



International Boundary Study

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Morocco – Western Sahara (*Spanish Sahara*) **Boundary**

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MOROCCO – WESTERN SAHARA (Spanish Sahara) BOUNDARY

I. BACKGROUND

The Kingdom of Morocco and Spanish Sahara as presently constituted have shared a common boundary only since April 17, 1958. On this date Spain in fulfillment of an agreement reached with Morocco on April 1, 1958, transferred to Morocco the Spanish Southern Zone* of the former protectorate of Morocco. This zone was directly north of Spanish Sahara and included the area in Morocco south of the Oued Draa and between the Atlantic Ocean and the meridian of 8°40' West of Greenwich.

From the signing of the Franco - Shereefian (for Morocco) Treaty of March 30, 1912, until Morocco gained independence in 1956, the state was governed as a protectorate. This treaty provided for a French Resident-General, who was to be for most purposes in virtual control of the state. In accordance with the Franco - Spanish Treaty of November 27, 1912, France afforded Spain a sphere of influence in two parts of Morocco referred to as the "Spanish Protectorate of Morocco" in the north and the "Southern Spanish Zone" as discussed previously. The Spanish Protectorate of Morocco was administered by a Caliph or Deputy of the Sultan, but the Caliph was under the effective control of a Spanish High Commissioner. The Southern Spanish Zone was administered as a part of what is now Spanish Sahara.

Moroccan independence dates from a joint declaration with France on March 2, 1956; this was the first of several official actions relative to the status of Moroccan territory. On April 7, 1956, Spain and Morocco signed a joint declaration and protocol ending the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco in the north. Later in the same year on October 29, Morocco and the representatives of the powers of the Tangier International Committee of Control signed a declaration and protocol recognizing the authority of the Sultan in Tangier. This action was followed by the transfer of the Spanish Southern Zone to Moroccan administration to form the present boundary on April 17, 1958.

The Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary is the parallel of 27°40' North between the Atlantic Ocean and the meridian of 8°40' West of Greenwich. International agreements relative to the boundary are Article VI of the Franco - Spanish Treaty of October 3, 1904, Articles I and II of the Franco - Spanish Treaty of November 27, 1912, and the acceptance of international treaties relating to Morocco by Article 11 of the Franco - Moroccan Accord of May 28, 1956.

II. ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY

The Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary is delimited as a straight-line geometrical

* This zone has been identified also by such names as the Southern Protectorate of Morocco and more recently as Tarfaya and Tekna.

boundary and traverses arid wasteland for most of its 275-mile length. Sheep and goats are grazed along parts of the boundary, and available information indicates nomadic tribes with their herds migrate seasonally between the two states. Several tracks cross the boundary, the most important of which connects Tarfaya in Morocco and El Aiún in Spanish Sahara.

A number of treaties primarily for trading purposes with little or no attempt to define boundaries were signed by the Sultans of Morocco and European countries prior to 1885; following this date a number of important actions were instrumental in the determination of territorial claims. On January 9, 1885, a Spanish Notification extended Spanish influence along the coast between the parallels of 20°51' North and 26°8' North, but it did not indicate a boundary inland. However, this date marks the first concerted effort by a European country to establish a sphere of influence along the Atlantic coastal area immediately north and south of the Tropic of Cancer. Inland prior to 1885 France already had started the conquest of Algeria as early as 1830 and by 1843 had clashed with troops of the Sultan at Ouidja over territorial claims. A Franco - Spanish Convention of 1900 indicated both inland and southern boundaries for the Spanish territory but failed to establish a northern limit. Secret negotiations in 1902 extended Spanish holdings northward to Cape Guir.

Two actions of great significance in establishing the location of the present Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary were the Franco - Spanish Treaties of 1904 and 1912. Secret negotiations in the Franco - Spanish Treaty of October 3, 1904, shifted the limits of Spanish territorial claims south of the 1902 line; in addition, Article VI established for the first time the parallel of 27°40' as a boundary south of which the area was outside of Moroccan territory and the Government of Spain was to have full liberty of action. Likewise, this convention also established the eastern limit of the boundary as terminating at 8°40' West of Greenwich. The Franco - Spanish Treaty of November 27, 1912, moved the northern limit of Spanish territorial claims southward to the Oued Draa. Article I of the 1912 Treaty stated that the regions included in the zone of influence outlined in Article II of the Treaty would remain under the civil and religious authority of the Sultan of Morocco. In accordance with Article II, the regions in the zone of influence were south of the Oued Draa, which served as the frontier between French and Spanish zones, and eastward to the meridian of 8°40' West and thence southward to the parallel of 27°40' North. Likewise in accordance with Article II, south of the parallel of 27°40' North, Article VI of the Franco - Spanish Treaty of 1904 remained applicable and recognized Spanish sovereignty. Thus in effect the Sultan of Morocco was recognized as having civil and religious authority north of the parallel of 27°40' North, but south of the parallel the area was outside of Morocco and under Spanish jurisdiction.

A factor that complicates the Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary is the status of the boundary between Morocco and Algeria. Since the location of the boundary has not been agreed upon, the exact position of the Algeria - Morocco - Spanish Sahara tripoint cannot be accurately determined. For cartographic purposes by United States mapping agencies, it is recommended that this boundary be shown by a special symbol as a straight line from north of Igli to 27°40' North and 8°40' West and labeling the boundary as

"undetermined".

The following topographic maps both printed in 1960 may be used for cartographic reference for the Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary: the Spanish Mapa del Sahara Español (Map of the Spanish Sahara) at a scale of approximately 1:1,000,000 and 2) the Spanish Mapa de las Provincias De Ifni Y Sahara Y Archipelago De Canarias (Map of the Provinces of Ifni and Sahara and the Canary Archipelago) 4th Edition, at a scale of 1:2,000,000.

III. CONCLUSION

While the Morocco - Spanish Sahara boundary as such is not in dispute, representatives of the Government of Morocco have made territorial and sovereignty claims southward as far as the Senegal River. These claims include all of the Spanish Sahara, all or most of Mauritania, part of Mali, and part of western Algeria.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared in the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8744, State Department Building, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (telephone: Code 182, extension 4507).