming the Frente POLISARIO and declaring a government in exile (the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic) from an Algerian base. Mauritania reached a peace agreement with the Frente POLISARIO in 1979, but Morocco seized the land given up by Mauritania and currently exerts administrative control over the region.

What is the case of Western Sahara like and not like (in comparison to “similar” cases)?

- It is *not* like East Timor → Western Sahara was colonized 40 years ago and not 400.
- It is *not* like Palestine → It is not a separate nation.
- It is *not* like Sudan → Its habitants are not “separate” people (e.g. its habitants are of the same religion as Morocco)
- It is *not* like Namibia → It is not a trusteeship territory with the UN as an administrator.
- It is like Catalonia (Spain) → It is self-autonomous within a larger state.
- It is like Aden (Yemen)
- It is like Zanzibar (Tanzania)
- Compared to “similar” cases, Western Sahara has a tiny population and little resources.

### **Walt Landry**

*He will discuss self-determination as it has developed in Algeria, Sudan and Nigeria, and emphasize the territorial ethno-national group, its right to self-determination under international law, and the need for the Major Powers to find common ground in support of this view.*

Self-determination is evident in the work of Rousseau in his Second Discourse (1755).

- People are distinct in different places. Therefore, they have a right to rule themselves.

Herder (German philosopher): Viewed people as distinct elements

- This principle spread in Eastern Europe during and around his time.

The Industrial Revolution allowed self-determination to spread to a larger number of people through more efficient transportation mechanisms and other means.

Self-determination spread in Western Hemisphere with the independence of states. The United States was founded on self-determination.

1896: Social International in England speaks out for self-determination of states.

1917: Lenin proclaims self-determination in new Soviet Union.

1918: Woodrow Wilson mentions self-determination in his Fourteen Points

- This principle, however, was only for Europe and nobody else. Ho Chi Minh was present during a speech of his trying to speak out for an independent Vietnam, but his sentiments were not accepted.

1945: Harry Truman includes self-determination in the United Nations Charter.

1979: Jimmy Carter and Iran. (Landry → President avoids self-determination. American citizens support self-determination. This leads to Carter's defeat vs. Reagan.)

1991: George Bush (the first) addresses Ukraine as "Soviet nation." This shows how U.S. presidents don't support self-determination.

### *Three Illustrations in Africa*

- Algeria – After WWII, France claimed Algeria as French.
- Nigeria – 1967 – Ibos wanted independence. Were oppressed in the northern part of Nigeria.
- Sudan – 1930 – South separated from North. South → darker skinned, North → Arab (lighter skinned)
  - Conflict with Egypt created national unity
  - Sudanese structure (government, national unity, etc.) destroyed the self-determination process

A minimum size (i.e. a minimum population) should be determined and set as a guideline for self-determination matters.