

The Role Of Spanish Colonialism In The Evolution Of Western Sahara Conflict

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The conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front/SADR (Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic) also known as the Western Sahara Conflict is one of the long lasting conflicts in the world. The conflict drew less international attention due to geographical location of Western Sahara region at least till Morocco's Green March in 1975. Basically, it is a territorial conflict between Morocco, the SADR, and Mauritania (till 1979) over the territory of Western Sahara. Beside these main parties, regional and international parties mainly Algeria, Libya, Spain, France and USA played a significant role in the conflict.

The nature of the conflict is very complex not only in terms of territory's historical claims but also in defining the legal status of the territory. There are mainly two contradictory positions; Morocco claims its legal right over the territory because of Moroccan King's historical ties with the tribal chiefs of the Western Sahara region where as various international bodies including the UNO and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) acknowledged no such evident of historical ties thus being an indigenous organisation of Saharawi people, Polisario claims its sovereignty over the territory. The aim of this study is to examine the role of Spain in the evolution of Western Sahara Conflict being a colonial power.

Key words: Western Sahara, Conflict, Spain, Morocco, Polisario, SADR.

Introduction:

The Western Sahara territory, with an area of approximately 2,66,000 square kilometres and coastline of about 1,062 kilometres, is situated in Northern Africa. The region shares border with Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, and North Atlantic Ocean. The area of the Western Sahara is a bit more than the size of Spain and somewhat bigger than the total size of United Kingdom. In the north and north-east it bordered by Morocco and Algeria with 475 kilometres land frontiers, and in the south and the east by Mauritania with 1,570 kilometres long land frontiers. The borders of Western Sahara generally pursue lines of longitude and latitude instead of any physical or ethnic boundaries. The region was separated along the twenty-sixth parallel into two parts by Spain authority in 1962. The northern part known as Saguia al-Hamra after the river that runs into that territory covers almost 31 percent of total land, while the bigger southern territory is

called Rio de Oro ("river of gold") covers about 69 percent of the land. Before 1962, in the West the whole Spanish province was known by the name of Rio de Oro. Although Western Sahara includes a sizeable region, the region, when seen from a bigger geographical viewpoint, is just a little piece of a gigantic body of land- the Sahara known to the Arabs and medieval cartographers the same as the Great Desert. The Western Sahara shapes the north-western boundary of this Great Desert. The significant thing about Western Sahara is that the most of its surface isn't covered with sand. Albeit broad sandy zones lie dispersed all through Western Sahara, the most of the domain comprises of huge rocky fields. The Atlantic coast-line of Western Sahara comprises of substituting stretches of tough precipices and sandy beaches (Saxena, S., C., 1995).

Regardless of the parties straightforwardly engaged with the Western Sahara struggle, a few other states also played crucial role especially in diplomatic campaign and arms supply. This research paper aims to examine the role of most significant party-Spain. Being a coloniser, Spain originated and watered the Western Sahara conflict.

Colonisation of Western Sahara:

Spain was never a solid rival in the scramble of Africa. It brought Western Sahara under its colonial occupation only after Britain, France, Germany and Belgium had taken command of, or had asserted some control over comparatively alluring part of Africa. Spain had just a historical enthusiasm for the domain as a key zone for the support of the Canary Islands, where the Spanish were deeply dug in, and as a business resource connected to the Canaries' fishing industry. An extra inspiration for Spain was the renown appended to colonial possessions (Damis, John, 1983, p.9). In 1884, Spain sent a military battalion to build up three coastline trading stations at Villa Cisneros (presently Dakhla), Cintra, and Cape Blane, that year in December; the Madrid announced the foundation of its "protectorate" over the bank of Rio de Oro. This declaration attached by Spain in a international presentation which, inter alia, stated: "Considering the significance of the Spanish installations...and in perspective on the records marked by the autonomous tribes...who have on different events requested and got the insurance of the Spanish...the King has decided...to take under his security the territories...between Bahia del Oeste (presently la Guera) and Cape Bojador (Boujdour) (Mercer, John, 1979, p. 106)."

The Spanish Government signed various accords with the neighbourhood Saharawi rulers. The Spanish claims to the Saharawi domain was accepted by the European states at the Berlin Conference (1884-85). The Berlin Conference set out the rule that the successful control of a region's coast qualified a colonial control for have the inside of that territory (Damis, John, 1983, p.10). The International Court of Justice, as its

Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975, said that in spite of the fact that Spain had referenced certain previous acts of alleged demonstration of sovereignty in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the period of colonization by it might be considered as the period starting in 1884 when Spain declared a protectorate over Rio de Oro (Saxena, S., C., 1995, p.11).

Six biggest colonial powers had taken under their control 25 million square miles of colonial territory by 1914. England alone had somewhere in the range of thirteen million square miles of territory. Spain, paradoxically, had the option to gain just 135,000 square miles. In the Sahara, Spain obtained about 112,000 square miles under its concurrences with France- a little under 9,900 square miles in Spanish Southern Morocco, around 31,650 square miles in Saguia el-Hamra and a little more than 71,000 square miles in Rio de Oro. The all of this, though, was uniquely on paper; in reality, the Spanish existence remained only confined as of now to the little settlement at Villa Cisneros. In spite of the fact that two additional settlements were built up along the Saharan coast in 1916 and 1920, no effort was made by Spain to control domains in the inside until 1934, just about fifty years after the establishing of Villa Cisneros (Hodges, Tony, 1983, p.49).

The Saharawi nationalists put a courageous battle against the Spanish, and they were the last among African people to submit to colonial mastery. The Saharawi people previously came into conflict with France which, started from Senegal, had controlled Mauritania. The French at that point progressed into Western Sahara where the native tribes offered them solid obstruction. Sheik Ma el-Ainin, an extraordinary spiritual leader of Western Sahara, posed a firm resistance against the French. He took support even of the Moroccan Sultan who likewise indicated enthusiasm for driving out the French. The Sheik acquired arms even from foreign countries to counter the challenge of French expansionism. Afterward, the Moroccan Sultan double-crossed Sheik Ma el-Ainin by going into some compromise with the French. The Sultan even captured the caravans supplying arms for the Sheik. In result, the opposition offered by Sheik Ma el-Ainin got powerless, which empowered the French to progress further north. The anti-French assaults, of course, kept on. The Saharawi nationalists depended on splendid guerrilla strategies and utilized their full knowledge of the desert region but at the end of the day they couldn't cope with to the French military power. The French were furnished with better arms and were also better organised. The French coordinated their last hostile in 1934 from Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, in this manner shutting on the Saharawi people from the north and the south. Despite the irresistible power of the French army, some Saharawi tribe proceeded with their war of resistance.

However, because of their sporadic and unorganised attacks their rebellion collapsed. The French as well adopted the strategy of setting tribes against tribe by misusing their customary contentions, fears and doubts (Ibid, p.63).

It was the fulfilment of the French victory of southern Morocco early in 1934 that made way for the colonization of Western Sahara. In February 1930, the French administration built up a joint Algerian-Morocco command to get rid of the rest of the obstruction that was being carried on in the fringe areas of southern Morocco and Algeria. It was just when the French had finished their victory of southern Algeria and southern Morocco that the Spanish authority chose to abolish of the couple of residual pockets of obstruction by possessing Ifni in Morocco and the inside of Western Sahara. At that point, there was not really a Saharawi opposition left in Western Sahara. The Saharawis were left with no other option but to surrender to the Spanish presence. Along these lines, we see that in the control of Western Sahara by Spain both Morocco and France had played a vital role (Saxena, S., C., 1995, p.13).

The colonisation of Western Sahara must be comprehended as alluding to each of the two domains - Rio de Oro and the Saguia el-Hamra that include it. Each of these two regions of Western Sahara has had its own history and its very own time of colonization. After controlling the region of Western Sahara, Spain partitioned it into two administrative parts Saguia el-I-Iamra in the north and Rio de Oro in the south. Somewhere in the period of 1934 and 1958, the two parts of Western Sahara, alongside Spanish South Morocco (now Tarfaya territory of Morocco) and the small seaside enclave at Ifni (among Tarfaya and Agadir), were administered as parts of Spanish West Africa under the incorporated organization of a military senator situated in Ifni. But after the independence of Morocco in 1956, King started to campaign for whole region of Western Sahara.

Spain's withdrawal and Madrid Tripartite Agreement

Spain has constantly reaffirmed the positions it acknowledged at the time it pulled back from the Sahara in February 1976. To start with, Madrid concerned that its international obligations in the Western Sahara finished on February 26, 1976. Second, under the conditions of the Madrid Tripartite Agreement of November 14, 1975, Spain handed over the government, however not the sovereignty of the Sahara and control over its seashore waters to Morocco and Mauritania. Third, Spain doesn't think about that the Sahrawi populace has expressed itself freely and hence Saharan decolonisation has not yet occurred. At long last, Spain keeps up firm impartiality on the Western Sahara question. It has recognised neither the Polisario Front nor the SDAR and, since 1977, has stopped all weaponry supplies to the fighting parties (Damis, John, 1983, p.104-105).

With the February 1976 handover of governing power to Morocco and Mauritania, the new leaders of post-Franco Spain would have liked to disavow the Sahara struggle. However, the Madrid Tripartite Agreement has turned into a combative issue in the domestic politics of Spain. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), the main opposition party, discards the Tripartite Agreement, seeing it as invalid and void from the point of view of international law. The PSOE's position on this question closely looks like the official Algerian stand. Spanish Socialist leader Felipe Gonzalez has travelled the Western Sahara, and the PSOE has criticized Madrid's surrender of its previous Saharan region to Morocco and Mauritania (Mortimer, A. Robert, 1978).

On the global level, the states directly associated with the Saharan clash have exposed Spain to different pressures. Morocco, from one side, and Algeria and the Polisario Front, on the other, have attempted to use Spain's weakness as for the Spanish enclaves on Morocco's northern (Mediterranean) coast, its fishing armada in the Atlantic, and the Canary Islands. With an attempt to keep up healthy relations with both Morocco and Algeria, Spain has given some deliberate concessions, yet it has not altered its essential stand on the Sahara matter.

Spanish strategy on the Sahara matter favoured Morocco from 1976 to 1978. Spain provided weapons to Morocco until mid-1977, it signed a fishing treaty in 1977 that was profitable to Rabat, and the Spain and Morocco upheld each other in international forums. During the same period, Spanish-Algerian relations were stressed. In the months following the Tripartite Agreement, Algiers invited various Spanish opposition leaders, some of them in a state of banishment, who condemned Madrid for cheating the people of Sahara. And, the Boumediene government gave one hour every day on Radio Algiers to Antonio Cubillo, pioneers of MPAIAC, during which Cubillo corresponded the "Voice of the Free Canaries." Because of a strident article in the administration controlled Algerian newspaper 'El Moudjahid' that spoke for the independence of the Canary Islands, Madrid recalled its representative in Algiers in December 1977. The Algerian assault on Spain's control of the Canaries served to bring together all Spanish political sections strongly behind the regime. Understanding that it had made a tactical blunder, the Boumediene government unexpectedly stopped MPAIAC's broadcasts on Radio Algiers in January 1978 (Thompson V., and Richard Adloff, 1980, p.151).

Continue mounting pressures from Algeria and the Polisario Front compelled Spain to embrace a more balanced stance on the Western Sahara issue in 1978-1979. With the Algerian material help, MPAIAC had carried out a hundred bomb assaults in the Canary Islands by 1978, and one of its bomb attacks was somewhat responsible for a midair crash of two business aeroplanes that killed several hundred visitors. Five Spanish trawlers fishing off the shore of the Sahara were assaulted by Polisario force working from rubber

vessels in 1978. In April 1978, during one of these assaults, eight Spanish fishermen were taken captive, and in August six Spanish fishermen were murdered in another assault. Spain grumbled to Algeria about these assaults, yet Algiers requested that Spain directly handle the Polisario Front. To ensure the fishermen's release, Javier Rupérez, a representative of Spain's ruling Central Democratic Union (UCD), went to the Fourth Polisario Congress in September 1978 and signed a joint document insisting that the front was the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawis (Mercer, Johan, 1979, p.15).

The action of release eight Spanish fishermen in October 1978 prompted normalisation of Spanish-Algerian relations. This improvement was get stronger by the visit in the spring of 1979 of Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez to Algiers. During this visit, Suarez, in his power as president of the ruling UCD, met with Polisario Secretary-General Mohamed Abdulaziz, which comprised UCD acknowledgment of the front. While this gathering didn't infer official Spanish government acknowledgment of the Polisario, it nevertheless gave a counterpart to the policy of Spanish Foreign Minister Marcelino Oreja, who was solidly against to recognising the front. The UCD acknowledgment of the front didn't prevent the Polisario from capturing an aggregate of 40 Spanish fishermen at the end of 1980. This time Madrid not only refused to talk with the Polisario Front but also started a worldwide movement to accuse the actions of the Polisario.

Spain remained to profit fiscally from normalisation of its relations with Algeria. In the time of the Madrid agreements, the Algerian government had debilitated new Algerian agreements with Spanish companies. All things considered, in 1979, Spain positioned fifth among contributors of Algerian imports, and exchange between the two nations was expanding, as was the reliance of Spanish industries on Algerian gas and oil supplies. Specifically, Spain had a remarkable long-term interest for the development of a trans-Mediterranean pipeline to transport Algerian petroleum gas to the Iberian Peninsula. Simultaneously, Spain thought that normalised relations with Algeria would diminish the Algerian government's enthusiasm for raising the issue of the freedom of the Canary Islands in the OAU.

Since 1978, the regional challenge to Spanish policy has been to good relations with Algeria without, simultaneously, distancing Morocco. Spain has been appreciative for the sporadic Moroccan statements of the Spanishness of the Canary Islands. Simultaneously, when Spanish-Moroccan relations turned stressed, Morocco doesn't spare a moment to raise the issue of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla or to apply pressure over fishing rights. At the point when relations are normal, nothing is said about the enclaves. In times of strain, moreover, Rabat discusses the need to recuperate these last segments of Morocco's national patrimony still under colonial control.

Spanish-Moroccan relations endured as Spain tried to improve its ties with Algiers in the fall of 1978. Because of the participation of the UCD delegate at the Polisario Front's Fourth Congress, Moroccan Foreign Minister M'hamed Boucetta gave a speech in Washington in which he resuscitated his nation's claims to Ceuta and Melilla. Lord Juan Carlos reacted by deferring an arranged visit to Rabat. All the while, the UCD proclaimed that Spain couldn't yield to Moroccan "blackmail" on the enclaves' question (Price, David Lynn, 1978). In the following spring considering the Suarez visit to Algiers, the Moroccan government was on edge to improve its relations with Madrid. The visit of Juan Carlos to Morocco in June 1979, during which the Spanish King reaffirmed his support of the Tripartite Agreement, facilitated the strain in Spanish-Moroccan relations.

In spite of the enclaves issues, fishing right off the Moroccan and Saharan coastline was the major pressure point between the Spanish-Morocco relations. The Spanish Cortes confirmed the 1977 mutual fishing treaty with Morocco and reaffirmed the Tripartite Agreement by a vote of 175 to 142 in February, 1978. At the time of King Juan Carlos's visit to Fez, Morocco consented to quicken its approval of the fishing accord and, then, to work out consent to stay away from the capture and inspection of Spanish fishing boats in Moroccan waters. But in the spring of 1980, this situation changed dramatically. When King Hassan commented on French TV that Spain was to a great extent accountable for the killing in the Sahara, the Spanish Foreign Ministry and media dismissed Hassan's announcement. A couple of days after the fact, the Moroccan Navy confined 21 Spanish fishing vessels and sent them to Casablanca (Damis, John, 1983, p.107).

These issues were settled with the payment of modest fines by a few of the confined Spanish fishing boats. Behind the imprisonment of the 21 fishing vessels was Rabat's wish to put together Spanish-Moroccan business relations with respect to friendship and collaboration. The Moroccans looked for a complete agreement one that incorporated the overland shipment of their nation's citrus produce through Spain-to be attached to a future fishing agreement. The two nations managed the fishing issue through a progression of interim accords as Morocco never confirmed the 1977 fishing accord with Spain. After troublesome negotiations, including interference in January 1981 that incited the Spanish to pull back their armada from Moroccan waters, Madrid and Rabat signed one more temporary fishing accord. The accord, signed on April 1, 1981, in Spain with one year's validity, included significant concessions for Rabat, including expanded fishing royalties, Spanish aid to advance Morocco's fishing industry, and expanded Moroccan trade to Spain. After a year, this accord was reaffirmed provisionally until the end of 1982, pending the arrangement of a multiyear agreement (ibid).

By the spring of 1982, Spain still had not consented to the free travel of Moroccan citrus. Without this concession, Morocco was not ready to sign a long-term fishing accord. The worth of the Spanish catch in Moroccan waters surpassed \$500 million in 1981 and Spanish fishing pontoons working from the Canary Islands are dependent, in view of their restricted range, on access to Moroccan fishing area. Accordingly, Spain has a monetary motivating force to keep up extensive business relations with Morocco on terms that are appealing to the Moroccans. Spanish-Moroccan relations have been fairly great since the spring of 1981, and there were indications of further improvement in 1982, including Spain's decision to offer nonlethal military equipment to Rabat (Damis, John, 1983, p.108).

Spain, nevertheless, keeps on stepping a sensitive way in its Western Sahara strategy. The Spain has enabled the Polisario to open an office in Madrid yet has not recognised the Polisario or the SDAR. Madrid is impatient to see a conclusion to the Sahara struggle and is very ready to partake in the quest for an answer. In October 1978, for instance, Spain mentioned at the United Nations that the Saharan conflict be settled by negotiation as quickly as time permits and that the Sahrawis be permitted to practice their right of self-determination. Among the parties to the contention, the Polisario Front believes that Spain, on account of linguistic and cultural ties, is the party most appropriate to enter at an understanding with the Sahrawi people. On the other hand, King Hassan has urged Spain not to play an intervening job in the Western Sahara question and has expressed that an endeavoured intervention effort by Madrid would ruin close Spanish-Moroccan relations. Spain's continued support of the 1975 Tripartite Agreement is essential to Morocco, while its stand that Saharan self-determination has not occurred is welcomed by Algeria and the Polisario Front. Any change by Spain from these essential positions conveys a high danger of stressed relations with one or more of the parties to the contention (ibid).

Conclusion

Spain has directly played a very little role in the Western Sahara conflict since 1976 but being a colonial master, Madrid colonial policies still hunt the issue. First of all, Spain was not ready to decolonise the territory even after the universal declaration of decolonisation by UNO where most of major colonial power started to leave their colonies. Spain considered it its province not a colony as called it Spanish Sahara. Because of the international community and UNO's consistent pressure to decolonise the territory, Spain was forced to withdraw. At the time of pull back from the territory Madrid played a wicked trick to maintain her benefits even where there is no direct Spanish administration and divided the territory between Morocco and Mauritania in 1975 instead recognising the right of self-determination of Saharawi people which is also known as Madrid Tripartite Agreement.

These colonial policies and arrangements led to formation of militant group like Polisario Front and also provided open space to involve in the matter Morocco and other regional powers. Thus it is very evident that the present conflict between Morocco and Polisario over the territory of Western Sahara is only a by product of Spanish colonial policies.

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