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American Policy Towards the Western Sahara Issue

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Peace in Western Sahara is in the U.S. strategic interest because it promotes long-term stability and security for Morocco—a major non-NATO ally and Abraham Accords member—and the broader region. In light of the State Department’s statement from April 8 that affirmed U.S. recognition of the Moroccan Autonomy Plan and committed to facilitating progress toward realizing the plan,¹ Congress has a significant role to play in adhering U.S. policy toward a lasting solution to the conflict.

Potential Avenues for Congressional Engagement

- Increase official congressional visits to the territory and encourage other official U.S. government activity, exerting pressure on Moroccan leaders to act faithfully in their implementation of the plan, ultimately creating conditions for lasting peace.
- Increase pressure on Morocco to implement the **Abraham Accords** by working with Israel and Morocco to upgrade their diplomatic posts from liaison offices as a sign of the tripartite agreement’s enduring impact.
- Encourage the State Department to work with Moroccan and Sahrawi leadership to create an arrangement between the semiautonomous Sahrawi government and Morocco to foster a standard of good governance, ensuring posterity of the peace between the two sides.
- Explore earmarking or authorizing Moroccan ESF funds for development of Western Sahara and toward de-mining the territory, to remove tens of thousands of land mines and other ordnances.
- The U.S.-Morocco FTA language excludes the area of Western Sahara from participation as it was implemented prior to 2020. Adjust the FTA wording to formally include Western Sahara, eliminating confusion and creating opportunity for American companies, especially those requiring phosphates.
- Earmark or authorize bilateral assistance to Morocco for people-to-people programming to help bridge the gap between the native Sahrawi and Moroccan populations in Western Sahara that has been forged over decades of fighting.

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Overview of the U.S. Position on the Conflict

- Spain withdrew from Western Sahara in the 1970s, and both Morocco and a localized government, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), claimed the land. Moroccan soldiers marched into the Sahara, and the Polisario Front, a group fighting for Sahrawi independence, resisted. Many members of the SADR and its supporters were forced into exile in Algeria but continue to fight for an independent state.
- The United States took a position of relative neutrality on the conflict, neither affirming Morocco's claims to sovereignty nor assisting the Sahrawi people.
- In 2007, Morocco proposed the Moroccan Autonomy Plan that would see Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara with a semiautonomous Sahrawi government operating within Morocco.² The plan, whose details need to be negotiated by the parties, is viewed broadly as the most realistic path forward.
- In December 2020 President Donald Trump changed the long-standing U.S. policy of neutrality to recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory of Western Sahara, but did not direct specific actions (such as those outlined earlier) to implement the change in policy.
- The shift in policy was a carrot for Morocco in the Abraham Accords.
- President Joe Biden maintained the policy shift but did not implement it in any way—no money was allocated to open a consulate, the FTA was not updated to reflect Western Sahara as Moroccan, nor did U.S. government officials visit Western Sahara.

Figure 1. The World Factbook Map



Source: Morocco—Details, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, accessed April 21, 2025, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/morocco/map>.



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- Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Moroccan Foreign Minister Bourita, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, April 8, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-rubios-meeting-with-moroccan-foreign-minister-bourita>.
- Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region, United Nations Peacemaker, April 11, 2007, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/10048>.