

Delayed Peace and Tranquillity in Africa's 'Last Colony': What Next for Western Sahara?

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Abstract

The conflicts in Western Sahara have not been resolved conclusively for 43 years now with some referring to them as 'frozen' conflicts in Africa's last colony. A clear case of decolonisation turned out to be a genesis of displacement and protracted suffering of the Saharawi people from the former coloniser to another handler arguably backed by some invisible external hegemony. This study is a qualitative research using secondary data and thematic analysis to investigate Western Sahara's unending conflicts and the way forward. Located in the conflict theory, findings indicate that the past failed interventions by the United Nations have been a result of the influence of superpowers wielding levers of power in the United Nations Security Council with vested interests in the country. Morocco the new coloniser is a neighbouring country reluctant to cede power while tapping the mineral and water resources which Western Sahara is abundantly endowed with. As the Saharawi people are not obliged to give in, the conflict rages on unabated. The latest United Nations intervention could avert the conflict situation as it appears that those who had vested interests are now recoiling. The situation should not be tolerated any further and the Sahrawis deserve better, peace and tranquillity in their homeland. It is recommended that, in the letter and spirit of multilateralism, the African Union and regional economic communities across Africa should swiftly intervene even though it is now late than never.

Keywords: Morocco; Conflict; Sahrawi; Peace; Western Sahara.



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1. Introduction

According to Norris (1986) North-Western Sahara in Africa is home to the Hassan-speaking people (hassanophone). These people reside in parts of Mali, Southern Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania's parts of the Sahara and the South-Western part of Algeria. They share a lot in common with respect to religious, cultural, language itself, to some degree social practices and political origins (Norris, 1986). During the colonial era in the 1960s and even to this day, the United Nations acknowledged the right of the Sahrawi's territorial sovereignty in the Western Sahara and successfully exerted pressure on Spain for the decolonisation process to take place. Mauritania and Morocco immediately lodged a case with the international court of justice claiming responsibility of ownership and control of the territory before the advent of Spain. In 1975, the court ruled against these claims paving way for the entitlement of self-determination to Western Sahara. Despite the ruling, Morocco and Mauritania proceeded to annex part of the Western Sahara. Morocco incorporated the Southern region right up to the boundary with Mauritania, while Mauritania on its part, annexed a smaller part of the same Southern region only to relinquish it in 1979 to the Sahrawi. To date, the UN's record of non-sovereign regions shows this area as unofficially incorporated by Morocco Wilson (2012). The liberation movement for Western Sahara as founded in 1973 which is known as Polisario has continued to lead the contest against the annexation (Larosch, 2007).

The conflict between Polisario and Morocco was originally an armed confrontation in the period between 1975 and 1991 until Morocco erected a militarised sand wall. This effectively partitioned the area under its jurisdiction, rich with mineral and water resources being the larger Western part leaving the smaller Eastern part under the control of Polisario. This smaller part has no access to the coast (Wilson, 2012). After decolonisation, Western Sahara became known as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) getting recognition from other states including the African Union (Ahmed, 2012). Also, according to Pazzanita (2006) even the UN acknowledges Polisario to be "the representative of the people of Western Sahara." The governance structures of SADR are located 50km outside the bounds of Western Sahara in Algeria's refugee camps close to Tindouf a military cantonment area. In 1991 the UN arranged a truce between Polisario and Morocco, but Wilson (2012) observes that since then, attempts to resolve conflict have been hinged on undertakings to have a referendum in Western Sahara without success describing the situation as a 'frozen' crisis.

Polisario argued that its independence would come through the referendum option which Morocco rejected. With the UN Security Council unable to implement the ceasefire agreements of a credible referendum, the conflict in the Western Sahara has remained intractable (Jensen, 2005; Theofilopoulou, 2006). It has been estimated that over 20000 Saharawi people's protest demonstration against Morocco were pronounced in 2010 about October-November 2010 while at Gdeim and Izik protest camps (Verdier, 2010). Moroccan forces responded violently disbanding these camps causing fatalities in both fronts. This further burdened the NGOs and UN with investigations into cases of Morocco's human rights abuses against the Sahrawi activities (HRW, 2008; UNCaT, 2011). It is high time African states should team up to bring permanent peace in that region.

2. Background to the Study

About a couple of decades ago saw the end of the Cold War. Yet, in Western Sahara conflicts have not yet been dealt with conclusively. In spite of efforts by the UN the people of Western Sahara continue to be refugees living in situations that are deplorable struggling for self-determination. Zoubir (2010), argues that, conflicts in that country attract merely erratic consideration primarily due to stakeholders' economic and national interests that are located outside and inside Western Sahara. This is contrary to the misrepresentation of facts by some quarters that the territory is a barren and desolate land, when in fact it is endowed with attractive resources including a coastal Atlantic stretch that is of strategic significance (Zoubir, 2010). For instance, one of the world's finest waters for fishing are found there. Morocco and its allies allegedly from the European Union are currently unlawfully exploiting these waters. Some of the attractive resources include abundant mineral deposits such as vanadium, phosphate, iron and titanium oxide with oil believed to be all over the area some of which is untapped.

It is noted that, Western Sahara could be holding the world's largest phosphate reserves and that apart from these known valuable resources natural gas and oil discovered recently compound the conflict resolution efforts (France-LibertésFoundation, 2002; Le Marec, 2002; Libertés/Afaspa, 2003). Indeed, what could have been a clear and mere decolonisation case, manifested as UN's failure ostensibly as a result of reluctance by France and the United States of America being viewed as wielding mighty powers of the Security Council (Zoubir, 2010). It has been argued that, this political problem originated the dynamics of the 1975 Cold War when Morocco was indisputably aligned to the West whereas Algeria belonged to the Soviet Union (Baker, 2004; Zoubir, 2002a;2002b).

Morocco has previously been a surrogate for the United States of America and France in Africa conquering some nationalists (Mundy, 2006). By so doing, it has accrued benefits militarily, economically and politically from its Arab and Western allies including the monarchies of the Gulf. This alliance and geo- politics made it easy for Morocco to grab the Western Sahara where the United States of America played a pivotal role. Zoubir (2010) observes that, further to the seizure, the power of geopolitics has extended to violations of Sahrawi human rights, hostilities between Morocco and Algeria, the 1989 freezing of the Arab Maghreb Union, recurrent Franco-Algerian and Algerian-Spanish tensions, and perennial insurrections in the region among others. Zoubir (2010), asserts that, apart from the role of USA and France in support of Morocco in the regional turbulence, Great Britain has also played a role although to a lesser extent. Therefore, the current rhetoric that in resolving conflicts a 'political solution that is mutually acceptable' should be sought, may not be applicable to Western Sahara whose right to sovereignty is already enshrined in the UN and international law frameworks. For instance, the provisions are clear in the Declaration of the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples contained in the General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of December 14, 1960, as well as, the United Nations' 1963 recognition of the right for Sahrawis to independence. For that matter, Kofi Annan the former UN Secretary-General made a declaration that;

"In the twenty-first century, colonialism is an anachronism. I therefore hope that, in the year ahead, all administering Powers will work with the Special Committee, and with people in the territories under their administration [which includes WesternSahara], to find ways to further the decolonization process. After all, decolonization is a United Nations success story, but it is a story that is not yet finished." (UN, 2004).

He made these remarks at the Special Committee Session of the Fourth Committee on Decolonization. The invasion of Iraq by the United States and Britain in March 2003 was under the auspices that Iraq was not complying with the UN resolutions, yet apparently Morocco continues to violate the UN resolutions without restraint. France and USA have not raised any concern as if there is nothing amiss. Chinkin (2008), argues that, by right (de jure) Western Sahara is up to now administratively controlled by Spain because the 1975 attempts to have administrative powers transferred to Morocco in terms of the November 14 Madrid Accords are not legally binding. It is also on record that the UN had no obligation to recognise the same Accords.

Zoubir (2010) observes that suggestions to conduct a referendum as declared by Morocco's King Hassan II on deciding Western Sahara's self-determination as far back as 1981 was never genuine. There was also no sincerity in accepting another referendum which was part of the United Nations 1991 Settlement Plan. The noble and valid idea of a referendum to resolve the conflict has never been taken seriously by United States and France through the UN Security Council probably for obvious reasons. It appears that, some superpowers see it fit to turn a blind eye to diplomatic and legal provisions even to the extent of pressuring Sahrawis to bow in to Morocco the aggressor instead of applying pressure on the later to uphold resolutions made by UN (Zoubir, 2010).

3. Compelling Case for this Study and Objectives

EU (2018), reported that the unsettled political conflict in Western Sahara has had serious humanitarian ramifications leaving almost 174 000 Sahrawis being refugees encamped in the South-West Algeria. The refugees reside in five camping sites and largely survive on external aid because they have limited access to the meagre resources outside the camps. These meagre resources include, water, food, education, housing and healthcare among others. On the basis of impartiality and neutrality humanitarian values, the European Union (EU) has been addressing this crisis. The camps are located in a remote area making it difficult for relief distribution logistics. This is exacerbated by the vagaries of desert weather conditions. The EU (2018) notes that, youths are frustrated by the political impasse, fragile peace and social cohesion. Being located in the desert, the Sahrawi camps are quite susceptible to sandstorms, flash floods, insufficient support from donors and low reportage from the media. Due to these circumstances, the EU has aptly described it as a 'forgotten crisis' (EU, 2018). In this crisis, the EU represents one of the prominent donor organisations whose basic services support added up to 9 million euros in 2017. This

includes provision of clean water and food. In view of these compelling issues this study is guided by the following objectives:

- To explore the ongoing social, economic and political conflict dynamics in Western Sahara and
 - To analyse the conflict matrix in order to find solutions for a possible lasting solution to the crisis.
- These objectives will be pursued in the lens of some conflict theories discussed below.

4. Theoretical Framework

Conflict can be described as a contestation between disputants with opposing views in terms of their needs, goals or value system. At this point, it could be resolved beneficially and not problematically unless it escalates into violence. But, social conflict is the contestation for societal power or agency occurring as a result of people having divergent views during social relations (Coser, 1956). In the process they mutually exercise social power in a bid to realise irreconcilable objectives, precluding the rival from achieving them. Conflict theory (Oberschall, 1978) places emphasis on the interests reposed in conflict, instead of the values and norms. It implies that conflict is motivated by the desire to satisfy competing interests over scarce resources. Accordingly, the conflict theory is premised on the belief that social life is ordinarily part of conflict not to be seen as a deviation from the norm or an irregularity. The conflict theory is dependent on the concept of a zero-sum game where the loss from one is a gain for the other and vice versa.

This leads to the manipulation and taking advantage of the weak. Where this happens it describes the 'Mathew effect' a notion that those with power will maintain it at all cost. It is indicative that, although society appears to foster a sense of belonging and cooperation, the struggle for power among groups frequently exist in pursuit of own interests. According to Simmel (1964) social conflict is basically a combination of mutually beneficial conflict and one without economic benefits and the main thrust being uneven allocations of societal rewards. This conception gave rise to the social conflict theory. Moffitt (2019), defines social conflict theory as a sociological macro-level orientation viewing society as a theatre fraught with inequalities creating societal transformation and conflicts. This perspective believes that society is made such that, only a few benefit at the detriment of the majority others. The social inequality factors linked to the social conflict theory include age, race, sex and class. A social conflict theorist believes it is a concept about the case of the more affluent against the less affluent in terms of group relations. The founding father of the social conflict theory is understood to be Karl Marx. Social conflict theory does not subscribe to the belief that social structure operates to promote the whole of the society. The theory is based on the assumption that, every society is not in a state of equilibrium with indistinct structures whose components are not perfectly synchronised but bound together due to coercive forces (Chambliss, 1973). This study finds support from this social conflict theory and helps to understand the conflict dynamics of Western Sahara and its main actors the Saharawi people and Morocco.

5. Literature Review

The related literature was reviewed based on the following themes; negotiations without success, issues of irreconcilable interest between the major disputants, the effects of geopolitics, human rights, the economic resources in Western Sahara, African Union and SADC Commitment.

5.1. Negotiations without Success

Successive rounds of negotiations have been done in futility for over four decades casting aspersions to both the facilitators and the actors. In February 2010, the Sahrawi nationalist, Polisario and Morocco engaged in the second attempt to break the impasse through talks held informally. These negotiations were led by the United Nations with an observation team drawn from Mauritania and Algeria. The announced round of this informal discussion was that it was going to pave way for the envisioned direct negotiations succeeding four previous direct talks which commenced in June 2007 and failed to bear fruit (Zoubir, 2010). With the coming in of Barack Obama as the new President of the United States of America in January 2009, it was anticipated that these talks would make a significant departure from the previous, which they did anyway.

The Western Sahara's trading bloc in the region that was proposed and celebrated with pomp and fanfare upon its inauguration in February 1989 as the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) (L'Union du Maghreb Arabe) went into economic oblivion from 1996, specifically because of conflict. This further soured relationships between Morocco, Sahrawis and Algeria. Although headlines are rarely made of the impasse, the conflict has far reaching effects on the regional development. Zoubir (2010), made a pertinent observation in the absence of a regional integration although 1, 3% represents Maghreb states global trade, being the world's lowest in terms of regional trade. Zoubir cites (Hufbauer and Brunel, 2008) who argue that, United States economists have revealed that a regional economic integration in the mould of the Arab Maghreb Union would impact positively and post tremendous results for the region's impoverished population.

The closure of the Morocco-Algeria border from August 1994 has additionally affected the Ouhda city's economy which has relied on tourism from Algeria. Although Morocco has pleaded with Algiers many times over reopening of the border, Algeria has not heeded the call until a conflict settlement is reached with Western Sahara even though cognisant of the cost to the Maghreb in its non-integration form. This is not withstanding the costs and dangers of the arms race which Morocco and Algeria have been seized with. Apart from tensions between Morocco and Algeria, the conflict has strained relationships between France (which supports Morocco) and Algeria, also the relationship between Algeria and Spain, and on the other hand, strained relationships between Morocco and Spain

(Zoubir, 2010). The conflict has not spared the United States whose support for Morocco to occupy the Western Sahara during Cold War was evident, because its policy for the Maghreb integration hit a snag particularly in the consolidation process of the Maghreb-Sahel regional security engagements (Mundy, 2006).

Perhaps, the persistent conflict gridlocks that have characterised Western Sahara could be explained from a geopolitical point of view because claims of technical problems in ensuring a referendum have not had any traction. This observation carries credence in light of assertions by Zoubir (2010) that, "If today, powers like the United States, France and Spain, support, albeit to different degrees, the concept of self-determination" and according to Chinkin (2008) sovereignty for the Sahrawi people is needed, but the failure is a result of the unequivocal international law in favour of the Sahrawis. The intensity of the conflict continues to increase as the Sahrawi youths become actively involved in relentless peaceful protests succeeding to court the international community's attention with respect to violations of human rights in the territory. For example, these protests prompted the UN Mission for Western Sahara (MINURSO) to incorporate in its mandate issues of monitoring human rights. However, in other UN peace keeping missions this prerogative has always been there. Zoubir (2010), observes that, in 2009 and 2010 this request had been rejected by France which means the UNSC Resolution 1920 extending operations of MINURSO by a year did not include human rights.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have denounced human rights violations which continue to increase. It appears that, the adamant position taken by Morocco derives from the geopolitical interests supporting it and delaying peace and tranquillity in Africa's last colony. Morocco has argued that, she will accede to negotiate the self-determination arrangement only if there is implied assent by Spain, France and the United States contrary to the UN resolutions that repudiate and disprove any conditions to be made for the negotiations.

5.2. Incompatible Interests: Sahrawi and Moroccan

Characteristic of any conflict, disputants will always have incompatible interests but where the resolution efforts require an accommodating style to conflict management there is a need for a give and take in order to narrow the bargaining range. This has not happened in the case of Western Saharan conflict. Morocco has continued to oppose the addition of self-determination option from 2001 in the referendum process, yet this has been a bargaining chip for the Saharawi people. According to the Security Council Report (SC, 2019) the Baker Plan II was also rejected;

"James Baker proposed another plan (Baker Plan II) which provided for a referendum in four to five years' time and offered the inhabitants a choice between independence, autonomy or complete integration with Morocco. The plan was accepted by Polisario, Algeria and the Security Council but was rejected by Morocco."

This rejection was informed by the U-turn on the part of the United States and on the other hand France clearly specified that it was going to exercise its power of veto to the move. In 2007, Spain, United States under Bush and France were unequivocal about backing Morocco when it proposed to give Sahrawis self-determination in the backyard of the Moroccan Kingdom. This covertly means they do support Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara although their formal positions do not aptly show that. This explains why Morocco maintains its unwavering stance of not giving in to anything except its own proposition when the UN resolution 1754 was adopted in April 2007. Yet, in 2007 for instance, the proposal by the Sahrawis with a modicum of international lawfulness and as a counter to Morocco's proposal did not completely dismiss the option provided by Morocco. This was a diplomatic and accommodating conflict management style as a matter of principle. They have (Polisario) always been devoted to agreeing to the referendum results no matter the outcome and to negotiate in good faith with the Moroccan government with the United Nations taking the mediatory role (ARSO, 2007).

The continuation of the conflict deadlock has been predictable in spite of the appointment of an optimistic US diplomat in 2009 serving as the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy in the name of Christopher Ross (Zoubir, 2010). In August 2009, Ross convened an initial meeting in Austria meant to brainstorm sticking issues informally between the two major disputants. As would be expected, despite a promising statement at the close of the meeting no meaningful progress was seen. Instead, another informal meeting was called for in Armonk, New York predicated on the 2009 UNSC 1871 resolutions, despite all these meetings Morocco continued to enjoy its authority without noticeable restraints. Considering, the intransigent behaviour of Morocco with its external backers it may not be amazing that the New York second non-formal meeting arranged in preparation for the 5th round was doomed to failure, much like the preceding arrangements. The status quo is most likely to continue as long as the two parties do not agree to have a point of convergence in any prospective negotiations.

5.3. Weighing Against Meaningful Conflict Resolution: Geopolitics at Play

The role played by the UN when the Western Sahara was decolonised by Spain is indisputable. However, its success in the stand-off between Polisario and Morocco is yet to be seen unless the United Nations devises some means to unlock the logjam whose keys are in the hands of some permanent members of UNSC namely France and the United States of America. Although the two countries have publicly not recognised Morocco's annexation of the Western Sahara territory, they have surreptitiously permitted Morocco to strengthen its governorship on the contested territory (Zoubir, 2010). The elements leading to the stand-off are crafted in the United Nations resolutions encouraging the Sahrawis to forge with the coloniser (Morocco) a "mutually acceptable" solution politically, even though endorsing self-determination rights to the Saharawi people (Theofilopoulou, 2010). Such provisions appear to have been carefully crafted to give the two warring parties powers of veto, to the advantage of Morocco in this case.

As far back as 1975, several governments could not conceal their desire opposed to having the Sahrawi state becoming independent, fearing that it would fall under the dominion of Algeria ahead of their preferred Morocco. Further, a sovereign state of Sahrawi as suspected by France, would be a threat to Morocco where France itself has substantial interests culturally, militarily, economically and politically. Zoubir (2010), argues that, France is the major investor and biggest trading companion of Morocco whose foreign direct investments (FDI) is close to seventy per cent. It is therefore evident that Morocco's irredentism entitlements and France's unfaltering support to it certainly creates difficulties for the Algerian-French relationships. As noted by Zoubir (2009a), this support to Morocco is also given by the United States a renowned Arab world associate. It however appears that, the United States is not against the principle of self-determination as such, although its approach to the Western Sahara is informed by geopolitics. For example, during the second Baker Plan, the US supported the autonomy of Saharawi among other provisions and that if Algeria and Saharawi were agreeable to the plan, US was willing to foist it as a solution to the UNSC. It later reneged on its own undertaking maybe after considering that France had the potential to veto that standpoint.

In view of this, Miguel (2007) observes that the US had to support the autonomy proposition in favour of Morocco with its vagueness and illegitimacy. There is naivety in believing that the US can reverse this stance on the ongoing conflict in the purview of Trump's government. In 2009, Obama's letter to King Mohamed VI was unambiguous in dodging the autonomous plan and reads in part;

"I share your commitment to the UN-led negotiations as the appropriate forum to achieve a mutually agreed solution...My government will work with yours and others in the region to achieve an outcome that meets the people's need for transparent governance, confidence in the rule of law, and equal administration of justice..... The United States no longer supports or endorses the Moroccan autonomy plan . . . Instead, the administration has returned to the pre-Bush position that there could be an independent POLISARIO state in Western Sahara." (WorldTribune, 2009).

Even with this extract from a diplomatic report, according to Elmuhaier TV cited in Zoubir (2010), the US officials could neither deny nor confirm having any knowledge about it all, averring that the position of the US is one of encouraging disputants to stand by the United Nations guidelines when discussing sticking issues. Nevertheless, as provided for by number 1920 Resolution of the UNSC, it seems that the United States has not assumed any policy shift with respect to the Western Sahara. What could be sure is that the US is vacillating between its continued backing of the long established associate and not founding a new path opposed to it. The contradictory statements in the letter penned by Obama and what Hillary Clinton said when she visited Morocco is testament to policy inconsistencies.

Upon her Marrakesh visit while attending the Forum for the Future in 2009 and responding to the question as to whether her government had made a policy shift concerning the autonomy plan she had this to say; "Our policy has not changed, and I thank you for asking the question because I think it's important for me to reaffirm here in Morocco that there has been no change in policy." (Clinton, 2009a). In a separate interview explaining the meaning of 'her affirmation' regarding Morocco's autonomy in the Western Sahara after being interrogated she replied:

"This is a plan that originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration. Now, we are supporting the United Nations process because we think that if there can be a peaceful resolution to the difficulties that exist with your neighbours, both to the east and to the south and the west that is in everyone's interest. But because of our long relationship, we are very aware of how challenging the circumstances are. And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same (Clinton, 2009a).

In light of the sentiments above, the US demonstrated a hard stance to Morocco when Haidar experienced a hunger strike and it (the US) played an influential role to contain the situation (Rhanime, 2010). It was therefore made easy for Haidar to re-join the Western Sahara.

Though, leading advocacies, comprising Washington's American Jewish Committee pressed on the Senate of the US to back Morocco (Isacson, 2010); several Senators, subsequently, hard-pressed the White House to decide the conflict in favour of Moroccan. It has remained to be seen if the White House, in spite of the apparently impartial approach, capitulates to the Senate's push for approving Morocco's unlawful occupation of Western Sahara (Zunes, 2010), particularly risking the isolation of Algeria, a reputable oil producer and a key partner to the US in fighting against regional extremism (Zoubir, 2009b).

5.4 Violation of Human Rights

According to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG, 2014) most of the human rights defenders themselves had been subjected to serious human rights violations perpetrated by the authorities from Morocco. Three well known examples cited are from CODESA, CODAPSO and ASVDH. The CODESA President Aminatou Haidar who was abducted, subjected to torture and held incommunicado between 1987 and 1991 and later detained in the infamous El Aaiún's Black Prison between 2005 and 2006 all by the Moroccan government. The President of CODAPSO whose name is Sidi Mohamed Daddach, was incarcerated by Morocco for 24 solid years (1976-2001) and tortured with no treatment access. The ASVDH President Brahim Dahane, was abducted and held incommunicado for a total of 4 years from 1987 to 1991, incarcerated from 2005-06, between 2009 and 2011 without trial.

Apart from these popular activists, many people met by the All-Party Parliamentary Group gave evidence of forced disappearance, arrests and assaults following peaceful protests supporting the sovereignty of the Saharawi people. During the Group's visit to El Aaiún the APPG (2014) reports that police in Morocco executed extra judicially many people; court-marshalled the 'Gdeim Izik 25' and imprisoned for long, based on admissions made under duress. At the time of the report was produced, about fifteen Saharawi youngsters' had disappeared on the 25th of December 2005, big numbers of human rights activists had been detained and tortured, denial of freedom of expression to the Saharawi people, terrorisation and threatening of individuals making efforts to file violation of human rights in Western Sahara. Other international human rights institutions like the Robert F. Kennedy from the Centre for Justice and Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have also recorded these human rights violation cases among others (APPG, 2014).

5.5. The Economic Resources in Western Sahara

APPG (2014), reports that the significance of natural resources featured prominently in their consultations and how these were exploited by Moroccan government in the occupied territory. These included the mining of phosphates and angling. Job creation in the region benefits the settlers with menial jobs left for the Saharawis. The main industry in Dakhla is fishing constituting 5% only of the Saharawis (APPG, 2014). The APPG was advised that the Saharawi people were never part of the talks that led to the consummation of the EU-Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement. In 2013 alone, exported phosphate is reported to have been valued at about USD 330 million with the mining labour force of almost 3,000 employees of which 21 % are Saharawi, 4% of them being specialists. (APPG, 2014). The annexed territory holds twelve tomato farms either owned by Morocco or French firms, located approximately 40 kilometres to the North of Dakhla and exported to Europe. Not even a single farm is owned by the local people. The APPG learnt from the Saharawis that Morocco's expected departure from the Western Sahara was only possible when the resources are depleted.

5.6. African Union and SADC Commitments

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2018) observes that the African Union (AU) made a decision in Nouakchott, Mauritania at its 31st Summit to restrain attempts to restore peace in the Western Sahara. This decision was reached with the intention of supporting the United Nations led initiatives. In supporting this initiative, the African Union Chairperson (AUC) collaborates with the troika. The ISS (2018) contends that, this position pans out to the advantage of Morocco, whose belief is that any efforts by the AU alone are tilted against it. But, it will also be advantageous to other AU members who have never approved the AU's interference. In January 2018, the admission of Morocco into the AU and later into the PSC took another angle reflecting the position by AU towards the Western Sahara conflict.

According to ISS (2018), prior to this new approach, the continental body regularly pronounced the conflict as a 'decolonisation' crisis acknowledging the SADR as an AU member state. To date, Morocco views this acknowledgement as a show of partisanship especially that it has protested against the PSC's pronouncements of Western Sahara's independence. ISS (2018), argues that, the move to support in full the UN's bid by the AU in July 2018 appears to be a good score for Morocco. The United Nations General Assembly requested the conflicting parties in the Western Sahara to urgently find each other by negotiating in good faith without setting conditions. While the Secretary-General of the UN oversees the process, the UNSC takes the lead. This is a UN resolution that was made in April 2018.

The ISS observes that, this resolution made at the 31st summit could have been a move to appease the Western Sahara's well known supporters like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Algeria and some Southern African countries as well as Morocco's associates, hence precluding worsening relations. It is also noted that the most recent resolution by the African Union in January 2018 to authoritatively prop the UN endeavours is a political volte-face calling for 'joint AU and UN facilitated talks for a free and fair referendum for the people of Western Sahara (ISS, 2018). This result invalidates the 1978 heads of state's ad hoc committee on Western Sahara. The committee was set up at a time when the conflict was at its infancy back then.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) held a conference in Pretoria, South Africa on 26th March 2019 over the Western Sahara conflict (SADC, 2019). It was a Solidarity Conference with the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic to which member states conveyed their steadfast pledge of support and unity with the SADR to get freedom. The SADC current Chairperson and Namibian President Dr. Geingob was grateful to members whose unity of purpose was proven by attending the conference. He implored on the international community and SADC members to be resolute stating that, "Freedom is not a gift; it is a right for the people of Western Sahara. It is their birth right" (2019, online). Geingob added that, the aspirations articulated in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union can only be a success if there is absolute freedom for all the people of Africa. At same conference the former Head of State and Government of Nigeria Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo pleaded with the International Community to guarantee the full execution of the AU and UN Resolutions on Western Sahara. This includes consolidation of procedures against grabbing Western Sahara's natural resources and the self-determination right (SADC, 2019).

According to Ebrahim (2019), Morocco made some attempts without success to foil, obscure and disrupt this SADC solidarity conference. It did this by convening a parallel conference in Marrakech, Western Sahara, exactly on the same days SADC met in Pretoria. Morocco invited African Foreign Ministers offering to meet their full costs and those of journalists. Although Morocco hosted 40 African states, Ebrahim (2019) argues that most of the officials in attendance were not high-ranking and that the effort was an exercise in futility because the SADC

conference in Pretoria was a success. Lindiwe Sisulu, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation commented that;

“This conference is the realisation of a formally adopted resolution initiated by the SADC Council of Ministers in July 2017 in Tanzania, and binding on all of us. SADC hopes to come up with concrete steps in which we can strengthen and support the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination. It is this kind of solidarity and support for the people of Western Sahara that must give courage and impetus to their struggle for self-determination....It is incorrect to repeat regular references to our continent as 'post-colonial', when the people of Western Sahara are not free” (Ebrahim, 2019).

Madagascar and eSwatini (formerly, Swaziland) are SADC countries which were not in attendance, but opted to attend a conference convened by Morocco hence beneficiaries of Morocco's inducements through what has been referred to as the 'cheque book diplomacy' (Ebrahim, 2019).

6. Study Methodology

This was a desk research and case study as defined by Yin (2003) focussing on the conflict in the Western Sahara. A desk research was chosen for being less time consuming and less expensive and affordable. According to Flick (2009), a desk research affords an open-minded and wider approach to the research topic. The study relied on secondary data collected from speeches, media reports, research papers, conference proceedings, travelogues, internet, journalistic articles, books, proclamations and resolutions. Thematic analysis was the main method of data analysis. This involves the identification of significant study themes obtained from data (Fulcher, 2010). Thematic analysis implies that certain themes or categories have to be identified which sufficiently reveal textual data content (Howitt and Cramer, 2010). It is a data analysis method for classifying, examining and recording data patterns which emerge in a study hence its choice was made (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A theme can be described as a collection of related classifications carrying the same meanings. These meanings generally arise from an inductive investigative procedure underpinning a qualitative research paradigm. In this study thematic analysis helped to address the research topic and objectives while facilitating reportage and drawing conclusions and recommendations.

7. Findings and Discussion

The results and discussions are based on the following main themes; delayed peace and tranquillity, Africa's last colony, humanitarian aid, clean and safe water, AU Peace and Security Council effect, what next for Western Sahara?

7.1. Delayed Peace and Tranquillity

The Sahrawi conflict has increasingly become complex and fragile over the years, changing from humanitarian “emergency” condition to a “prolonged crisis” (Oxfam, 2015). The survival of the Sahrawi refugees in the last 43 years is owed to its internally well-structured systems and aid from the international community. According to Oxfam (2015), there are numerous teaching facilities including middle schools, primary schools and 49 preparatory schools. In 2013, the territory had 27 health centres, 4 provincial hospitals and 1 central hospital although all inadequately resources financially and human. Regardless of this infrastructure, the refugees still dwell under very unfavourable state of affairs such as worsening humanitarian crisis. Repetitive dried produce taken as food for several years has deleterious health and psychological effects coupled with uncertainties of the future.

7.2. Africa's Last Colony

Looking back, in 1963 Western Sahara appeared on the group of countries that were not self-governed in terms of Article 73-74 of the United Nations Charter's Chapter XI. Therefore, it fell under the UN's jurisdiction and principles for decolonisation guidance and monitoring process. Currently, it is the sole African territory still reeling in a state of non-self-governance, more so devoid of a formal power governing it. The Charter provides that the formal power for governing has to “recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount” accepting “as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security the well-being of the inhabitants” (UNCharter, n.d). Oxfam (2015), expresses concern over the non-availability of a power vested with the authority to administer the Western Saharawi, and that in such absence, chances for the international community are limited from accessing facts and figures or even to make recommendations that benefit the vulnerable Sahrawi people.

The UN Report S/21360 is unambiguous on the settlement and implementation arrangements for the referendum to break the impasse (Nizkor, 1990). Although the disputants' “perceptions concerning this referendum may have changed, they both continue to view it as the means of satisfying the prerequisites for self-determination” (UNSC, 2012). While some negotiation issues with respect to the conduct of referendum emerged, successive attempts came to nought due to “troubling problems” as well as “[the parties] unyielding adherence to mutually exclusive positions” (Theofilopoulou, 2006). The members of the UNSC have been caught up in a vicious cycle of bilateral and national interests' fluctuations instead of scientifically pursuing a permanent resolution marring the UNSC's credibility (Theofilopoulou, 2006). Traditionally, negotiations have been a preserve for the UN until recently when conflicting parties became responsible for their own conflict resolution initiatives with the UN playing a facilitator role (Oxfam, 2015). Paris, Washington and Madrid have appreciated the need “to address both the substance of a political solution and the means of achieving self-determination” (Oxfam, 2015; UN, 2014).

7.3. Humanitarian Aid

The World Food Programme (WFP, n.d) continues to provide food and drink to the Saharawi refugees ever since 1986 although Algeria started hosting them from 1975 making it “the world’s most protracted refugee crises.” Since that time, the WFP has provided almost similar (flour, rice, soya, sugar, oil, wheat and lentils) dried foodstuff monthly with quantities reduced beginning of January 2015 due to inadequate funding. Prior to this current basket of food, corresponding three kilograms of vitamin-rich fresh produce in the form of vegetables and fruits used to be part of the monthly supplements. Proteins obtained from mackerel tinned fish was discontinued in 2015 by WFP citing economic challenges, hence subjecting the refugees to undernourishment. Diabetes and hypertension are prevalent (WFP, 2013), an increase in stunted growth and high rate of anaemia starting from birth (Oxfam, 2015; UNHCR, 2015). Being a secluded area in the desert, trading of goods for dietary supplements is very limited.

7.4. Clean and Safe Water

Oxfam (2015), observes that there is adequate water with approximately two wells in Dhakhla, two in Smara and nine in Laâyoune. However, the degree of being salty is fairly high, high fluoride and nitrates well above World Health Organisation (WHO) presenting a major challenge in the use of underground water (de Minas, n.d; WHO, n.d). The water is generally contaminated posing high health hazards. Further to that, minimum daily water requirements are not met across all the camps (Oxfam, 2015).

7.5. AU Peace and Security Council effect on Western Sahara

A recent position taken by the AU Assembly to impose operational limitations on the PSC with respect to the Western Sahara may have far reaching negative consequences. With the PSC summits held biannually at the behest of Heads of state only on very critical issues, it remains to be seen if at all the Western Sahara crisis will ever be slated on the agenda. If it pops up on the agenda, binding resolutions are difficult to predict because the AU has put its weight behind the UN initiatives. However, there is a danger set in this precedent where some member countries may request a UN led process ahead of the AU-PSC if a crisis arise, thereby undermining the credibility and relevance of the PSC. Besides that, in the past, the committee of Heads of state have not exhibited adequate potential and political willingness to decisively deal with hot spots. More so that, the troika has no power and authority out of the Assembly and its mandate is not provided for in the Constitutive Act which is a glaring deficit of a legal backing. This explains why related arrangements could not post tremendous results in the case of South Sudan, Burundi and Libyan conflicts. That being as it may, it is still within the ambit and powers of the AUC chair to table the Western Sahara case at any PSC summits and AU Assembly.

7.6. What next for Western Sahara?

The African Union (AU) has limited its initiatives to broker peace and instead pledged to stand by the UN in dealing with Western Sahara crisis. This is despite the UN efforts from the 1990s that have not resolved the matter to its logical conclusion. The AU has also been a failure since the 1970s in the name of the OAU then. The troika which represents the AU in supporting the AU assisted by the AU Chairperson are less likely to make significant Western Sahara decisions. This is likely to benefit Morocco which has never trusted AU initiatives to the crisis. Perhaps, excluding the PSC from the equation was a premeditated move initiated by the AU whose member states are heavily divided on the Western Sahara conflict. The exclusion could be viewed as a ploy to avoid member-states from a direct confrontation. This leaves Western Sahara in a very precarious position unless African states collectively intervene with or without the African Union.

8. Conclusions

As long as the Western Sahara’s peace and tranquillity remain delayed and uncertain, Africa may not realise the AU’s Agenda 2063’s vision of a peaceful continent. Informed by social conflict theory and developments in the territory as revealed in this study, there is an urgent need to collectively take a position that will assist the UN-led initiative. The SADR and Morocco should be assisted more than before, to find each other and break the political impasse that has stretched for too long. It is here where the much talked about ‘African problems need African solutions’ should be put to test. It is inconceivable how concerted efforts by the African Union and all regional economic communities could fail to bring a lasting solution to the Western Sahara. It appears there is too much rhetoric of having solidarity with the people of Western Sahara without practical action to salvage the situation. African statesmen, academics and human rights defenders should rethink their African brotherhood, pan-African and religious values. It is this spirit which brought down apartheid in South Africa and other protracted struggles that saved many from anguish, conflict, colonial bondage and led to self-determination. The involvement of the UN-led efforts that have continually ended with a deadlock should be questioned although needed. Any invisible hand to the delayed peace should be urgently investigated and call a spade a spade in the interest of international law and in particular the right to self-determination. The African Union and other continental supranational bodies should ordinarily take the lead and not to play second fiddle. Advocacy for international humanitarian aid is needed but not a solution. If the sanctity of human life was at the core of most African leaders and not egoistic tendencies then Western Sahara’s conflict could have been history by now. In the meantime, the African Union through its chairperson, AU Assembly and Troika Summit should develop an operation tasking instruction which increases the frequency of the troika meetings in order to exert pressure on the UNPSC to expeditiously resolve this conflict.

Another deadlock by the UN should not be countenanced, if it happens plan B should be invoked and implemented sooner than later.

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