

# Morocco-Algeria's Deep-rooted Conflict

Morocco and Algeria, the two neighbors, share decades-old rivalry which is depicted in their long history of mistrust and tensions. Researchers and columnists claim that the case of Morocco-Algeria conflict is pretty similar to that of India-Pakistan. Others go as far to the east and resemble it to the two Koreas' forever-close-to-war situation, with Morocco seen as North Africa's South Korea, and Algeria as the African version of North Korea. The million-dollar question is, how does this ongoing tension affect both nations and beyond?

## ***Pre-Independence***

Before gaining independence in the mid-twentieth century, these North African countries were both under French and Spanish control. While Morocco was occupied for some 40 years under the French protectorate and Spanish partial control, Algeria was under a French colony for more than 130 years. Morocco succeeded to re-establish a constitutional monarchy in 1956, whereas Spain continued to have control over its southern provinces until 1976 following the historical unarmed Green March in November 1975. Meanwhile, Algeria had been occupied by the French since 1830.

As soon as Morocco gained its independence, the late Moroccan King Mohamed V expressed that Morocco's independence is incomplete before Algeria gained its independence too. At the time, the king did not even negotiate its border issues with the French colony as they cropped the Moroccan map in favor of Algeria which was considered as a French district in Africa. Soon, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was established with the support of Morocco to liberate Algeria from the French. The NLF fought bloody fights against the colony powers and received funding, arms, and medicine from Morocco. Despite the vast gap in ideological perspectives between Morocco and the NLF, there was still a cooperation between the two countries in order to overcome the colony's leftovers.

## ***Two Rivals: Struggle for Leadership***

Interestingly, after its liberation in 1962, Algeria refused to negotiate its suspended border issues when Morocco started to voice its concerns about it which it deemed as the natural right of the kingdom. The logic that the late Mohamed V used was to first liberate its country from a mutual enemy, then to sit down together as brother countries to solve border and territorial issues. But Algeria's behavior showed its ingratitude when faced with the many attempts initiated by Morocco to reconcile ties.

The starting point of the long-lasting conflict began when Spanish occupants were kicked out from the Sahara, followed by the Madrid Accords that left the Saharan issue for Morocco and Mauritania as the only countries that could negotiate the status of the Sahrawi people. However, Algeria jumped into the dispute as an observer which was seen by Morocco as a transgression over international laws and treaties. Since then, Algeria has never stepped back from backing the Polisario Front which is considered by Morocco and many other countries as a terrorist group. Algeria justifies its position as a country that stands with the people who long for self-determination. Nevertheless, all these claims turned to be nonsense but ways to deceive international opinion.

Speaking of self-determination, Algeria forgets that the Kabyle (Amazigh-dominated region in North Algeria) wants to gain its independence from Algiers, but the latter denies such claims. Many Kabyle people held demonstrations in various European cities, demanding their independence. The Algerian regime turned a blind eye on the demonstrations and accused Morocco of fueling such moves. Morocco's Ambassador to the UN Omar Hilale called during a meeting of non-aligned countries for the "independence of the Kabyle people" in Algeria. In response, Algiers immediately summoned its ambassador from Rabat for consultations and clarifications.

Morocco and Algeria could be two leading and complementary countries, not only in North Africa but in the whole continent and the Arab world as well. Instead of being rivals, the neighboring countries could play a crucial role in stabilizing security and peace in the Maghreb and Sahel regions. Both countries exert important and plausible efforts to hold back terrorist groups and illegal mass migrations toward the

## Mediterranean and Southern Europe.

Both countries also have vast sustainable resources that can be used wisely in the right direction for the benefit of their national interests. Economically, Algeria possesses an important reserve of raw fuel and natural gas; has the second-largest gold reserve in the Arab world at 173,6 tons. Meanwhile, Morocco leads in agriculture, fishery, and mining; it has an advanced infrastructure and the largest reserve of phosphate and fertilizers. Demographically, the population of Morocco and Algeria combined count for 80 million which is characterized by a large youth share, and the prospect a big market for goods and services. The two countries share the same languages and dialects, homogenous cultures, and cults. They also have many other indicators that could actually help mitigate or even revoke the long conflict and focus more on enhancing and developing the two countries.

### ***Diplomacy and the Mission Impossible***

The ABCs of international relations imply responding to what a country considers inappropriate in various means, starting from sending a protest note to the diplomatic representative, and/or suspending diplomatic ties, to even cutting all kinds of relations over hostile actions. Since its independence, Morocco has always tried to balance existing tensions with Algeria and avoid any escalation. In 1963, Morocco wanted to peacefully regain its historical territory that was granted to Algeria by the French colony. But Algeria yielded to deteriorate Morocco's good intentions. This led to the 'Sand War' that lasted for almost five months. Fortunately, the two countries agreed to a ceasefire through negotiations led by Mali and Ethiopia.

Tension continues to be worsened by Algeria after Morocco's attempts to call for reconciliation. Following the Green March in the Moroccan Sahara, Algeria forcibly expelled 45.000 Moroccan families to their home country. Many of which were mix-married couples, causing people to separate from their partners. In March 1976, Algeria recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, triggering Morocco to sever its diplomatic ties with the country. In 1988, Saudi Arabia-led negotiations resulted in restored diplomatic relations. The heads of states exchanged visits as a testament of normalization and willingness to revive their aborted ties. Yet in 1994, Rabat accused Algiers of being responsible for a terrorist attack that took place in Marrakesh which was responded by Algiers of closing its land border with Morocco ever since.

The ties between Morocco and Algeria continue to fluctuate over the decades, sometimes with reasonable causes, while in some cases with nonsense accusations. Attempts to resolve tensions were marked by the Moroccan side as King Mohammed VI urges Algeria to "put aside the differences between the two neighbors and open a new page in their relations". In his recent speech, Mohamed VI favors restoration of diplomatic ties with Algeria: "I stress once again that the borders that separate the Moroccan and Algerian brothers will never be barriers preventing their interaction and understanding," the monarch said. He also urged Moroccans to "preserve the spirit of fraternity, solidarity and good neighborliness towards our Algerian brothers" and described the two countries as being more than neighbors. He added: "we consider Algeria's security and stability as part of Morocco's security and stability. What affects Morocco will also affect Algeria, because they are complementary twins."

Coming to the table with Algeria's current (old) mentality seems to be an impossible mission to achieve in the short run. As Morocco runs for peace and security in the African continent, Algeria keeps lobbying to abolish Morocco's efforts. Examples are many but just to mention a few, the world recognizes Morocco's role in bringing Libya's political parties to Skhirat (a town near Rabat) which resulted in the establishment of the Council of the State. Further, Morocco deployed its military personnel in UN-led Central African Republic peacekeeping missions. Morocco also played a key role in ensuring political stability in Mali, Burkina Faso, and other African states. And then there is also Morocco's obvious soft power in the African continent. Yet, for years Algeria failed in bringing any sort of stability to its neighboring countries. Although this was Algeria's role as a regional player in the 1970s, this role did not last long. This is apparently due to the incapacity and incapability of ex-president and senior generals who controlled almost everything.

### ***Hope or Hype***

While Morocco has been exerting for decades to reunite and re-establish bilateral ties between the brethren nations, unfortunately, we observe how Algeria's hostile rhetoric against Morocco works as a threat to safety and stability of both countries. As long as the Algerian authorities endorse hostile and

hatred narratives against Morocco's good intention of reconciliation, the decades-old conflict could last for more decades to come. Indeed, if Algeria really wants its people and its neighbors' people to live in prosperous conditions, it should relinquish its old traditions and inaugurate a new era with its neighbor. Algeria is being criticized on exporting countless internal crises on the expense of the people by targeting Morocco's contributions for the advancement of the region. Hence, Algeria has no other option but to act in a reciprocal manner by demonstrating good intentions to prosper economic and social development for the full benefit of the Maghreb and Sahel regions. With this, the North African kingdom should keep up its successful foreign policy agenda aligned with its allies and other friendly countries.

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