

AFRICA NEWS

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NORTHWEST AFRICA Whose Coast, Whose Fish?

[AN] The war that pits Morocco against guerrilla independence forces in the Western Sahara has once again spilled over into territorial waters off the coast of the former Spanish colony.

Last week, the Moroccan coast guard apprehended two Soviet trawlers and one Cuban vessel operating in what authorities called a "Moroccan economic zone" off the Saharan coast. Moroccan officials charged that the Cuban ship bristled with sophisticated electronic surveillance and transmitting equipment — to the exclusion of fishing gear.

In the aftermath of the incident, military experts in the Moroccan capital of Rabat were suggesting that the Cuban boat was being used to spy on Moroccan troop movements for the POLISARIO independence forces in Western Sahara. The Soviet vessels, they add, may have been used by POLISARIO as floating bases for their occasional raids on foreign fishing trawlers.

Some observers suspect that the allegations are primarily a Moroccan ploy to win support for its attempt to annex the Saharan territory. Although complaints about Soviet over-fishing are common among northwest African nations, including Morocco, economic ties between Rabat and Moscow are strong, and a 1978 cooperation accord made Morocco the Soviet's largest commercial partner in Africa.

Cuba, for its part, has issued a formal rebuttal of

the Moroccan charges. Havana maintains that the captured vessel had just unloaded its catch of seafood in Conakry, Guinea, and was en route to Vigo, Spain, for repairs when it was "unjustifiably apprehended." According to the Cuban statement, "The communications instruments on board were of a conventional type," and the suspicion of espionage is "totally unfounded."

Cuba enjoys warm diplomatic relations with POLISARIO, as witness last week's meeting in Algiers between Havana's envoy to Algeria and a high-ranking Saharan official. And Morocco is making much of POLISARIO contacts with the Soviets or their allies. The Rabat daily *Al-Mittaq Al-Watani*, for example, declared last week that the naval incident "proved once again to the entire world that Cuba and the USSR are implicated in the war of aggression being directed against Morocco."

To add to the complexities of the situation, the waters off Western Sahara are one of the world's richest fishing grounds, and, though they agree on little else, both Morocco and POLISARIO oppose unrestricted exploitation of the waters by foreign trawlers.

Each side has taken action in its own right against foreign fishermen: As well as attacking Moroccan fishing boats, POLISARIO has destroyed Spanish, Portuguese and South Korean vessels, and held their crews to ransom. The Moroccan authorities, for their part, have strafed Cuban ships and cracked down hard on Spanish trawlers, though the

Soviet vessels recently apprehended may also face penalties.

The activities of foreign fishing fleets have, in fact, become a problem for all the nations on Africa's northwest corner, as a correspondent for Tanzania's *Daily News* spells out in this article:

Despite the risks involved, the trawler fleets continue to plunder the seas off the northwest African coast because the rewards are so great: some of the richest banks of sardines in the world have been moving slowly south from Moroccan waters toward the Western Sahara and Mauritania. And further south, off Senegal, are quantities of the less predictable tuna fish.

The catch landed off the Senegalese coast has ranged as high as 350,000 metric tons in recent years. Normally, however, only a tenth of the total is caught by Senegalese boats, with the lion's share going to foreign trawlers.

Senegal's small-scale inshore fishermen have been doing rather better since Canadian aid began to equip them with outboard motors for their dug-out boats. But the real money lies in offshore fishing, where the catch can be sold for processing into cattle food or frozen for the European and American markets.

Senegal managed last year to get the European Economic Community to agree to pay about \$12 million over two years for fishing rights. Spain, not yet a member of the EEC, agreed to pay a similar amount.

Mauritania has also had to do some hard bargaining. By dint of massive investment, particularly in canning factories,



Leaders Meet

WASHINGTON—Special Assistant to President Carter, Louis Martin (c) meets with Rev. Jesse Jackson (l) of Operation PUSH and NAACP Director Benjamin Hooks, along with others to map strategy for sustaining the veto of a major appropriations bill with an anti-busing rider.

Mauritania managed to double the value of its fish exports to \$26 million between 1974 and 1978. And to protect its stocks, it declared an "exclusive economic zone" of 200 miles (320 kilometers) offshore.

During that period, Mauritania continued its practice of allowing the Soviet Union, Japan, Spain, Portugal, Romania and South Korea to fish under license. The only conditions were that they did not exceed a total limit of 100,000 tons a year, and that they supplied enough fish to enable the canning plants at Nouadhibou to function at full capacity.

However, it rapidly became clear that, though only 60,000 tons were brought ashore, three times the limit was actually being fished. As a result, out of a catch worth an estimated \$1 billion a year, Mauritania was only getting between \$12 and \$30 million, and the canning plants were running at only a fifth, or at best a third of capacity.

The worst offender was Spain, which had 800 trawlers in the area. It was only after Mauritania had repeatedly arrested Spanish fishermen that Spain agreed to abandon the licensing system in favor of a joint company, in which Mauritania had the majority shareholding.

Under this agreement, signed in January, 1979, Spain was limited to 90,000 tons a year, and at the same time paid the Mauritanian government \$116 million as opposed to only \$6 million the year before.

Similar agreements with other countries followed.

One of the disadvantages faced by the northwest African states is that most of them lack a tradition of fishing and fish consumption. Only Morocco has made any serious attempt to create a fishing fleet of its own to rival the 450 foreign trawlers regularly reaping the harvest of its seventy mile "exclusive economic zone."

Between 1973 and 1977, Morocco acquired 110

new trawlers. Though slightly smaller than the Spanish trawlers, they were modern and efficient. But manpower was a problem. Moroccan crews had only had experience on traditional boats.

As a result, instead of Moroccan nationals comprising at least two-thirds of all crews on Moroccan trawlers, as regulations demanded, the proportion was allowed to drop to an eighth.

The remainder of the crews are Spanish, from Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, the headquarters of Spain's African fishing operations. The Spanish fishermen have to be paid in precious hard currency. Out of a total annual wage bill for Morocco's fishing industry of \$9 million over 75% has to be paid in hard currency.

Another handicap is the lack of facilities at the Moroccan port of Agadir. Because of the gradual southward migration of the sardines, most fishing is now done south of

Agadir, between Tarfaya

in Morocco and Dakhla (formerly Villa Cisneros) in the Western Sahara.

Not only is Agadir further away from the fishing grounds than the rival port of Las Palmas, but the Moroccan port has little hope of acquiring comparable dockyard and cold storage equipment. The Moroccan government has no means of controlling, either for taxation or conservation purposes, the activities of either Spanish or Moroccan companies operating out of Las Palmas.

Frustrated in its efforts to attract more of the industry to itself, Morocco has turned, like Mauritania, to crude economic bargaining. Even in order to get a provisional agreement on fishing rights, Spain has had to make concessions on agricultural produce, so that Morocco will continue to get a share of the European market for fruit and vegetables after Spain joins the EEC.

But a final answer lies in a common policy on the part of all the African

countries concerned, and an agreement on who actually owns the prime fishing sites in the area. This can only come about in the context of a settlement of the five-year-old independence war in the Western Sahara.

Until that happens, the POLISARIO and Morocco will continue taking time off from fighting one another — at least, occasionally — to make common cause against the Spanish trawlers.

SIERRA LEONE Testing Time For Stevens

[AN] The year 1980 at one time held great promise for Sierra Leone President Siaka Stevens, now the incumbent chairman of the Organization of African Unity. At home, however, Stevens is facing an unprecedented level of unrest coinciding with his newfound international prominence.

Protests by students and lecturers at Fourah Bay College in Freetown have caused serious disruptions in recent months, and the capital city remains tense. In addition, during official visits to the United States and Britain, Stevens has encountered embarrassing demonstrations by Sierra Leone nationals hostile to his administration's policies.

Most recently, while Stevens visited Britain from November 4-7, anti-government activists in exile took the opportunity to launch a new opposition group, the Sierra Leone Alliance Movement (SLAM). The alliance's initial statement proclaimed the necessity of political action in order to rescue "our beloved motherland from further decline," and its leaders say they will seek cooperation with the U.S.-based National Alliance Party, another opposition group launched in similar fashion around the time of Stevens' visit to the United States.

Returning home, Stevens found himself saddled with the nasty business of putting to rest the latest confrontation

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