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**Modern Irredentist Conflicts in the Arab World: Political Science and Socio-Philosophical Aspects (Part 1)**

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of modern irredentist conflicts in the Arab world, examining cases of irredentist conflicts in countries such as Morocco and Algeria, as well as the situation around the island of Mayotte, which is the subject of claims between the Comoros and France. The article is based on the example of conflicts in West Africa and the Comoros Archipelago. The author emphasizes the growing influence of ethnic and nationalist movements that determine the nature of territorial disputes and pose a threat to political stability in the region. An important aspect of irredentist conflicts is the desire of certain ethnic groups to regain historical territories or to integrate with territories inhabited by ethnically close populations. It is indicated that the source of irredentist conflicts in the Arab world is, firstly, uneven colonization and, accordingly, the ineffectiveness of the application of universal consolidated mechanisms of decolonization; secondly, the differentiated nature of Arab-Muslim imperial colonialism itself in the historical past. The analysis of the political and social sources of conflicts allows us to comprehend their impact on the global political system and outline possible ways of peaceful settlement.

**Keywords:** Arab world; mediation; negotiations; irredentism; irredentist conflict; social conflict; international law; globalization; identity.

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**Introduction.** The growing influence of ethnic and national movements on international politics in recent decades has been accompanied by an increase in irredentist tensions and the emergence of open forms of irredentist conflicts. The Arab world, which is not characterized by monolithic and unified geopolitical orientations, is currently going through a difficult period when issues of territorial affiliation, identity and political influence are once again exacerbated by both unresolved conflicts and new ones. One of the key factors remains the desire of some ethnic groups to gain political influence and control over the territories of other states with compact residence of their representatives or groups ethnically close to them. A related factor is the policy of returning «historical lands» of certain states, i.e., fixing territorial claims. Irredentism in Arab countries is influenced by religious organizations, which also appeal to this political problem in their activities. Therefore, against the background of the growth of irredentist conflicts in the world, large-scale use of human and military-technical resources and the theater of military operations of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the analysis of socio-philosophical and political sources allows not only to comprehend the global significance of local irredentist conflicts, but also to search for methods of their resolution, or, better, prevention. The formation of a

balanced foreign policy by the countries of the Arab world, the definition of strategies to counteract irredentist conflicts and reduce the risks of escalating violence in the face of discrediting the activities of relevant international organizations such as the UN will allow countries to use the synergy of individual countries to pass the bifurcation point of the system of international relations in the post-bipolar world.

**The degree of research of the problem.** The problem of irredentism in the national scientific discourse has been spreading in the last decade. Doctor of Political Sciences N. Horlo in a number of publications and dissertation research revealed the essence and structure of irredentism, the strategies of its participants at both the domestic and international political levels [16]. The socio-philosophical and cultural aspects of the Arab world are also analyzed by the domestic philosopher K. el Guessab, in particular, in the monograph «The Phenomenon of the Arab World», he clarified the essence, attributes and modes of the Arab world, the socio-cultural determinants of its formation, the principles of relations between modern countries [17]. In our previous studies, we identified the potential of mediation in irredentist conflicts in the Arab world [20, 19].

**The purpose of the article** is to analyze the political and social nature and forms of irredentist conflicts in the Arab world (on the example of conflicts in West Africa and the Comoros Archipelago).

**Presentation of the main research material.** The term «Arab world» is widely used in political science and socio-philosophical sciences, but there is no established definition, as the emphasis is primarily on the area of residence of Arabs in the modern world. In this respect, it is generally recognized that the emphasis is on the linguistic and political aspect of the expression of this concept, i.e. the Arab world is a set of those Arab countries (we also understand cultures) that have Arabic as an official language. These are primarily the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Sudan, Somalia, and Mauritania. If viewed through the prism of linguistics, the difficulty in defining the area would be that there are significant differences in literary Arabic and its dialects. The political component points to state support for the development of the modernized literary language, which is the medium of instruction in education and the language of the media, although in practice, combinations of it with dialects are used. Geographically, modern Arabic dialects are divided into five groups: Arabian (four subgroups); Mesopotamian; Syrian-Lebanese (or Levantine, three subgroups); Egyptian (four subgroups) and Maghrebi (two subgroups) [3, p. 342]. In this context, it is worth noting that language is a supranational factor in the formation of national identity, a factor of cultural and political unity between Arab countries. Historically, in the first half of the twentieth century, the national idea in Arab countries emerged as antagonistic to the ideas of imperialism and colonialism. On the one hand, it contributed to the formation of independent countries, and on the other hand, to the formation of integral interstate political processes and the establishment of a strategy of pan-Arabism.

At the same time, it should be noted that although the status of the Arabic language is not a determining criterion for a country's belonging to the Arab world, as it can emphasize its inclusion in the Islamic world, it is one of the tools of the political vector of development of the state's foreign relations. For example, in Somalia, the Arab ethnic group makes up only about 5 %, and the majority are Somalis. In Djibouti, it is over 15%, and the majority are Somalis and Afars. Or in countries such as the Union of the Comoros, where about 97 % of the population speaks Comorian, although Arabic has the status of an official language. But at the same time, all of these countries are members of the Arab League, proclaiming themselves part of the Arab world.

Despite the proclamation of an integral national pan-Arab idea and corresponding political practices, historical memory has a significant impact in the context of the formation of individual political organizations with their own unique experience of state-building. The key aspects in this regard are, first, the nature of the interaction between Arab tribes and the local population, especially in the context of Islamization processes, and, second, the specifics of colonization and the formation of anti-colonial struggle. The formation of nation-states was accompanied by the formation of claims to specific territories (due to the availability of the necessary natural and human resources), which, by virtue of relevant decisions at the international level, ignored historical and social aspects. Therefore, the source of irredentist conflicts in the Arab world is, firstly, uneven colonization (territories inhabited by one ethnic group were colonized by different countries), and, accordingly, the ineffectiveness of the use of universal consolidated mechanisms of decolonization; and, secondly, the differentiated nature of Arab-Muslim imperial colonialism itself, and thus the formation of different ethnic communities in the process of interaction between Arabs and the local population, including assimilation. We agree with R. Landes that, believing that the West is the only imperial power worth discussing (and condemning), progressive historians have a marked tendency to ignore the millennium and a half of the history of Islamic and Arab imperialism [9]. The latter is marked by the presence of a contemporary conflict between the Muslim identity of certain ethnic groups and the Arab transnational and tribal identity.

A long-lasting irredentist conflict in the Arab world was the conflict between Morocco and Algeria, Morocco and the partially recognized state of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, and between Mauritania and the partially recognized state of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. The main reason was the policy of colonialism of European countries towards these territories and the uncoordinated mechanisms of decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century. Morocco's declaration of independence also activated irredentist

processes demanding the return of historical lands that were lost under the colonizing policies of the Spanish Kingdom, the French Republic, and the German Empire as signatories to the Treaty of Fez in 1912. Moroccan irredentism is based on the concept of Greater Morocco, which proclaims the need to regain sovereignty over a number of territories (in the most ambitious perspective, the territory of the Almoravid dynasty, which ruled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries), which, in turn, is a territorial claim to Algeria, Mauritania, and the partially recognized state of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. While the irredentist conflict between Morocco and Algeria, which manifested itself in aggressive forms in the 1963 Sand War, was marked by the active role of both geopolitical players and negotiators, in Mauritania, Moroccans are faced with the *fait accompli* of the existence of this state. As D. Ashford notes, although Mauritania remained a French colony for a certain period, there was a small chance that France could be persuaded to recognize Morocco's claims; but when Mauritania became an Islamic republic within the French Community and many African and Asian countries recognized the existence of Mauritania, the claims lost their relevance [4, p. 642]. At the same time, religious factors remain a significant factor in irredentist conflicts in the region. Historically, for centuries, Muslims throughout the region have recognized the authority of Morocco's spiritual centers, and many religious clerics and scholars have studied in Fez. It also proclaims the idea of a common historical destiny, in which there are common trends in ethno-national processes – the integration of Arab and Berber tribes into one society on the basis of a common religion. The peculiarities of the course of this irredentist conflict and negotiation processes are studied in more detail in our work «The Potential of Mediation in Irredentist Conflicts in the Arab World (on the Example of the War in Western Sahara)» [20].

The problems of the legal status of Western Sahara in international law significantly complicate the achievement of a compromise between the conflicting parties. A specific feature of the mediation method applied to the process of resolving an irredentist conflict is the involvement of third neutral parties in the negotiation process. The basic requirements are neutrality, trust and diplomatic skills for effective mediation as the basic conditions for the effectiveness of this method. Attempts to apply the mediation method through the involvement of neutral parties in the conflict in Western Sahara were unsuccessful, but contributed to the beginning of a dialogue, including a ceasefire, although it was not decisive. The question of which state can take on the role of mediator in further negotiations is currently unresolved.

In our opinion, the Comoros' irredentist claims to the island of Mayotte, which also have their origins in colonial/anti-colonial politics, remain unresolved. The Comoros archipelago, which consists of the four islands of Grande Comore, Mayotte, Anjouan and Mohel, was colonized by France in the nineteenth century (the first island, Mayotte, by the French Kingdom in 1841, and the rest by the Third French Republic half a century later). The process of decolonization, which was marked by the creation of the French Union in 1946 to assimilate the colonies that changed their status to «overseas territories». The transformation of this entity into the French Commonwealth, which provided substantial autonomy (supported by 97.33 % of the population of the Comoros in a referendum), as well as the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1960, made it possible to negotiate the realization of the Comorians' right to self-determination. The initial agreement provided for consultations on each island, but as a result of the negotiations, France decided to hold a joint consultation for the entire archipelago, which was confirmed by the agreement of June 15, 1973, and was also emphasized by President Giscard d'Estaing at a press conference on October 24, 1974 [12, p. 74]. Such an approach to the declaration of independence is also referred to in the UN General Assembly Resolution of December 14, 1973, which states «4. Affirms the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoro Archipelago» [15]. That is, it is about the formation of a state within all four islands.

However, according to the results of the referendum on December 22, 1974, 63.8% of those who participated in Mayotte voted in favor of maintaining ties with France, unlike the other three islands, where the will showed the opposite position. After that, France abruptly changed its policy, creating, in fact, a pretext for an irredentist conflict, which, in the event of independence, is marked, on the one hand, by the right to ensure the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros Archipelago, and, on the other hand, by the weak influence of the irredentist state on the territory where representatives of its ethnic group live compactly. This is what actually happened in the subsequent state-building processes. Since France violated the agreements, the local legislature of the Comoros declared the independence of the Comoros. However, Mayotte's representatives did not participate. The UN's involvement as a negotiator proved to be ineffective in resolving the conflict. France held a separate referendum on the island of Mayotte on February 8, 1976, in which 99.4 % of those who participated supported the idea of remaining part of the former metropolis (i.e., in two years the number increased by more than 35 %). Consequently, this part of the archipelago is integrated into the political institutions of France, and over the past decade, the EU, with the UN as a mediator postulating the right of the Union of the Comoros to sovereignty over these territories in accordance with Resolution 3385 (XXX) «Admission of the Comoros to membership in the United Nations» of November 12, 1975, in which the decision proclaims that the accession takes place on the basis of respect for the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros Archipelago, consisting of the islands of

Anjouan, Grande Comore, Mayotte and Moheli, in accordance with resolution 3291 (XXIX) of December 13, 1974. [13], as well as a number of UN General Assembly resolutions on the status of the island of Mayotte, and more specifically on the transfer of the island to the sovereignty of the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros. However, since 1994, after resolution 49/18 (December 6) [14], the issue has not been on the agenda. This is largely due to internal political conflicts in the state itself, including the declaration of independence by the islands of Anjouan and Moheli. Although, even with the transformation of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros into the Union of the Comoros, the Constitution in Article 1 proclaims: «The Union of the Comoros is a republic composed of the autonomous islands of Mwali (Moheli), Maore (Mayotte), Ndzuwani (Anjouan), Ngazidja (Grande Comore)» [6].

The potential for mediation in resolving this irredentist conflict is rather low, since, firstly, the influence of neighboring countries is minimized due to the processes of decolonization in their political systems, and, secondly, the irredentist country itself needs to establish and develop democratic institutions, and therefore is not able to offer its ethnic groups living in other territories sufficient socio-political conditions in which to realize not only the rights to fulfill national and cultural needs, but also socio-economic ones. This is complicated by the position of France, which proclaims that it did not violate international law, since the independence of the Comoros and the decision of Mayotte to remain part of France were in line with international legal principles and rules of decolonization, and Mayotte was not separated from an independent state by borders recognized by the international community [11]. The legal recognition of Mayotte as one of the most remote regions of the European Union makes negotiations impossible. At the same time, international organizations remain committed to the principle of the territorial unity of the Comoros within the archipelago, in particular, in 1995, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity adopted a resolution reaffirming the sovereignty of the Comoros «over the Comorian island of Mayotte.» in 2000, the foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference adopted a resolution «On the Comorian island of Mayotte», stating that the separation of Mayotte from the other Comoros is a serious violation of the territorial integrity of this state [12, p. 78]. The presidents of the Union of the Comoros speak about the unresolved conflict from time to time in their speeches at international forums. In particular, at the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2012, Ikililou Doinine called on France to «open and sincere dialogue» on the Comorian island of Mayotte, emphasizing that the latter poses a threat to the peace and stability of the other three Comoros, as it has always served as a base for the enemies of the Comoros who do not want to see the island develop [7]. A significant study was conducted by analysts of the African Union, who in their work «African Governance Report 2023 - Unconstitutional Change of Government in Africa» noted that there is a growing danger that is now prevailing on the island of Mayotte. They are convinced that the tense relations between the Comoros and France over sovereignty over Mayotte could lead to a future conflict [1, p. 84]. The reasons for this are the fact that it was on this island that the leaders of the 1997 separatist crisis were hiding, the growing crime situation, and uncontrolled migration. It should be added that the island is experiencing significant population growth, according to the 2017 French census, the demographic growth on Mayotte is 3.8% per year (the highest compared to other islands in the region). This is reflected in an increase in density - 690 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> [10], especially in the context of a significant increase in illegal migrants - residents of other Comoros (although, given the Union of the Comoros recognizes the French occupation of Mayotte, this is interpreted as free movement within the country) In general, this trend leads to an increase in social problems and protest moods. This, in turn, actualizes the need for the French government to make appropriate political decisions to maintain stability. In particular, in April 2023, Operation Voambouchou («Return») was launched to send «illegal immigrants» to the island of Anjouan [5]. However, the operation met with significant resistance, as a significant number of non-natives of Mayotte had destroyed their documents and were essentially stateless, so the authorities of the Union of the Comoros could not take them back [8]. In addition, their repatriation revealed the unpreparedness of local authorities to receive and accommodate them. Such social tensions, the high level of poverty on Mayotte, and the conflict between locals and newcomers are becoming a source of future irredentist conflicts, which, given the tendency of the United Nations to be ineffective in preventing conflicts, is increasingly becoming a role for the African Union.

### **Conclusions.**

The irredentist conflicts in West Africa and the Comoros have a number of features. First, they are often caused by the colonial legacy and borders established without regard to ethnic ties. Second, the religious factor adds cultural depth to the conflicts, as it is often religious organizations that support irredentist ideas. Thirdly, France, as a former metropolis, continues to influence the conflicts, in particular through its political and administrative control over Mayotte. Fourth, international organizations with a peacekeeping mission, such as the UN, are unable to effectively address these conflicts, which increases the risk of escalation but contributes to the growing role of regional organizations, such as the African Union. Fifth, these conflicts deepen instability in the region, increasing the flow of migrants and exacerbating social problems.

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**Сучасні іредентичні конфлікти в арабському світі: політологічний та соціально-філософський аспект (частина 1)**

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена дослідженню сучасних іредентичних конфліктів в арабському світі, розглядаються випадки іредентичних конфліктів у таких країнах, як Марокко та Алжир, а також ситуація навколо острова Майотта, що є предметом претензій між Коморськими островами та Францією. На прикладі конфліктів у Західній Африці та Архіпелазі Коморські острови. Акцентується увага на зростанні впливу етнічних і націоналістичних рухів, які визначають характер територіальних суперечок та є загрозою політичної стабільності в регіоні. Важливим аспектом іредентичних конфліктів є прагнення окремих етнічних груп повернути історичні території або інтегруватися з територіями, де проживає етнічно близьке населення. Вказано, що джерелом іредентичних конфліктів в арабському світі є, по-перше, нерівномірна колонізація та, відповідно, неефективність застосування універсальних консолідованих механізмів деколонізації; по-друге, – диференційований характер самого арабо-мусульманського імперського колоніалізму в історичному минулому. Аналіз політичних і соціальних джерел конфліктів дозволяє осмислити їхній вплив на глобальну політичну систему та окреслити можливі шляхи мирного врегулювання.

**Ключові слова:** арабський світ; медіація; переговори; іредентизм; іредентичний конфлікт; соціальний конфлікт; міжнародне право; глобалізація; ідентичність.

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