Why Would the US Stir Up Conflict in North Africa?

The Trump administration, which left the US political Olympus, actively sought to sow contradictions in the unity of the Arab world in the Middle East, to divide these countries, to force the states that yield to the influence of Washington to lose even more identity and independence in their politics, to obey only the dictates of the American-Israeli elite. It was to this end that active steps were taken to build a new configuration of the region with forceful pressure on Muslim countries for diplomatic recognition of Israel. Although it was clear to everyone, including in the US itself, that without a solution of the Palestinian question by Tel Aviv, no Abraham Accords made between the leaders of individual Muslim states and the Jewish state would bring these countries peace and political stability.

Trump’s initiatives to involve North African countries in the game of chess, conceived by his administration, in which Israel was supposed to be the leading figure, brought no calm to the political situation either. And Donald Trump’s baiting of Morocco on “US support for the kingdom’s sovereignty over the territories of Western Sahara in Africa” for agreeing to recognize the Jewish state has only exacerbated the situation in the region. Political activists in countries such as Algeria and Libya, which for decades have supported the Polisario Front, which insists on the creation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), opposed Washington’s decision.

As a result, the Polisario Front declared the end of a 30-year truce and mobilized the population to fight the “Moroccan occupiers” and began preparing for hostilities with Morocco, whose army also said it would conduct an operation in Western Sahara to “restore the unity of the nation.” The military has already entered the buffer zone, ignoring its obligations to the UN, which, in fact, was the trigger for a new armed conflict in Africa. The military operations have already started, involving the use of artillery and MLRs, as well as peacekeepers, who fired APCs to repel the Polisario’s attack in the direction of the border town of Guerherat. The main hope of the Polisario rebels is...
Algeria, which was already considering stepping up its forces against the kingdom. Mohammed Salem Ould Salek, one of the leaders of the Polisario Front, accused the Moroccan authorities of fomenting war in the region. In addition, he stated that his organization, as well as the SADR administration, had lost confidence in UN Secretary General António Guterres because his recent report did not comply with the letter and spirit of the joint UN-African Union (AU) plan to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara.

Another representative of Polisario Front, Sidi Mohammed Omar, quoted by AFP, believes that the Guterres report gives a false impression of calm, when in reality there is chaos in the region. He claims that the Moroccan authorities have grossly violated human rights in the occupied territories by abducting, torturing and killing Polisario and SADR functionaries.

At the same time, in spite of the ongoing tension around the problem of Western Sahara, it should be noted that since the arrival of the new US President Joe Biden in the White House, despite the breakdown of the truce, the rebels are not trying to make a serious offensive in the lands controlled by Rabat. They are clearly hoping that the new US administration may renegotiate Trump’s agreement with Morocco on Western Sahara. Moreover, Polisario is well aware that, without the necessary support from the international community and with insufficient firepower, a prolonged war with Morocco is clearly untenable. Therefore, the recent loud statements of the Polisario fighters are more a desire to draw international attention to the situation in Western Sahara, to get the support of world powers to put pressure on Morocco to withdraw royal troops from the occupied territories.

The Moroccan authorities are already accusing the authorities of neighboring Algeria of covertly supporting the Polisario. Other countries, in particular the United Arab Emirates, which opened a diplomatic mission in Western Sahara 10 days before the start of the war, are involuntarily brought into the conflict. In addition, the situation escalated after the government of Côte d’Ivoire, followed by several other small African states, including Gabon, Comoros, and Sao Tome and Principe, decided to open their consulates in Laayoune, a small town claimed by the SADR. In Western Sahara, such steps were perceived as flagrant violations of international law, UN and General Assembly resolutions on the decolonization of Western Sahara. The SADR protest was supported by Algeria, Polisario’s traditional sponsor, Namibia, and several other African countries that have recognized SADR independence.

The danger of the current escalating conflict in Western Sahara is that a new war could not only scorch Morocco and the SADR, but also spill over into Algeria. In this situation, with African countries and the Arab world deeply concerned about the events in Western Sahara, Egypt has taken the initiative to play the role of mediator and peacemaker, calling on Morocco, Polisario and Algeria to refrain from further escalation.

To better understand the situation, it is necessary to recall that Western Sahara was under Spanish control until 1953. But when a new political-military organization, the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Polisario), appeared in the territory, it began to advocate the independence of the two regions, with Algerian support, without ruling out the possibility of armed struggle. As a result, Madrid abandoned its colony and withdrew its troops, to be replaced by soldiers from Morocco and Mauritania. The fighting continued until 1991, when representatives of Rabat and Polisario signed a UN-brokered ceasefire agreement.

The people of Western Sahara were given the opportunity to determine the fate of their land, including through a referendum in 1992, but due to disagreements over who could participate, the vote did not take place. Subsequently, Morocco refused to support the idea of calling a new referendum, agreeing only to grant autonomy within the state. Today about 80% of Western Sahara is controlled by Rabat, the remaining 20%, which is mostly desert surface, has gone to the rebels.

On the issue of ownership of the disputed territories international community has remained neutral for the last 30 years, 117 out of 194 UN member states still do not recognize the independence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, in fact, as well as the sovereignty of Morocco over these lands. However, Algeria, Argentina and several other countries sided with the SADR, and France, along with 19 states, agreed to a plan for autonomy in the region. Forty-five states, including Russia, advocate a people’s right to self-determination.

As for Rabat’s resumption of diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, one can hardly expect any active steps from the kingdom in the near future. First, they clearly intend to wait for the new US administration’s decision on Trump’s “initiatives,” especially with regard to support for “kingdom sovereignty over the Western Sahara territories in Africa.” In addition, the Supreme Court of the Kingdom has already received a lawsuit from a group of lawyers.
demanding the cancellation of the deal with Israel, and until the end of this lawsuit the official Rabat is not willing to take any action against Israel.

As for the Biden administration, it had another urgent task to clean up Trump’s “Augean Stables,” only this time in relation to the situation in Morocco-Western Sahara-Algeria, and in the North African region as a whole.

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