

US Policy on the Western Sahara

Executive Branch

- Since 1999, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama have supported a compromise formula based on autonomy for the Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty, with the details to be negotiated among Morocco, the Polisario Front, and the Polisario's Algerian backers.
- In [October 2006](#), US Ambassador to the UN William Brentick urged "Morocco to move quickly to fulfill its many promises to submit a comprehensive and credible autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara."
- Since 2007, when Morocco unveiled its compromise autonomy plan, the plan has been widely supported in Washington and deemed "serious, realistic, and credible" by officials in the Administration:
 - Sean McCormack, Spokesman for the US Department of State, said in an [August 2007 press briefing](#), "We believe that meaningful autonomy is a promising and realistic way forward and that the Moroccan initiative could provide a realistic framework for negotiations."
 - In [April 2008](#), US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Alejandro Wolff said, "For our part, we agree with [the Secretary General's Personal Envoy] Mr. van Walsum's assessment that an independent Sahrawi State is not a realistic option for resolving the conflict and that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution. In our view, the focus of future negotiation rounds should therefore be on designing a mutually acceptable autonomy regime that is consistent with the aspirations of the people of the Western Sahara. In that regard, Morocco has already produced a proposal that the Security Council has qualified as serious and credible..."
 - Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman for the US State Department, said in a [press briefing in May 2008](#), "An independent Sahrawi state is not a realistic option. In our view, some form of autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only realistic way forward to resolve this longstanding conflict. We urge the parties to focus future discussions on a mutually-acceptable autonomy regime that is consistent with the aspirations of the people of Western Sahara. As Ambassador Wolff said following the adoption of the resolution, the United States will support these efforts by broadening our own engagement with the parties over the coming weeks and months. Morocco has presented a proposal that we believe is serious and credible."
 - During a trip to Morocco on November 3, 2009, Secretary Clinton noted during her [remarks with then-Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Faihri](#), "It is important for me to reaffirm, here in Morocco, that there has been no change in our policy." In a subsequent [interview](#), Secretary Clinton continued, "It is a plan, as you know, that was started under the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed under the Bush Administration and remains the policy of the United States under the Obama Administration."
 - On March 23, 2011, at a [joint press briefing](#) with Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri, Secretary Clinton reiterated US policy on the Western Sahara, stating that the Moroccan autonomy plan is, "serious, realistic, and credible [and] a potential approach to satisfy the aspirations of the people in Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity."
 - Secretary Clinton echoed these statements in [remarks](#) with Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Saad-Eddine Al-Othmani on February 12, and again in [remarks](#) at the September 2012 US-Morocco Strategic Dialogue.

- In the [Joint Statement](#) issued in November 2013 between President Obama and King Mohammed VI, “The President pledged to continue to support efforts to find a peaceful, sustainable, mutually agreed-upon solution to the Western Sahara question. U.S. policy toward the Western Sahara has remained consistent for many years. The United States has made clear that Morocco’s autonomy plan is serious, realistic, and credible, and that it represents a potential approach that could satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity. We continue to support the negotiations carried out by the United Nations, including the work of the UN Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy Ambassador Christopher Ross, and urge the parties to work toward a resolution. The two leaders affirmed their shared commitment to the improvement of the lives of the people of the Western Sahara and agreed to work together to continue to protect and promote human rights in the territory.”
- Joint Statements issued following the [2014](#) and [2015](#) US-Morocco Strategic Dialogues closely echoed the sentiments.

Legislative Branch

- In 2007, 173 Members of the House (including the bipartisan House Leadership, Chairman Tom Lantos and Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen) sent [a letter](#) to President Bush reiterating Congressional support for the Moroccan plan.
- On the eve of the April 2009 MINURSO renewal, 233 members of the United States House of Representatives sent [a letter](#) to President Obama reaffirming their support for Morocco’s Autonomy Proposal. The letter called for strong US backing for Morocco’s compromise solution to end the 30-year Western Sahara conflict, which would clear a path for greater regional cooperation to meet growing security and economic challenges.
- In March 2010, 54 members of the United States Senate affirmed their support for Morocco’s autonomy plan in [a letter](#) addressed to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The letter voiced strong support for the US policy backing a solution to the conflict based on “broad autonomy for Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty” and called the Moroccan compromise autonomy proposal “serious and credible.” The letter noted that it has been the “bipartisan US policy” of three successive Administrations (Clinton, Bush, and Obama) “to support a resolution of this conflict based on this formula.”
- In December 2011, Congress inserted language in the [2012 Omnibus Spending Report](#) stating that US program assistance to Morocco may be used in “all regions and territories administered by Morocco,” authorizing the extension of US development assistance to the Western Sahara as a means of resolving the conflict. It further noted that Congress “remains concerned with resolving the dispute over the Western Sahara” that for decades has been an obstacle to cooperation, stability, and security in the region, and urged the State Department “to prioritize a negotiated settlement” to the dispute based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. Speaking in the [Congressional Record](#), then-House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) noted that “the US must continue to seek a fair, just, and enduring solution to the Western Sahara in order to promote regional integration and protect US security interests in the region.”
- On January 17, 2014, President Obama signed into law the [FY2014 Appropriations Bill](#), which explicitly stated that existing development assistance to Morocco “should also be available for assistance for the territory of the Western Sahara.” The law also requires that the State Department (in consultation

with USAID) submit a report describing how aid will support development and democratic reform in the country, and also detailing US efforts to “resolve the longstanding dispute over the Western Sahara, based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.”

- On December 16, 2014, Congress adopted and President Obama signed into law an [FY2015 Appropriations Bill](#) that explicitly directed that existing development assistance to Morocco “shall be made available for assistance for the Western Sahara.” This directive was repeated in the [FY2016 Appropriations Bill](#).
- In July 2016, the US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations called on the State Department to secure a census in the Sahrawi refugee camps, including the following language in the draft [FY 2017 House Appropriations Bill](#) adopted by the full committee: “The Secretary of State shall take all practicable steps to secure the cooperation of the Government of Algeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to conduct a census of the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria.”

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