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*The of Western Sahara issue and regional and international tensions*

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Abstract :

The Sahrawi issue is considered one of the most complex current international issues, and one of the oldest conflicts in West Africa. It has worked to inflame the region for many decades, and with time the avenues for solution are shrinking due to the overlap of this issue with regional and international interests, that have found a great opportunity to impose geopolitical balances at the expense of the sahwari people and their legitimate rights to self-determination , and on the maghreb region and its strategic.

Keywords :

Western Sahara , polissario front, self-determination, United Nations, Morocco .

Introduction:

Western Sahara has an important strategic location linking it to North Africa and Europe across the Mediterranean, as well as many mineral wealth: phosphate, iron, copper, energy resources and precious metals, in addition to the enormous fish wealth, these economic potentials in light of a strategic geography have made the region a station of regional and international ambitions.

Western Sahara has known a European colonial scramble since the second half of the ninth century, in light of the stampede of Western imperialism according to the outcomes of the Second Berlin Conference, and thus the Spanish extended their control over the region since 1884, until its withdrawal in 1975, without holding a referendum on self-determination, to leave the region in a state of political vacuum, benefiting from the Moroccan Makhzen, which employed a political agenda that manipulates history and tribal ethnicity, considering that territory part of its territory, this thesis was met by the Polisario Front with rejection and demanded With full independence, with the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination in accordance with the decisions of the United Nations and its international charters.

This historical paper examines the roots and backgrounds of epilepsy, the historical context of the case and the agreement of the parties.

1- A brief history, geography and economy of Western Sahara

1-1-Historical characterization

According to the source texts, the history of the architecture of this geography dates back to about 300 BC¹ as sources called it different names, including the Berber country - The Coast of Barbaric² - and Libya³, the confused - Mashuasha - and Tamahu - Tamaha - and many of these names appeared in the pharaonic inscriptions dating back to the period between 1700 BC and 1300 BC, which indicates that this region was in itself and has cultural links with entities The prehistoric list, as described by Arab sources — the island of Morocco — is intended to link it to the Islamic Maghreb region.

After the Spanish occupation of the region, it was called the name of the Spanish Sahara, and we note that this name was restricted by the international texts between 1973 and 1974⁴, and after the withdrawal of the Spaniards from it, the forces of the Moroccan Makhzen intervened, and therefore the region knows a new name dictated by the current circumstances, so that the term - Moroccan Sahara - appears synonymous with new transformations. And contrary to the norms and principles of the United Nations approved by the United Authority⁵

1.2 -Geography

Western Sahara is located between a circle 20 and 28 degrees north of the equator and between the lines 8 to 20 degrees west of the Greenwich Line, bordered to the north by: Kingdom of Morocco, east of Algeria, southeast of Mauritania and west of the Atlantic Ocean, with a total area of 266,800 klm^{2 6}. Western Sahara is geographically divided into two parts:

- Sakia El Hamra

It is a wide geographical area extending from Cape Jupi to Cap Bojador,⁷ this region occupies a total area of 82,000 square kilometers, and its most important city is the city of Laayoune.⁸

- Oued Eddahab

It includes the geographical area extending from the south of Saguia el-Hamra and Cape Bojador to Cape Blanco⁹ and covers an area of 80 klm²¹⁰

The climate in these large areas varies, a sub-desert continental climate, characterized by liberal fluctuations due to the influence of oceanic currents, and an oceanic climate on the western coasts¹¹, whose temperature stabilizes within 32 degrees Celsius¹².

The population of Western Sahara, according to the availability of United Nations statistics for the year 2023, is estimated at more than half a million citizens¹³, but this number is distributed over a wide region in the north and south and even European countries, and a large number of them live in the camps of the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria.

Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the region has been under the influence of the Spaniards and the features of the geographical map have changed in preparation for political and economic domination. With the activation of the imperialist policy of fueling, excluding and controlling the economic potential throughout the country.

1-3- Economically

Western Sahara has many important natural resources, especially mineral and oil wealth as well as fisheries, and phosphate is the most important raw materials available and has formed an economic turning point in the region since its discovery in 1974 in the northern region of Abu Karaa, and the reserves are estimated at 10 billion by 10 billion tons and iron reserves are estimated at 700 million tons. In addition, the Western Sahara has many important metals such as copper, tin, gold and platinum in different proportion¹⁴.

As for oil, it began to be explored in the Western Sahara in 1961 by European companies, and appeared in limited quantities in 1969 in the maritime area, north of the city of Laayoune and at the entrances to the valley of Sakia El Hamra¹⁵.

Fish wealth is also one of the most important wealth in the region, and the income area is one of the most important ports Fish wealth is extracted by Moroccan ships and European Union ships, where Dakhla ranks first in Africa in unloading sardines in quantities estimated at 100,000 tons per year according to 2006 statistics¹⁶.

2- Western Sahara before the Spanish occupation

The colonial phenomenon is closely related to the movement of geographical discoveries and the European Renaissance, as the interest of European countries was based on controlling the coastal ports of the desert, and his ambitions were limited to taking them as crossings to transport the goods of the Sahara region, especially gold and slaves towards Europe, and the first beginnings were in the region with the Portuguese presence, where the port of Ceuta was controlled in 1415 and the Portuguese navigators were able to cross - Ras Boujadour - in the Western Sahara, and then the Spaniards descended to the liquids of the Western Desert from In order to benefit from fishing privileges in 1476¹⁷.

The sources also mention that during the year 1454 descended one of the Spanish centenarians called — Diégo Garcia — and took control of the Canary Islands and culminated his efforts by moving a Spanish campaign towards the Western Desert and set up a castle - Santacruz Dumar - in order to monitor ships in order to control the gold and slave trade, and since 1524 the desert tribes were able to eliminate the castle and the Spaniards fled from it¹⁸.

During the fifth and sixteenth centuries AD, Spain returned the ball with a group of settlers and were able to control the Saguia el-Hamra area, and their campaigns continued on the western coasts of the desert until the sixteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it should be noted that Spain was not the only country that was interested in these western desert regions, but many countries entered into this darkness, such as France, England, the Netherlands and Portugal, met by the desert tribes to address these foreign ambitions on their territories and properties. However, the first expedition of the desert in the modern sense was in 1850 in light of the increasing Spanish interest in these areas and they were able to enter the Wadi Eddahab area and turn it into a Spanish protectorate.¹⁹

3- Spanish occupation of Western Sahara

Despite the early interest of the Spaniards in the Western Sahara region, there were many obstacles that did not help the Spanish government to subjugate the region militarily, and the Spaniards were satisfied with commercial transactions on the coasts, despite the tense relationship in many cases with the Saharan tribes that were apprehensive in their dealings with foreign elements.

3-1--Congress of Berlin 1884-1885

The conference is considered a major base of European hegemony over Africa²⁰, It was attended by 16 countries: Germany, France, Britain, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Turkey, and the United States of America²¹, and Europe participated in it with its political weight in order to demarcate positions of influence in Africa²². According to the outcomes of this conference, Spain obtained Western Sahara²³, However, we must explain the reasons behind the Spanish occupation of Western Sahara, which we present in the following points:

- The strategic location linking the Western Sahara with Europe and Africa.
- Important waterfront overlooking the Atlantic Ocean
- Greed for the mineral, energy and fisheries resources of Western Sahara
- The importance of the area as a crossing for land and sea commercial convoys

3.2 - Stages of the Spanish occupation of Western Sahara

The occupation went through several stages, which we summarize as follows

3.2.1 The first phase 1884 - 1934

Spain acquired Western Sahara in accordance with the decisions of the Second Berlin Conference in light of the conflict between it and France, which was also interested in these neighboring territories and territories and for that it signed a set of agreements in order to alleviate epilepsy and colonial competition between them, and among those agreements we mention :

The Mani Agreement in 1900, during which the boundaries of the area of Saguia el-Hamra and Oued de Oro were drawn to be the southern border of Spain, and thus the Spanish imposed its protection on the area from a wide stretch from Tarfaya to Wadi Draa, and in 1922 it expanded in the Laayoune region and imposed its presence in the Smara region.

The secret agreement of 1904 that strengthened Spain's restaurants in Oued Eddahab and Saguia el-Hamra, and established the Spanish presence there.

The Madrid Convention of 1912 was a Franco-Spanish agreement, under which Spain recognized the French protectorate over Morocco, and France recognized the areas it controlled in the agreements before 1912.

3.2.2- Second phase 1934-1975

Beginning in 1934, the region of Saguia el-Hamra, Oued Eddahab, Tarfaya and Ifni were transformed under Spanish military rule, and the matter continued in this case until 1958, when a set of amendments occurred under which Spain ceded to Morocco the Tarqaia area, and in 1969 Spain ceded to Morocco the Sidi Ifni area located on the Atlantic coast, and thus the Spanish influence in southern Morocco shrank after 1969. The region became divided into two regions :

Sahara region: which divided it into the area of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro and imposed a military administration on it, and the Spanish government granted a moral personality to the Sahrawi people in the Spanish Parliament, and allocated three seats to the Sahrawi deputies, and Spain continued to proceed until the signing of the Treaty of Madrid in 1975 and the Spanish forces withdrew permanently from the region on 26February 1976²⁴ .

4- Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara

Morocco's demands for the annexation of Western Sahara date back to the mid-fifties, when the Istiqlal Party, led by Allal El Fassi, the author of a book and the White Book, which carries expansionist ideas at the expense of all neighbors, especially Algeria and Mauritania, felt that Morocco has expansionist ambitions in neighboring countries, especially Algeria, Western Sahara, Mauritania, the Sahara and Senegal. Allal El Fassi's speech stated that his independence movement demands." with all the parts of the Alawite empire that have not yet been liberated, which according to it begins from Tangier in the north to Senegal, and from the borders of the Algerian Sahara to the ocean."

For his part, Mohammed V tried to keep pace with this proposition because of its important repercussions in the stability of the Makhzen system, as this paper can be employed in the conflict with neighboring countries, especially Algeria, which adopted the principle of self-determination despite Moroccan bargains..

After Mohammed V, this obsession was enshrined in Hassan II in the 1972 Constitution²⁵ , which worked to constitutionalize the Moroccan outlook, after it became clear the seriousness of the Spanish proposal to withdraw from Western Sahara in implementation of United Nations Resolution No. 04/15, which is the right of colonial peoples to gain independence and hold a referendum in 1974²⁶ , so the Moroccan authorities began to wait for the opportunity to penetrate into Western Sahara, taking advantage of the political vacuum. Indeed, the Moroccan authorities decided to twist the idea through the Green March, which was launched on 06 November 1975, in which approximately 3500,000 Moroccans²⁷ marched from the north towards Western Sahara, and the Moroccan authorities manipulated international decisions²⁸ , taking advantage of the chord of history and belief²⁹ , and its goal was to annex the Saharan territories to Morocco and put the United Nations in front of a fait accompli.

In order to ensure the success of this experiment and to break the resistance of the Sahrawi population, the Moroccan Air Force blew up and exterminated civilians using incendiary white phosphorus bombs³⁰ .

And research into the reasons behind Hassan II's project is to dismiss the current partisan trends, accompanying the Moroccan segments of all classes in their orientations, as he worked to maintain the

stability of the Moroccan political system from any expected coup by the army against the king, and this project came in light of Morocco, which is divided against itself between currents loyal and rejecting the rule of Hassan II, which faced strong opposition taking advantage of the deterioration of economic conditions, so this was a new political orientation, which once it was resurrected The king was able to gather the poles of the political opposition and his popularity rose dramatically.

The aim was also to keep Algeria away from escorting a Sahrawi state that would be loyal to the Algerian regime and open a window to the ocean that could anger Morocco and keep it away from the African depth politically, economically and culturally.

In the midst of these events, the Madrid Agreement was signed on November 14, 1975 between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania, which provides for the transfer of the management of regional affairs to Morocco and Mauritania until Spain's withdrawal from the region.³¹

However, we recall that these consultations culminated in the conclusion of secret agreements between Morocco and Spain, through which Spain reserves the rights to invest in phosphates, fisheries, gas and oil exploration. Morocco has also held extensive consultations with neighboring countries, especially Mauritania and Algeria, through which it will discuss compromises in exchange for the recognition of Moroccan legitimacy in the Saharan regions.

-5Mauritanian presence in Western Sahara

Like the Moroccan Makhzen, Mauritania went in this direction, where its elites devoted themselves to the fact that the Oued Eddahab region was historically affiliated with the Emirate of Adrar, which was known as - Mauritanian society - so the participation of the former Mauritanian president: Mokhtar Ould Dada in the historic Madrid meeting imposed the Mauritanian point of view.

It should be noted that Mauritania did not trust the Moroccan policy towards Western Sahara, especially since the Moroccan project was beyond that and includes Mauritanian territory to the borders of Senegal, these fears were embodied by the Mauritanian Foreign Ministry submitting a memorandum to the United Nations dated 20 watts 1974 in which it demanded that a third proposal should be developed that includes the right of return of the Sahrawis to the Mauritanian homeland³².

However, the Moroccan intervention in the north of the Sahara, in accordance with the outcomes of the Green March, precipitated the Mauritanian authorities to review the previous agreements and moved quickly towards the northern border separating on October 31, 1975 and seized the area of Oued Eddahab only three days after Morocco moved south³³. In front of these seated junctures, Hassan II and Mokhtar Ould Dadda sat in secret negotiations on October 11, 1976, in which Ould Daddah met with Hassan II three times, to discuss the Saharawi affair and possible ways to address the issue, away from the international paper, especially the Court of Justice and the United Nations, taking advantage of the Spanish absence preoccupied with the disease of Geral Franco.

Thus, a new road map was drawn up that includes the division of the region between Morocco and Mauritania, and this was approved in a secret agreement between the two parties on November 27, 1976, in which Mauritania acquires the Valley of Oro and the southern provinces³⁴. However, the Moroccan manoeuvres, regional and international pressure and developments following the military coup precipitated Mauritania's withdrawal from the 1979 tripartite agreement and went along with the UN proposal for self-determination in Western Sahara³⁵.

6- Reactions of the parties involved in the Western Sahara conflict

This station is devoted to studying the reactions of the parties involved in the direct conflict in Western Sahara, as well as the countries and entities involved in this conflict, in particular Algeria, Mauritania, Spain and the African Union.

6-1- Position of the Sahrawi people on the conflict

The reaction of the Sahrawi people was very strong and touched various political, social and cultural aspects, as well as the participation of the classes of society in their various segments, thus establishing various organizations, including

•Student Organization for the Liberation of the Desert

This student organization was founded due to the great efforts of: Mohamed Sidi Ibrahim Al-Basir, who organized several demonstrations in the region against Spanish colonialism and his organization was known as the Movement for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro, and the aim was to establish a fully sovereign Sahrawi state, and the liquidation of Spanish colonialism from the region, and this organization on 17 June 1970 held a mass demonstration in the city of Laayoune demanding the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination³⁶

•Anti-glaucoma movement

Elias Bashir Faqi³⁷ is the actual founder of this libertarian political organization and his movement aimed at the independence of the Saharan provinces from Spanish imperialism.

•Sahrawi National Union Party

This party was founded at the end of the Spanish presence in the region and officially appeared in 1970, and it is believed that its establishment was at the behest of the Spanish authorities, as it guarantees its survival and economic position in the country until after the evacuation.³⁸

•Liberation and Unity Front :

A pro-Moroccan political organization, founded by the security and intelligence services in 1970 to activate the Moroccan agenda aimed at annexing Western Sahara to Morocco.

•Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro)

It is considered the most important and strongest political and military wings of the Sahrawi region, which took upon itself the liberation of the Sahrawi people, and broke the colonial domination, was founded on May 10, 1973 and adopted since its founding conference the armed struggle for independence³⁹. Only a few days later, it made its ideas a reality and launched its first attack on Spanish units on May 20 of the same year. After that, in its second congress from 25 to 31 August 1974, the Front contemplated specialized political bodies: the General People's Congress, the Executive Committee and the Political Bureau.

6.2- The position of the Moroccan Makhzen on Western Sahara

The political literature in Morocco has always considered Western Sahara as a Moroccan territory, and has established all available political, legal, historical and doctrinal channels, and harnessed its official and unofficial channels, to keep pace with the Moroccan illusion, as mentioned above, leading to the military advance that was embodied in the urban pleasure on 06 November, 1975⁴⁰; and the subsequent regional and

international maneuvers and massacres against the Saharawi people, in addition to the consolidation of secret agreements through which Morocco tried to control the territory in all available ways.

6.3- Mauritania's position

Mauritania's positions on the Sahrawi issue have varied, and we distinguish in that era two main phases:

The first phase before the military coup (1974-1979) embodied the policy of President Mokhtar Ould who worked hard to control the northern regions of the Saharan region, and tried to sit in secret negotiations with Morocco to share positions of influence as mentioned earlier .

The second phase after the overthrow of the rule of Mokhtar Ould Dada . The military council led by Mustafa Ould Mohamed Salek took over the administration of the country, and the council was completely different in its dealings with the Sahrawi file, as it announced according to the shooting with the Polisario Front, and this policy paved the way for withdrawal from the northern provinces to withdraw Mauritania from the tripartite agreement of 1979⁴¹ and then from the Saharawi scene completely.

6.4 - Algeria's position

Algeria's position was constant and did not change, and Algeria had no ambitions for Western Sahara, as it affirmed the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination, a principle on which the country's foreign policy has followed since independence, and was established by the statement of the first of November and the constitutions of the state after that, and Algeria also supported all international efforts calling for a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara, and enabling the Sahrawi people to regain freedom.

6.5- Spain's position on the crisis in Western Sahara

In the first direction, Spain welcomed the illiterate mission in Western Sahara and proposed to enable the Sahrawis to determine their fate, with a referendum that includes the population in the Saharan territories only and suggested not to expand it to the displaced in neighboring countries, provided that Spain retracted this proposal after external pressure, especially from Morocco and Mauritania, and expressed its desire to withdraw completely from Western Sahara, and also called on the United Nations to organize an international conference on the Sahara in which all parties to the conflict participate⁴² .

7- The position of international bodies on the Sahrawi issue

We summarize the study on the position of the United Nations body and the position of the Non-Aligned Movement along with the position of the countries of the Eastern camp (Russia)

7.1- The position of the United Nations on the Sahrawi issue

The first roots of the United Nations' interest in the Sahrawi issue date back to 1956 when the Swedish Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammer Schuld, sent a letter to Spain dated February 24, 1956, requesting information and clarifications on the territories under Spanish occupation, and in 1960 the United Nations presented a resolution in which it considered that the Spanish overseas colonies were the lands of a colony whose fate had not yet been decided.

On 14 December 1960, a new UN resolution numbered A1514 and 15 was passed stating that colonial peoples should be granted independence, affirming their right to self-determination. The United Nations Resolution No. 1514 (d88) was issued on 11 December 1963, which described Western Sahara as a non-autonomous territory, but Spain continued to maneuver in its policy, and with it the suffering of the

Sahrawi people increased, and after two years the United Nations again requested an end to colonialism by the Spaniards, and with increasing pressure, Spain decided to comply with the illiterate decisions and withdrew from Western Sahara on 26 February 1976.⁴³

After the withdrawal, the United Nations, in accordance with its tasks in maintaining security and peace and achieving self-determination of peoples, accompanied the Saharawi issue, and intensified its efforts to resolve the crisis in light of Moroccan intransigence and international fluctuations, especially after the demise of polarity, and thus translated the efforts of - Kofi Annan - the efforts of the United Nations and the special envoys on the Sahrawi issue in bringing views closer⁴⁴, provided that the scene after 2020 began to complicate a lot with the entry of new parties into the conflict arena.

7.2- Position of the Non-Aligned Movement on the Sahrawi Issue

Non-Aligned is an international body, its thought and philosophy are in support of the liberation and decolonization movement, provided that the most important decisions were before the Madrid Fruitful Decade, where its foreign ministers agreed in their session on 8-11 August 1972 to accelerate the liberation of the entire African continent from colonial restrictions, and submitted a memorandum to Spain intended to liquidate colonialism.⁴⁵

The second resolution of the movement issued by the Fourth Summit Conference, held in Algeria from 5 to 9 September 1973, in which it denounced the Spanish maneuvers in the region, and their manipulation of illiterate decisions aimed at self-determination, as the countries gathered in Algeria showed support for the Sahrawi people in self-determination, and since that date the non-aligned countries have adopted in all their groupings the Sahrawi issue, and worked to promote illiterate decisions aimed at resolving the Sahrawi crisis and accelerating self-determination⁴⁶.

7.3-- The position of the countries of the eastern camp on the Saharawi issue

The geopolitical interests of the eastern camp in the Far Maghreb controlled the strengthening of its position on the Sahrawi file, in light of the polarization with the Western camp, which was bargaining with Morocco with the Sahara file to pass its political agenda in the region, and the economic interests, especially in the field of phosphates and fisheries between the countries of the eastern camp and Morocco, controlled the imposition of themselves on the Sahrawi file, provided that Russia today supports the United Nations resolutions on the referendum to determine the fate of Western Sahara⁴⁷.

8-- CONCLUSION

The suffering of the Sahrawi people began since the Spanish occupation of the region in 1884, and despite the evacuation of European forces from the region in 1975, but this entered the region in another spiral, as the reservoirs that accompanied the evacuation of the Spanish forces were capable of complicating the political situation, as a result of Spanish conspiracies and intrigues, which opened the way for Moroccan and Mauritanian ambitions, to then enter different parties in the arena of conflict, and with the inability of the United Nations to find just settlements, the crisis knew a continuous escalation that would drag the region Magharebia as a whole has become a political and military attrition in light of the current developments and the race towards normalization, and different perceptions of the outcomes of the crisis can be developed according to the following:

Looking ahead to the future of the Sahrawi issue

Based on previous studies, we imagine some future scenarios on the issue of Western Sahara based on the balances of current international forces and changes and new trends in light of normalization with the entity state, and therefore the following can be put forward:

-It is the continuation of the status quo, because this situation serves the interests of the United States of America, France and Spain to enrich their interests in Algeria and Morocco in particular, and it can be said that this situation also serves Algeria as a pressure card on Morocco and keeping it away from the African Union.

-Independence of Western Sahara This opinion serves Algeria in particular and cherishes its place globally and regionally, and establishes a new state in the region that derives its political reference from Algeria, provided that this proposal remains elusive in light of the new international balances that seek to strike Algerian interests in the region, and keep them away from any regional political leadership.

-The possibility that Morocco will annex the Sahara region, and this possibility will have effects on the entire region, and could drag it into a war whose outcomes will be difficult to control, especially in light of the rapprochement between Morocco and the entity state, which is working hard to drag the region as a whole into a state of war.

-The possibility of a military clash may be launched by the Polisario Front on Moroccan military sites, which will accelerate the necessity of the Moroccan response, and this will expand the conflict, and the region will enter a phase of tension and tension between the poles of the crisis in Western Sahara.

-In the event of the political will of the parties to the crisis, it can also be a fundamental reason for the revival of the Arab Maghreb region, and turn from a demolition pickaxe to a pickaxe for building a civilization for the Maghreb countries and the Arab nation as a whole, all Arab countries, and turning the region into a global economic take-off center as it has all the elements of renaissance.

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