



Escalating Disputes:

An overview of the Moroccan call to grant Algerian tribes the right to self-determination

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The Algerian Foreign Ministry summoned its Ambassador to Morocco on July 18, 2021, in order to consult with him regarding what the Moroccan envoy to the UN had stated in a recent meeting of foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement States (NAM) in Baku, as he called for granting the Kabylie region located in Eastern Algeria the right to self-determination.

Algeria regards this measure as a violation of international law and the African Union Constitutive Act. It further considered such statements opposing the principles and agreements governing Moroccan-Algerian relations. Algeria also referred to the possibility of taking other measures should no positive and appropriate action be taken by the Moroccan side.

Significant political developments:

The current escalation in Algerian-Moroccan relations coincided with several key political developments, most notably the following:

1- The rise of the Algerian public outrage: Public protests erupted in the states located in Southern Algeria due to the suffering of their residents from economic marginalization and unemployment. Public and private oil companies operating in Southern Algeria are accused of corruption and discrimination in granting jobs, in addition to providing insufficient services (water - electricity) to citizens, which clearly

reflects the political and social instability in this area.

2- Morocco accused of violating freedoms: Morocco faces international accusations of violating human rights and public freedoms in the country, particularly after the US State Department report issued in mid-July, accusing Moroccan authorities of violating standards for conducting fair judicial trials against some detained journalists, in contravention of Moroccan promises to allow freedom of the press and expression.

Reasons for the escalation of disputes:

The reasons for the recent escalation of disputes between Morocco and Algeria can be traced back to the following factors:

1- The Kabylie region's right to Self-Determination: Omar Hilal, the Moroccan envoy to the UN, presented a memorandum during the meeting of

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foreign ministers of the NAM in Azerbaijan in July 13-14, which considers the Amazigh region to the East of Algeria a colonial area, and calls on the UN to grant this region the right to self-determination.

This provoked the Algerian side, which summoned the Algerian Ambassador to Rabat to consult with him in this regard. Furthermore, the Algerian People's National Assembly (APN) issued a statement condemning the Moroccan position and declaring it as unacceptable.

Several political parties in the Kabylie region, led by the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), issued a statement expressing their rejection of the Moroccan position towards the Kabylie region, and considering the Moroccan memorandum as part of the conspiracy weaved against the unity of the Algerian state and its sovereignty.

This statement denied the demand of the residents of the Kabylie region to obtain the right to self-determination, as they are not under colonialism, contrary to what was called for by the statement issued by the New Generation party, which expressed its rejection of the Moroccan stance towards the Algerian Kabylie region, describing it as Rabat's desire to continue hostility with Algeria.

2- Algeria accuses Morocco of supporting terrorism: The Algerian Foreign Ministry accused Rabat of what it views as the multifaceted support for terrorist organizations, specifically the Kabylie Independence Movement (MAK). Rabat was also accused of supporting terrorist organizations during the black decade in Algeria.

3- Morocco denies espionage charges: Moroccan authorities denied Algerian accusations of Morocco using the Israeli "Pegasus" system to spy on some Algerian officials and citizens. In return, Morocco considered such statement as an Algerian attempt to distort Morocco's influential regional role, which Morocco had acquired at the level of international and regional organizations, particularly the UN and the African Union.

The Moroccan government, headed by Saadeddine Othmani, rejected these accusations, and confirmed

that it had never acquired informatics software to penetrate communications devices. Moroccan Foreign Minister, Nasser Bourita, announced his country's turning to local and international courts to stop what he described as the Algerian slander campaign against Morocco aiming to undermine Morocco's role in combating terrorism and illegal immigration in the region.

4- Morocco's diplomatic successes: The Algerian position in support of the independence of the Moroccan Sahara from Morocco is one of the reasons for the continuing tensions with Morocco. This was evident during the speech of the Algerian Foreign Minister, Ramtane Lamamra, during the last meeting of foreign ministers of the NAM, where he confirmed his country's support for the demands of the "Polisario" Front, which prompted the Moroccan ambassador to present the memorandum supporting the independence of the Kabylie region.

Recently, Moroccan diplomacy was able to win regional and international support for its position on the issue of the Sahara, particularly the US recognition of Rabat's sovereignty over the Sahara region, in addition to the launching of dozens of consulates in the cities of El-Ayoun and Dakhla in the Sahara region. This bolsters Morocco's influence and weakens the position of the Polisario and Algeria, which contributes to the deterioration of relations between the two countries.

5- Demarcation of borders with the Sahrawi Republic: In early July, Algeria announced the demarcation of the borders with the Sahrawi Republic (the Polisario Front), as part of the official Algerian recognition of the Sahrawi Republic. This action provoked Rabat, deeming it a threat to its national security.

This Algerian announcement may be an indication of providing additional Algerian military support to the elements of the Polisario Front, enabling them to launch attacks against some Moroccan targets, particularly after the Moroccan authorities established their control over the Guerguerat border crossing with Mauritania.

6- The expulsion of the Moroccan farmers of



Figui: Last March, the Algerian forces expelled dozens of Moroccan farmers (40-50 Moroccan families) from the lands of the Al-Arja region near the border city of Figui, which includes about 10,000 palm trees and which is characterized by the high fertility of its soil. Moroccan citizens have lived there for many years.

The Algerian authorities declared their sovereignty over these areas, according to an agreement signed between Algeria and Morocco in 1972 and ratified in 1989. The Algerian authorities claimed that this region witnessed a boom in organized crime and the proliferation of drug smuggling operations.

Possible scenarios:

In light of the current facts, there are some possible scenarios regarding Moroccan-Algerian relations over the coming period:

1- Continuing strained diplomatic relations: This scenario is likely to lead Algerian-Moroccan relations towards further tensions at all levels, particularly the diplomatic and political ones. This may take multiple forms, such as the issuance of official statements where the two sides exchange accusations of destabilizing each other, in addition to media reports justifying each party's view on the issue at the expense of the other party. This will intensify tensions between

the two countries in a way that may amount to a complete rupture of their bilateral relations.

2- Indirect military clashes: This scenario goes to the possibility of future tensions that may amount to indirect military clashes, as Algeria pushes the Polisario elements to launch some attacks against Moroccan targets. In return, Morocco may use the MAK to carry out attacks inside Algeria.


Matters may develop into direct clashes between the Algerian and Moroccan sides. This scenario is based on the reference in the Algerian Foreign Ministry's statement to the possibility of taking non-diplomatic measures, along with the presence of Moroccan military reinforcements on the borders with Algeria. Algeria also accuses Morocco of allying with Israel and establishing spy bases targeting Algeria.

In conclusion, the current signals suggest the continuation of tensions in the Algerian-Moroccan relations over the coming period, especially after Morocco adopted a policy of reciprocity with Algeria, particularly with reference to supporting movements demanding the right to self-determination, just as Algeria supports the separatist tendencies of the Polisario Front.


This action came following the Moroccan government announcing the legalization of the cultivation of Indian cannabis. However, the real reason was it being a response to the Moroccan authorities seizing control of the Guerguerat border crossing with Mauritania and the expulsion of the Polisario Front members from there.

ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

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