

The History of the Western Sahara

The sovereignty of the Western Sahara remains the subject of a dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front, a separatist group based in southern Algeria. Morocco reasserted its sovereignty over the territory after Spain withdrew its colonial interests from the area in 1975. The Polisario Front has challenged Morocco's control over the Western Sahara.

The Moroccan Government has undertaken a sizable economic development program in the Western Sahara to provide economic, political, and social infrastructure for the region's residents. Today, international efforts are underway to encourage a political settlement between Morocco, the Polisario Front, and Algeria that would resolve sovereignty over the Western Sahara through autonomy, a solution widely supported in the international community, particularly the US and Europe.

1578 to 1727	Moroccan Kings rule over the territory currently known as the Western Sahara.	<p>"[Morocco's compromise autonomy initiative] originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration. [...] And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same." <i>-U.S. Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, November 3, 2009</i></p>	Former US Sec. of State James Baker III is appointed as UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy in the Sahara region.	1997
1884	Spanish colonization begins.		Houston Accord is signed between Morocco and Polisario establishing the implementation of a referendum to decide the future of the Western Sahara.	2002
1956	Morocco claims independence from France. Morocco reclaims the Western Sahara at the UN for the first time.	UN Sec. Gen. Kofi Annan presents the Security Council with four options to break the impasse in the Western Sahara: referendum, autonomy, partition, or complete withdrawal.	2004	
1958	King Mohammed V formally lays claim to the Sahara.	UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1541, urging the parties to the Western Sahara conflict to "to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution."	2005	
1963	The UN includes the Western Sahara on the list of non self-governing territories.	Dutch ambassador Peter Van Walsum is appointed as the new UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy to the Western Sahara.	2007	
1965	The UN General Assembly adopts its first resolution calling on Spain to decolonize the Sahara.	Morocco releases autonomy under sovereignty plan for the Western Sahara which is endorsed by the many in the international community, including the United States, Spain, and France.	2009	
1973	The Polisario Front is founded and stages its first attack.	Morocco and the Polisario Front conduct first two rounds of negotiations. The Polisario Front threatens a return to armed conflict with Morocco.	2010	
1974	Algeria begins to oppose Moroccan policy on the Sahara and trains Polisario guerillas.	A third and fourth round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front take place.	2011	
1975	<p>The Green March takes place in which 350,000 unarmed Moroccans march South into the desert to reassert Moroccan sovereignty of the Sahara from the Spanish.</p> <p>Morocco signs Madrid Agreement, which seeks to transfer control of the Sahara to a three party administration divided between Morocco, Spain, and Mauritania.</p> <p>Spain officially terminates its administration of the Sahara.</p>		UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy Van Walsum calls for realism; deems independence an unattainable option.	
1976	The Polisario Front declares the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and raises the flag of "Western Sahara".	<p>"[A]utonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution for the Western Sahara dispute [...]" <i>-Dana Perino, White House Press Secretary, June 23, 2008</i></p>	UN Sec. Gen. appoints US diplomat Christopher Ross as the new Special Envoy for the Western Sahara.	
1977	Spanish-Moroccan fishing agreement is signed; the Polisario begins attacks on Spanish fishing vessels.	<p>"My conclusion that an independent Western Sahara is not an attainable goal is relevant today because it lies at the root of the current negotiation process..." <i>- UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum, April 21, 2008</i></p>	US Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reaffirms US policy in support of Morocco's autonomy initiative remains unchanged.	
1991	UN Security Council approves the establishment of Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara (MINURSO). Cease-fire declared in the disputed Western Sahara region.	Morocco and the Polisario Front conduct six rounds of informal talks.	Sec. Clinton meets with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri and reiterates that the Moroccan autonomy proposal is "serious, realistic, and credible" and "a potential approach to satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara."	

This information has been produced by the Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP). MACP is a registered agent of the Government of Morocco. Additional information is available at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.