

Palestinians Manage to Infuriate Moroccans By Supporting the Polisario Front

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Not content with having enraged the Emiratis by defacing, stepping on, and setting fire to their flag and the image of their leader, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed, the Palestinians have also described the United Arab Emirates as having “betrayed” the Palestinians and, for good measure, claiming that the Emirates “stabbed us in the back.” Palestinians have also tried to prevent Emiratis from praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and when ten of them did so, Palestinians described their presence as a “desecration” and on social media called for destroying the carpets that the inoffensive Emiratis had sat on and thereby befouled.

Now it seems that the Palestinians have managed to infuriate

the Moroccans. And it had nothing to do with Israel. It's all about the Polisario Front, and the hostility between Algeria and Morocco because of that group. The story is here: "Moroccans outraged by Palestinians' 'support' for rebel group," by Khaled Abu Toameh, [Jerusalem Post](#), November 17, 2020.

The Polisario Front seeks independence for the Western Sahara, which Morocco annexed in 1975. The Front has been fighting for decades, beginning in 1973, to end the Moroccan presence in the territory. Algeria, which remains the host and main supporter of the Polisario Front, backs to the hilt the Front's desire to become independent from Morocco; many Moroccans believe, however, that Algeria's ultimate aim is to annex the Western Sahara, which is the world's largest producer of phosphates. The Moroccans claim the Western Sahara as their own, though they have also said that they intend to give the area a large degree of local autonomy. For the past 30 years, a ceasefire has been observed between the Polisario Front and Morocco. But this November, the Polisario Front, which has been steadily supported by Algeria, has announced it no longer will respect the 30-year ceasefire.

And now the Palestinians, who have always been considered much closer politically to Algeria, a country run by a military junta that descends from the revolutionary FLN, than to Morocco, ruled by a pro-Western king, have stepped into the conflict over the Polisario Front – and not in a way that has been helpful to their cause.

Mixed signals are being given by the Palestinians. First, the Palestinian Youth Organization announced that it was supporting the Polisario Front. Immediately following, the Palestinian Embassy in Rabat distanced the PA from that announcement, and affirmed its support for Morocco's "unity, safety, and security," without, however, mentioning its opposition to the Polisario Front.

Then came yet another expression of Palestinian support for the Polisario Front, echoing the original statement by the Palestinian Youth Organization and contradicting what the PA's ambassador in Rabat had said. That new statement came from Amin Maqboul, the Palestinian ambassador to Algiers:

...the Palestinian ambassador to Algiers, Amin Maqboul, was quoted as expressing support for the Polisario Front.

Maqboul, in an interview with an Algerian newspaper, said that the statement issued by the Palestinian embassy in Morocco does not represent the official position of the PA. The PA, he said, has not commented on recent developments in the Western Sahara...

Maqboul later stated (prompted by Ramallah) that the Palestinians remain committed to UN resolutions to find a political solution for the Western Sahara. He expressed the hope that the "brothers in Algiers and Morocco would be able to resolve the issue and live in peace and tranquility." In his second, "clarifying" statement, Maqboul did not take back his endorsement of the Polisario Front, but merely expressed the standard noncommittal wish for "an agreed political solution."

The Palestinian Embassy in Morocco was only engaged in damage control when it took issue with the support given to the Polisario Front by the Palestinian Youth Organization. The Palestinians are much closer in their views to Algeria, an anti-Western, "revolutionary" regime than they are to Morocco, a monarchy that, unlike Algeria, remains close to the West, especially to its former ruler France; the Moroccan elite still sends its children to be educated in French universities. Furthermore, while Algeria has been consistently anti-Israel, in Morocco great care has been taken, at the behest of King Mohammed VI, especially in recent years, to emphasize in his kingdom's school books the enormous cultural

role played by Moroccan Jews in the country's history. The current king's senior advisor, Andre Azoulay, is a Moroccan Jew who was also a senior adviser to the present king's father, King Hassan II. All this has led many to suggest that Morocco may be among the next two or three Arab states to normalize relations with Israel. And Morocco is keenly aware that half a million Moroccan Jews live in Israel, and might someday serve as a cultural and economic link between the two countries.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry in Ramallah said in a statement on Tuesday, in an attempt to ease tensions with Morocco, that the Palestinians do not intervene in the internal affairs of the Arab countries.

The claim that the Palestinians "do not intervene in the internal affairs of the Arab countries" is nonsense. Didn't the Palestinians interfere in Lebanon, fighting on the side of Muslims in the long (1975-1990) Lebanese Civil War? Didn't Palestinians openly take the side of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Mohamed Morsi, in Egypt? Didn't Palestinians take the side of the Islamist Rached Ghannouchi in Tunisia? Haven't the Palestinians denounced the Emirates and Bahrain for normalizing relations with Israel? Ramallah was simply engaged in ineffective damage control.

The ministry's statement, however, drew sharp criticism from the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, a political party in Morocco.

The party took the PA to task for failing to explicitly support the Moroccan people in their "just" conflict with the Polisario Front. The Moroccan party said that the Palestinians' "alleged neutrality" in the conflict was tantamount to a "poisoned dagger" against Morocco, which has long supported the Palestinian issue and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The Moroccans have not been pleased with what they see as Palestinian support for the Polisario Front. The Palestinian Youth Organization unambiguously endorsed the separatist movement that has been Morocco's main concern for the last 40 years. The attempt by the Palestinian ambassador in Morocco to smooth things over was quickly followed by yet another declaration of Palestinian support for the Polisario Front, this coming from the PA's ambassador in Algiers, Amin Maqboul. Under pressure from Ramallah, he tried unconvincingly to moderate his remarks, but the Moroccans were not buying it. He did not say he stood by Morocco and opposed the Polisario Front, which is what the Moroccans needed to hear, but only that the Palestinians "remain committed to UN resolutions to find an agreed political solution" and he hoped that the "brothers in Algiers and Morocco would be able to resolve the issue and live in peace and tranquility." That did not undo the damage of his original statement; Moroccans on social media also reminded one another that Amin Maqboul had often appeared in public with members of the Polisario Front – a clear sign of his support.

That is where things stand: the Moroccan Socialist Union of Popular Forces (SUPF) has denounced the Palestinians for their supposed "neutrality" which, the SUPF declares, is really a "poisoned dagger" plunged into Morocco, and it has reminded the ungrateful Palestinians of the diplomatic support they received in the past from the Moroccans.

The Moroccan fury will not be assuaged. The Palestinian Youth Organization and Ambassador Amin Maqboul have clearly taken the side of the Polisario Front, and the studiedly neutral statement from Ramallah was an example of unpersuasive fence-mending, that enraged the Moroccans still further with the obvious unwillingness of the Palestinians – "after all we Moroccans have done for them" – to unambiguously distance themselves from the Polisario Front. The Morocco World News report on the Moroccan-Palestinian contretemps bears the title

“Palestinian Ambassador to Algeria Attacks Morocco’s Territorial Integrity.”

Not for the first time, the Palestinians have been their own worst enemies. And what better way for the Moroccans to express their extreme displeasure with the Palestinians than by establishing diplomatic relations, and even perhaps normalizing those relations, with Israel, where a half a million Moroccan Jews now live? For the Palestinians, when it comes to Morocco, things can only get worse.

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