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The Algerian Crisis of 2019 and the Second Arab Spring Uprising: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In 2019, Algeria was in turmoil that was reminiscent of the 2011 Arab Spring Uprising (ASU). Interest in Algeria's unanticipated resentment is predicated on the fact that Algeria is not only the largest country in Africa but also the largest country in the Arab world and ridiculed the ASU with the impression that it will remain peaceful. The broad objective of the study is to evaluate the Algerian Crisis of 2019 in the light of the Second Arab Spring Uprising (SASU). To this end the study posed the following research questions: How did the military facilitate into a revolution the popular protest in Algeria? What sustained Bouteflika as President of Algeria for twenty years and why was his fifth term agenda foiled. What is the nature and causes of SASU in Algeria? The study is guided by the theoretical framework of regime theory as propounded by Stephen D. Krasner. The study concludes that the fifth term agenda of the President Bouteflika was the casus belli of the crisis in Algeria. The study recommends that genuine democratic government should be instituted in line with the agitations of the broad mass of Algerians.

Key Words: Algeria, Bouteflika, Protest, ASU, SASU

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring Uprisings (ASU) began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain in 2011. It also impacted on Jordan, Morocco and Oman but spared Algeria for obvious reason. In 2019 (eight years later) Algeria was in turmoil with a crisis reminiscent of ASU. Interest in Algeria's unanticipated resentment is predicated on the fact that Algeria is not only the largest country in Africa but also the largest country in the Arab world as well as the Mediterranean basin. By its very strategic location and AS orientation Algeria possesses the key to peaceful coexistence in northwest Africa (Mehdi 2020, Bensemra 2019).

The broad objective of the study is to evaluate the Algerian Crisis of 2019 in the light of the Arab Spring Uprising. To this end the study posed the following research questions: How did the military facilitate into a revolution the popular protest in Algeria? What sustained Bouteflika as President of Algeria for twenty years and why was his fifth term agenda foiled. What is the nature and causes of the Second Arab Spring Uprising in Algeria?

Regime theory is the theoretical framework of the study. Regime theory has to do with institutions or rules that regulate the decision-making processes in the international system. Regime in international relations is often used interchangeably with institution and is predicated on the explicit or implicit rules, principles, norms and decision-making procedures whereby actors and expectations converge in a given issue area. Stephen D. Krasner is a major proponent of the regime theory and it revolves around institutions with decisive rules to facilitate a convergence of expectations (Krasner 1983). Regimes make available a diversity of specification, support, enforcement, coherence, and legitimation to the governance of an issue area by contributing to the development of the laws, codes of conduct, expectations and continuity of habits (Hasenclever 1997). Regimes could be likened to multilateral agreements among states with the objective of regulating

national actions in an issue area. It defines the array of acceptable state action by clearly delineating the injunctions. Regimes facilitate the institutionalization of aspects of international system by regulating expectations (Haggard and Simmons 1987).

The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. It consists of content and documentary analysis whereby data was gathered mainly through secondary sources and reviewed. The article is divided into five sections. We are already in the first section which is the introduction. The second section would discuss President Bouteflika and the foiled 5th term agenda while the third section would discuss popular protest and the role of the military in Algeria's revolution. Section four is the second Arab Spring and its causes in Algeria while section five is the conclusion and recommendation.

PRESIDENT BOUTEFLIKA AND THE FOILED 5TH TERM AGENDA

Abdelaziz Bouteflika took the mantle of leadership as President of Algeria in 22 April 1999 and immediately commenced a shuttle diplomacy to redeem the battered image of Algeria. At this time the Algerian Civil War was still raging but under his watch the gruesome Algerian War ended in 2002 wherein he intensified the Liamine Zéroual project that revolved around granting amnesties to combatants. Amnesties through referendum were granted to former warlords when Bouteflika took over the realms of power in 1999 and few years into his second tenure in 2005 (Bouandel 2019).

The Civil Concord of 1999 and the Charter on National Reconciliation of 2005 made the warriors to lay down their arms and this brought lasting peace, security and stability in Algeria for a long time thereby legitimizing his government. The fair and equitable distribution of revenues from hydrocarbons was another major achievement of Bouteflika that endeared him to the broad mass of the people in his first decade in power. Through oil revenues he provided cheap housing and food subsidies (Aljazeera 2019).

Bouteflika intensified consolidation of power after he was elected for a second term in 2003 (Tlemçani 2011). To this end he radically developed Tlemcen his home state through infrastructures and empowered the people of that region with lucrative and strategic jobs. It is estimated that about \$10 billion of public funds was invested in various developmental projects for the transformation of this region. This shifted the power center from the east to the west of Algeria (Aziz 2019, Tlemçani 2008).

It is worthy to note that Algeria has been ruled by the same cartel wherein Bouteflika belongs since independence in 1962 after the fierce war of independence with France [1954-1962] (TRT World 2021). This elite group fulcrum of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) was declared the only lawful party of Algeria in 1963. The claim to power of this nationalist movement cum political party rest on historic achievements predicated on the war of independence victory but it has neither been authoritarian nor democratic in orientation (Aljazeera 2019).

Algerian parliament was practically the rubber stamp for the implementation of Bouteflika's policy and his decisions were effectively unrestrained. As a matter of fact in his governance Bouteflika mainly surrounded himself with people he directly choose and they were largely his family or clan members, friends or close associates, people from Western Algeria etc. to consolidate his power base (Aljazeera 2019).

The 1996 constitution of Algeria dictates only two terms for the president but a few years into his second term in office Bouteflika started nursing the ambition of remaining in power for life (Zoubir 2000). For this reason in 2008 Bouteflika influenced the amendment of the 1996 Constitution. Members of the parliament were overwhelmingly enticed and a broad mass of them voted for the removal of the two-term limit of presidential tenure in office. It was no longer limited to two terms but as many times as desirable thereby assenting to the possibility of Bouteflika as president for life (Aghrout, Zoubir 2009).

With the 2008 constitutional amendment Bouteflika contested for a third term and emerged as president and again in 2014 contested and won for a fourth term in office. Bouteflika's victory for the fourth term in power was a wonder to a great majority of the Algerian population because of the major obstacle of health challenge. Protracted health challenges including stroke besieged Bouteflika. The stroke made Bouteflika unable to speak in 2013 and confined in totality to a wheelchair (TRT World 2021).

He ruled Algeria as president from the wheelchair and was yearning for a fifth uninterrupted five-year term while in the wheelchair. The constitutional amendment of 2016 reintroduced the two-term limit to presidents but reiterated the fact that the law was not retroactive thereby allowing Bouteflika to seek for a fifth term as President (Aljazeera 2019). Ailing President Bouteflika has been in power for 20 years and wants to remain in power despite his old age and health predicament. "As Vox's Alex Ward explained at the time, the 82-year-old president had led Algeria since 1999 despite suffering a stroke in 2013 that left him paralyzed and basically mute" (Brown 2019).

Bouteflika started having health challenges as far back as 2005 which was compounded in 2013 when he was paralyzed – impairing his ability to speak and write effectively and by extension hampering his ability to efficiently govern Algeria (Yassin 2019). Because of the ailment Bouteflika rarely makes public appearances. A meeting with Saudi crown prince Salma was cancelled in December 2018 because of ill-health (Djelloul 2019).

These constraints notwithstanding the candidacy of Bouteflika for president was filed for the fifth time on March 3, 2019 by his campaign director which was at odds with Algerian constitution that requires the physical presence of a presidential candidate for this process. This action was considered appalling and abysmal by many Algerians (Adlène 2019).

Bouteflika's detractors are of the view that he is physically and mentally impaired and therefore incapable of ruling Algeria. This argument is countered by the supporters of Bouteflika who assert that his physical incapacitation notwithstanding that he retains normal mental capacity and understanding of his leadership assignments (Porter 2019).

Opposition members are pointing accusing fingers on Said Bouteflika – the younger brother of the President saying that he and some powerful elites are taking advantage of Bouteflika's ill health to grab power. Most of the vital decisions of the presidency are said to be manipulated by them in the name of President Bouteflika (TRT World 2021).

These manipulations were halted when the military decided to hearken to the voices of protesters. Bouteflika was declared unfit for a fifth term in office by the Algerian Army under the leadership of Ahmed Gaid Salah on March 26, 2019. On April 1, 2019 – Salah publicly advised Bouteflika to resign immediately. Bouteflika complied and resigned as president on April 2, 2019 (Nossiter 2019).

3. POPULAR PROTEST AND THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN ALGERIA'S REVOLUTION

Beginning on 13 February 2019, there was popular protest in Algeria which culminated into a revolution popularly called the revolution of smiles with the deposition of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The revolution of smiles is sometimes also referred to as the Hirak Movement (Belkaïd 2019).

The revolution began with major demonstrations and protests that gathered the broad mass of the people beginning in Kherrata on 16 February 2019. They were protesting against the fifth term bid of President Bouteflika and the prevalent political situation. Commencing in February 2019, there

were massive protest demonstrations which engulfed Algeria demanding the removal of the government of Bouteflika and in its place the installation of a transition government (Zerrouky 2019).

Three days after the Kherrata incidence, a very large poster of President Bouteflika was pulled down from city call and assaulted. Thereafter another giant poster of Bouteflika was torn down and trampled. At the landmark central office the portrait of Bouteflika was also dragged down and assaulted on 22 February 2019. Dragging down of the large posters of Bouteflika was informed by the impression that there are big posters of a president but no president in reality (LaTribune 2019).

These initially skeletal demonstrations intensified and engulfed people of all ages and walks of life protesting against Bouteflika's fifth term agenda and for genuine democracy and rule of law. The pattern of demonstration in Algeria is unique with tinctures of peaceful festivity. It normally takes the shape of a festival wherein people sing popular songs and anthems while presenting their demands to people at the helm of affairs. Those not able to join the street carnivals stay in strategic balconies to lend their voices of support to the demonstration (Djelloul 2019).

Algerian protest was virtually leaderless but some groups like the Mouwatana movement played a major role in coordination (BFMTV 2019). The leaderless movement was generally referred to as "*Hirak*". Their massive demonstrations were on weekly bases dominated by young people but encompassed people of all ages and gender (Zoubir 2020). Out of the seemingly leaderless demonstrations a powerful civil society evolved with amazing organizational skills. No less amazing was the increasing politicization of the civil society groups. There were strikes and demonstrations by university students, teachers, lawyers, judges and others (Aljazeera 2019).

The demonstrations were generally nonviolent and peaceful with protesters making peaceful gestures towards the police. Cleaning the streets after every demonstration is one unique show of civic responsibility that was exhibited by Algerian protesters (Djelloul 2019).

Despite this peaceful disposition there were fierce verbal attacks demonstrating their grievance and desires. Some of the speeches were highly inciting and vociferous thereby attracting the attention of security operative but clashes with the police were scanty. The one million-man march of 1-Mar-2019 was said to be very peaceful (Djelloul 2019). This was partly because the "Pacifist and Civilized Walkers' 18 Commandments" by Lazhari Labter was made popular through massive circulation in social media (Bourdillon 2019).

They also filled the social media such as Facebook and Twitter with messages of hope with charming smiles depicting a positive future after a political change for true democracy in Algeria (Djelloul 2019). The huge demonstrations on February 22, 2019 and beyond were spectacular in their peaceful orientation and the social media played a vital role in spreading the nonviolence message (Aljazeera 2019).

Bouteflika had wished that the protests would not be peaceful so that he would take advantage of violent riots to impose a state of emergency and order military intervention. This may have saved the precarious situation for his benefit (Aljazeera 2019). Notwithstanding the positive disposition of Algerian protesters, on 28 February, 2019 a total of twelve journalists were arrested by the police when a protest on press censorship was ongoing (TheEast African 2019).

More than a million people were involved in the Algerian demonstration but a private television channel reported that one million people were involved in the protest of March 1, 2019. This is a conservative estimate because in reality about three million people demonstrated on 1 March 2019.

The **army** played a vital role in the success of the Algerian revolution. From the very beginning the military said that there is no intention to intervene in the ongoing demonstration which invariably means that the people will determine who rules them (Aljazeera 2019). General Ahmed Gaid Saleh – Algerian Army Chief of Staff and a close ally of President Bouteflika had on 10 March, 2019 made a presentation to officers announcing that there is a common vision between the army

and the people as to how the future of Algeria will be. This statement apparently motivated a 5-day general strike which commenced the day after the speech (Michaelson 2019).

On 26 March 2019, the Army under the leadership of General Salah paved the way for the success of the revolution through his speech that advised the Constitutional Council to highlight the ill health condition of Bouteflika and to declare him unfit for a fifth term as President. On the strength of these pressures, Bouteflika announced that he will not run for a fifth term but step down at the end of his term. The announcement was vague without a specific date and this made the public to be doubtful and it triggered more protest. For this reason, the Army led by General Salah advised that Bouteflika should resign straightaway. Without further delay Bouteflika resigned (Alloui 2019). “On 2 April, under unbearable pressure from the military, Bouteflika announced his resignation.” (Aljazeera 2019) He was succeeded by Abdelkader Bensalah – who became interim President as provided in the Constitution of Algeria.

Gaïd Salah was hitherto one of the loyal supporters of Bouteflika who was also interested in the will of the people as made manifest in the massive protest. As a matter of fact the army as displayed by the Chief of Army Staff sided with protesters against the fifth term bid of Bouteflika. Without the pressures of the army, the revolution may not have succeeded as fast as it did (Aljazeera 2019). From every indication “Bouteflika would have clung to power indefinitely since his cronies had so many interests at stake” (Aljazeera 2019). This is buttressed by McDougall (2019) who said the army had realized that drastic measures were required to appease the masses and save the country.

4. SECOND ARAB SPRING AND ITS CAUSES IN ALGERIA

The 2019 uprisings in Sudan and Algeria are reminiscent of the Arab Spring Uprising (ASU) and pointer to a Second Arab Spring Uprising (SAPU). Evidently, the conditions which sparked the ASU are still prevalent in these countries and the revolution in Algeria like the ASU were demonstrations for rule of law and against blatant exploitation of the masses (TRT World 2021).

ASU was a chain-succession of anti-government demonstrations, revolution, uprisings, and armed rebellions that began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain in 2011. It also impacted on Jordan, Morocco and Oman. ASU started with a single act of defiance by Mohammed Bouazizi (a Tunisian fruit vendor) who immolated himself on 18 December, 2010 (set himself ablaze to death as sacrifice) in protest of police corruption and ill treatment. This very bitter one-man protest of Mohamed Bouazizi – setting himself on fire to death while protesting in front of a government office against the arbitrary seizing of his wares and government insensitivity, sparked the **Jasmine Revolution** in Tunisia which spread to other countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The collectivity of the Jasmine Revolution of Tunisia and those of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain is the ASU (Noueihed 2011, Fahin 2011).

A great majority of the revolutionary incidences of the ASU occurred in the spring of 2011. The one man protest of Tunisia was so volatile that it led to the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011 – a few weeks after the one man protest. President Ben Ali has been the autocratic president of Tunisia for 23 years but the overwhelming revolution made him to abdicate and fled into exile in Saudi Arabia (Graham-Harrison 2018). The overthrow of Tunisia's President Ben Ali spurred pro-democracy activists in the region and began the protest of similar authoritarian or corrupt government in their own countries (BBC News 2019, History.com 2018).

ASU was caused by the desire of millions of people to be liberated from dictators, autocrats and oppressive regimes. There has been concentration of wealth in the hands of monarchs in power for decades. The protesters were agitating for greater opportunities to alleviate their economic hardship and reforms especially against decades of autocratic rule “They wanted a say in running their countries, an end to corruption and greater opportunities in economies stalled by cronyism, fraud and bureaucracy” (Graham-Harrison 2018). High unemployment, extreme poverty, corruption,

food inflation, poor living conditions and low standard of living were prevalent in these countries (except Libya) as at the time of the uprising. They were also demonstrating for social freedom, freedom of speech, political freedom, and greater participation in a more democratic political process (Spencer 2011, BBC New 2011).

The revolution that swept across nine countries would have engulfed Algeria but for a combination of factors. Top on this list is the collegial pattern of Algeria's political despotism. The political system of Algeria is such that power is decentralized and not concentrated in the hands of a royal family or few individuals. It is hinged on oligarchic alliances of large cartels that have a reasonable chunk of power and restrained individual dictatorships. This type of political system is very resilient and consolidated the power base of the government of President Bouteflika. The system was less fragile and more resistant to revolution than the countries that experienced the 2011 Arab Spring (Hamza 2012).

Financial gratifications of the people by Bouteflika petro-dollars arrangement was another major factor that made Algeria to enjoy peace when other states around it were engulfed in the Arab Spring revolution. The people directly had a feel of the oil money through subventions, scholarships, housing schemes, free medical services and several subsidies which pacified the population and contributed to relative longevity of Bouteflika's regime (Hamza 2012).

The bitter experience of the civil war of the 90s has created a phobia for war which tampered revolutionary zealotry in Algerians. There was a fierce civil war in Algeria (1999-2002) leading to the killing and maiming of millions of people. The war traumatised Algerians and made them very desirous of peaceful coexistence. This peaceful disposition was further enkindled with the crisis that engulfed Libya, Yemen and later Syria after their revolutions (Hamza 2012). In a nutshell, abhorrence to the disastrous consequences of war tamed the attitude of Algerians in the first Arab spring. This also conditioned their very peaceful disposition during the course of their protest until a successful revolution. Invariably a "complex political configuration and the scars of civil war helped Algeria avoid the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings" (TRT World 2021).

This was garnished by the role France played in the Libyan crisis intervention that plunged Libya into a failed state. Algerians have an aversion for France and this is predicated on its bloody fight against the colonisation of France which culminated into the 1962 independence. Algeria is one of the very few African countries that actually fought for independence which was bloody and protracted. Invariably France had a rocky history with Algeria (Werenfels and Luca 2019, Bryant 2019).

Things started to fall apart after some years and it culminated into the 2019 uprisings in Algeria which alongside the uprisings in Sudan are collectively referred to as SASU. The causal factors of SASU in Algeria are myriad. It revolves around the 5th term bid for president by Bouteflika, the dwindling economy and corruption. To these we turn.

Announcement of the 5th term bid for president by Bouteflika was the immediate cause of SASU. The candidacy of Bouteflika was announced on February 10, 2019 in the news agency of Algeria and other media. It was to the effect that Bouteflika will seek for re-election in the presidential polls of April 18, 2019. Bouteflika has been ruling Algeria for 20 years and at age 82 years with major health challenges sought for a 5th term to the displeasure of a great majority of Algerians (Djelloul 2019, TRT World 2021). This triggered major protest beginning on February 13, 2019 in Bordj Bou Arreridj. It spread to Kherrata and Khenchela on 16 February 2019 before spreading to all the provinces of Algeria protesting against Bouteflika 5th term bid (Aljazeera 2019). Demands for the resignation of Bouteflika ensued as the protest intensified (Brown 2019, Djelloul 2019). Opposition of his candidacy was hinged on the humiliating feelings of Algerians for Bouteflika as President on a wheel chair and not because of unconstitutional issues (Aljazeera 2019).

Dwindling economy was a major causal factor of SASU. Algeria was entangled in economic crisis which began when the price of oil began to drastically decline in 2014 (Zoubir 2020). The situation was precarious for Algeria because its budget revenue is overwhelmingly predicated on it. As a matter of fact, 97% of Algeria's foreign earning is from oil. Revenue from Algeria Oil and Gas Company called Sonatrach declined from \$76 billion in 2008 to \$33.2 billion in 2017 because of collapse in oil prices (Porter 2019). Also, the currency reserve of Algeria was \$179 billion as at 2014 but this dwindled to about \$79.8 billion as at 2018 (Zoubir 2020). Algeria has over the years been a one-commodity producing state focusing on oil and gas and didn't diversify its economy (Zoubir 2020). The attendant economic crisis had hindered the ability of government of Algeria under the leadership of Bouteflika to provide some services it has been providing in the past. The inflation caused by the economic crisis has also increased the cost of living and made it very difficult for people to secure daily needs (Porter 2019). Meanwhile the unemployment rate was almost 12% (Djelloul 2019).

Flagrant corruption was another factor that caused SASU. Corruption outrages were extensive, giving rise to colossal damage to the economy of Algeria and this enraged the people to demonstrate. In 2018, Transparency International Corruption Perception Index announced that Algeria ranked 108th out of 180 countries in the world. The implication is that corruption is prevalent in Algeria. This was buttressed by the 2016 World Bank Doing Business rating which rated Algeria 163 is to 189 (Aljazeera 2019).

Algeria ought to be a rich country because of its very large natural gas reserved which is the sixth in the world coupled with huge proven oil reserves were Algeria is globally ranked 16th and 3rd in shale gas reserves. Unfortunately the regime of Bouteflika and some power elites who constitute Algeria's oligarchy control the wealth using different channels (Zoubir 2020). The broad mass of the people demanded for housecleaning from corrupt practices as it concerns overbilling and false descriptions of imported commodities. These and other corrupt practices were by cronies at the corridors of power (El Watan 2019).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Algerian crisis of 2019 began on 13 February which was exactly three days after the supporters of Bouteflika announced his fifth consecutive term bid on 10 February, 2019. The crisis lasted for six weeks and was reminiscent of the Arab Spring Uprising of 2011 hence the Second Arab Spring Uprising. The fifth term agenda of the President Bouteflika was the *casus belli* of the crisis in Algeria. The crisis degenerated into a revolution with the resignation of Bouteflika on April 2, 2019 after ruling Algeria for 20 years. The revolution is popularly referred to as the revolution of smiles. Some scholars refer to it as the *Hirak* movement because of the role this peaceful demonstration movement played. As was the case with the ASU the SASU it was caused by mainly political and economic factors as well as the prevalence of social vices such as corruption and nepotism.

The study recommends that genuine democratic government should be instituted in line with the agitations of the broad mass of Algerians and other countries of the ASU. The *Hirak* should be carried along in any attempt to build a formidable political institution characterized by the peoples' representative and rule of law.

Term limit for the President and other electoral positions should be unequivocally stated in the constitution of Algeria with rigid rules to safeguard against alterations by future over-ambitious presidents. There should be economic reform for purposes of diversifying the economy from oil and gas to other areas as well as supportive of the unemployed and very poor.

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