

Morocco Does Not Negotiate About Its Sahara

The late Moroccan King Hassan II (1929-1999) delivered a historical speech in November 5th, 1975 calling all eligible Moroccan men to step out from all regions and to connect the three geographic directions with Southern Morocco. In response to the Royal Speech, every Moroccan family had sent at least one of its members to participate in the peaceful Green March heading to the Sahara region in Morocco. Following the unforgettable sentence "Tomorrow, by God's will, the Green March will start", A huge number of 350.000 Moroccans from all regions gathered in Agadir City to head from a central point to the South. The Green March was a strategic manifestation of all Moroccans to force Spain to hand over the disputed colony of Spanish Sahara. The symbolic meaning of such unprecedented event in the modern era has a lot to do with the strong ties that all Moroccans have toward Sahrawi people, and of course the historical ties between Sahrawi tribes and the Moroccan kings.

The Western Sahara had been under the Moroccan sovereignty for centuries until it went under Spanish occupation in 1884. Spain kept administering and exploiting the region until serious agreement between Morocco and other friendly countries took place to make an end for the long-lasting occupation at the North African kingdom. The first agreement had included some Sahara-based cities to come up with a solution in order to better off the Sahrawi people. In 1956, Morocco got back the center and north parts of the kingdom, and the international zone of Tangiers as well. Two years later, Spain insolently announced that the Western Sahara is governed as a province of Spain not as a West African region. This annoyed the decision makers in Morocco which pushed the Special Committee of Decolonization at the United Nations (UN) to include Sahara at its agenda in 1964. In less than one year, the UN General Assembly resolution number 2072 requested Spain as the administering power to take immediate actions to initiate serious negotiations for liberating colonized territories of Sahara.

Attempt to Liberation

The beginning of 1971 witnessed a good-will move by a group of young Sahrawi/Moroccan university students in Rabat. Their intention was to mobilize their fellow Moroccans to end up Spanish control over the Western Sahara. Gaining back from several states including Morocco and Algeria, these young students started officially their movement which they named **Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro (POLISARIO)**. The point of this movement was to liberate two major Sahrawi regions, Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro (or Oued Eddahab in Arabic). The movement eventually reallocated in the Western Sahara and started armed rebellions against Spanish army. The Polisario Front was formally established in 1973 by several Sahrawi university students at Rabat besides some other Sahrawi men who served in Spanish army. Their aim was to represent Sahrawi people and to become the legitimate body that speaks on their behalf. Unfortunately, the movement was hacked by Algeria which unconditionally supported the front against Moroccan interests in different means; be it military or logistic. The neighbor country hosted the rebels in Tindouf, refugee camps-based territory on Algerian soil which is not far from Moroccan borders. There are many readings of such support including a thesis that might seem fiddling. This thesis claims that Algeria wants to have a façade onto Atlantic Ocea, and the optimal way to have that is to form a new state on its western side. This actually is very relevant because why Algeria had hacked the Polisario front? And why it's been hosted in its soil? Why it's has been arming the front for more than four decades? The thing is that Algeria always denies its responsibility as a state member which is directly involved in round-table negotiations at UN level. Contrary, Algeria claims itself as an observer rather than a third party of the artificial dispute on Western Sahara. However, the recent Security Council Resolution (2602/2021) has mentioned for the first time the full responsibility of Algeria as party of this dispute. Another essential thing to know about the attempt of liberating the Sahara is the massive splits at leadership level. This was followed by consecutive withdrawals of the front's founding leaders who returned back to Morocco, their home country. Other refugees also tried to escape and get out of such inhumane camps; many were killed or tortured, and only mercenaries left in the refugee camps in Tindouf.

In 1975, the UN Security Council called parties to sit for serious negotiations to solve this territorial dispute in a peaceful way on the basis of Article 33 of the UN Charter. One month after this resolution number 377, the Green March took place in November 6th, 1975. This march has an important socio-historical significance for all Moroccans and many others who participated from different countries namely from the Middle East. Since then, the monarch delivers a speech to the Moroccan people reminding them not only with historical achievement of ending an occupation in Sahara, but also to share opportunities and

challenges that hoover this fabricated dispute. Such fabrication started few months later after the 6th November speech when a group of individuals from Sahara proclaimed the establishment of so-called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in February, 27th 1976. Out of 84 UN member states that once recognized SADR as a legitimate state, 43 UN member withdrawn recognition, the number still continued to fall to only 4 states in less than two decades.

International support to Moroccan plan

There were serious attempts to terminate the ongoing territorial dispute over the Western Sahara region. Had it been never easy for people to move freely in Sahara region just like other regions of Morocco? Was it not for the fact that Morocco always aligns with UN resolutions? Had it been never intricate for Moroccan army to secure the easy crossing of goods and people to Mauritania and then to other African countries? There is no doubt that Morocco is an important regional and international player which always stands for peace and mutual interests in its diplomatic and economic ties. Morocco has been always committed to international treaties and agreements by which he receives an international praise.

In order to end up the artificial dispute over Sahar, Morocco proposed, in 2007, a plan to offer Self-autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty to Sahrawi people. This depicts seriousness and willingness of the North African Kingdom to end up the conflict and let the development locomotive boosters. Advanced Regional Development was also implemented in Sahara regions as another catalyst to push forward economic and socio-cultural achievements. The Moroccan large self-autonomy proposal received an international satisfaction and praise as it is serious, credible, and realistic solution.

A turning point changed the rules of the game concerning the Western Sahara conflict when the US president Donald Trump issued a historic proclamation to recognize sovereignty of Morocco over the Western Sahara on December 10th 2020. This is the first time when The White House explicitly displays its support for the Moroccan plan of self-autonomy. Such move appealed many African and Arab countries to enhance diplomatic ties and show unconditional support to Morocco's proposal. In less than half-year, those countries opened General Consulates in Dakhla an Laayoune, the two major populated cities in Western Sahara. Twenty-four countries have so far backed the Moroccan integrity in a palpable and concrete way. Following Trump's proclamation, The Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stated that "State Department announces that it has begun the process to establish a U.S. consulate in the region" and the US "looks forward to this increased engagement and we will continue to support political negotiations to resolve the issues between Morocco and the POLISARIO within the framework of Morocco's autonomy plan".

From another vein, Morocco and the U.S. run for years military maneuvers and trainings on Western Sahara territories within the framework of Africa Lion that is a multinational military joint gathering U.S. and Moroccan Commands. This is an optimal opportunity to hone military capacities in addition to adopting necessary skills to manage crisis that threaten North Africa and Southern Europe. This reflects again the vital role of Morocco in stabilizing the region counter terrorism and contributing to international security.

Sahara case is non-negotiable

Morocco has always been an active and responsive member in alignment with UN and Security Council resolutions (1754 (2007), 1783 (2007), 1813 (2008), 1871 (2009), 1920 (2010), 1979 (2011), 2044 (2012), 2099 (2013), 2152 (2014), 2218 (2015), 2285 (2016), 2351 (2017), 2414 (2018), 2440 (2018), 2468 (2019), 2494 (2019), and 2548 (2020)). In many occasions, Morocco showed its readiness and seriousness for negotiations and round-table meetings at international levels. However, this readiness is only valid under what it was proposed in 2007; that is a large self-autonomy initiative that respects Morocco's sovereignty over Sahara and national territorial integrity. Any proposal outside this framework is not negotiable including referendum and self-determination.

In November 2020, a crucial event happened in Guerguerat crossing point that connects international trade between Morocco and West Africa. Few members of Polisario with their women children penetrated the buffer zone -Guerguerat- which is under the UN missionary observation. Afterwards, they blocked the

movement of vehicles and trucks that were carrying goods to Mauritania and other West African countries. In few hours, the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces intervened to hold on any possible attack or bringing harm to civilian drivers. Following such insanity by Polisario militias beside their use of children and women as scapegoats to attract international public opinion, the consequences were not well calculated as nothing had not been changed in the field. In contrast, the world as whole witnessed again who really does break the ceasefire since late 1990s.

Coming back to the Green March, Morocco marked the 46th anniversary of this socio-historical event by celebrating intensive developmental efforts to make the Sahara region as advanced as it had never. The Monarch delivered a clear and concise speech stating that the Sahara issue is not-negotiable. Speaking on Saturday, 6th November 2021, the king said: "Today as in the past, Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara will never be up for negotiation.". The solution of more than four-decade long-lasting dispute should be politic, serious, sustainable, and practical based on compromise. The king said in his televised speech that "If we engage in negotiations, it is essentially in order to reach a peaceful solution to this artificial regional conflict". This speech came amid unprecedented heightened tension between Morocco and Algeria as the later cut diplomatic relations from one side with its western neighbor. The reason behind such decision was that Algeria claimed several allegations that Morocco totally denies. What is interesting here is that Morocco continues to develop the Western Sahara and boost a lot of capitals by calling international investors. In contrast, Algeria after decades of financing and arming Polisario front against Morocco have both failed and lost their credibility. In a recent talk to representatives at the parliament, the Moroccan minister of foreign affairs, Nasir Bourita, said that Morocco is totally committed to find a solution to the "artificial regional conflict that stems from the opposition of a neighboring state (Algeria) to its legitimate rights to the consummation of its territorial integrity". He also claimed that Morocco wants to turn page on Western Sahara conflict as soon as possible.

To sum up, Morocco has brought the Sahara issue to an irrevocable point such that there is no room to interpret what Polisario and Algeria wished to attain few decades ago, that is an extensive referendum of Sahrawi people. We may conclude that the Sahara issue has been put down by wise Moroccan diplomacy plus the massive investments implemented in the Sahara region that translate credibility and seriousness of Moroccan plan to end up the artificial dispute on Western Sahara. It also seems -at least from the recent rhetoric- that Polisario front and its backing country, Algeria; understood that the Sahara issue is terminated and their effortless supports have literally blown up. What is more? The mega-projects that were launched in major Sahrawi cities, namely Dakhla Port which will connect Morocco and other African ports. This alone would change economic hubs in international trade. Further, many other projects will increase economic growth at the region with noticeable figures in several sectors including renewable energies, automotive, agriculture, and tourism. Last but not least, increasing numbers of foreign direct investments to Western Sahara are also astonishing in a way that resonates what Morocco has committed to deliver to bring prosperity to the Sahrawis.

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