



# **International Boundary Study**

No. 84 – July 30, 1968

## **Algeria – Western Sahara (*Spanish Sahara*) Boundary**

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**The Geographer  
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**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY**

**No. 84 (Revised) - July 1, 1970**

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## **ALGERIA – WESTERN (SPANISH) SAHARA BOUNDARY**

### **I. BRIEF**

The Algeria-Spanish Sahara boundary is delimited by the meridian of 8° 40' W. It has a length of about 26 miles between the Mauritania tripoint at approximately 27° 17' 40" N. and the Moroccan tripoint at 27° 40' N. The boundary is demarcated by only two known pillars.

### **II. BACKGROUND**

French military forces occupied Algiers in 1830, and by 1847 most of northern Algeria was under the administration of France. In 1848 northern Algeria was proclaimed an integral part of France and was organized into the three departments of Oran, Alger, and Constantine. Under a French law of December 24, 1902, the Saharan area, known as the Territoires du Sud Algerien (Southern Algerian Territories), was annexed by France. However, the territories were administered separately from the departments of northern Algeria.

On October 3, 1904, a Franco-Spanish convention established a line between French and Spanish spheres of influence along the meridian of 8° 40' W., which serves as the present Algeria-Spanish Sahara boundary. An agreement between the Military Commander of the Departement de l'Oasis (part of Territoires du Sud Algerien) and the Commandant of Haut Senegal and Niger delimited a boundary between Algeria and French West Africa on June 7, 1905. In principle the boundary agreement of 1905 was completed by the Niamey Conventions of June 20, 1909, and August 26, 1909, and approved by a decision of the French President du Conseil on August 16, 1911. In 1947 the Algerian Statute altered the status of the Saharan territories (Ain-Sefra, Ghardaia, Touggourt, and Oasis), which then were to be organized into departments. Ten years later the Saharan area was divided into the Department of Saoura (capital at Bechar, formerly known as Colomb Bechar) and the Department of Oasis (capital at Ouargla). Prior to 1960 the number of departments in northern Algeria were expanded gradually to 13. Pursuant to the Evian Agreements and subsequent plebiscites, Algeria became independent on July 5, 1962.

Spaniards from the Canary Islands established the fort of Santa Cruz de Mar Pequena on the northwest coast of Africa (in the vicinity of Ifni, possibly at the site later occupied by Puerto Cansado 40 miles northeast of Cabo Juby) in 1476. The fort was abandoned in 1524, and in general, Spanish interest in this part of the African mainland lapsed for more than 300 years. Spanish interest in the area commonly known as Rio de Oro revived in 1845, when the King of Spain sent a representative to observe and report on the territory. Meanwhile, the territory of Ifni was ceded to Spain by Morocco in 1860. Thereafter, a number of Spanish expeditions explored the land and attempted to promote trade with the people of Rio de Oro.

On January 9, 1885, a Spanish Notification extended Spanish influence along the coast between the parallels of 20° 51' N. (Cabo Blanco) and 26° 8' N. (Cabo Bojador), but it did not indicate a boundary inland. On April 6, 1887, a Spanish decree placed the protected territory under the administration of the Governor-General of the Canary Islands. Later, France claimed a protectorate over the entire western Sahara, but a Franco-Spanish convention of June 27, 1900, delimited both southern and inland boundary sectors between their respective territories from Cap Blanc to 26° N., 12° W. The Franco-Spanish convention of October 3, 1904, delimited French and Spanish spheres of influence northward from 26° N., 12° W. to Qued Draa.

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. 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 "Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco" (presently known as Tarfaya)\*. The Spanish Southern Zone was administered as a part of what is now Spanish Sahara. Between 1934 and 1958 Rio de Oro, Ifni, and the Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco were administered as parts of Spanish West Africa. A decree of January 10, 1958, created the two Spanish African provinces of Provincia de Ifni and Provincia de Sahara (commonly referred to as Spanish Sahara) from Spanish West Africa; and in accordance with an agreement between Spain and Morocco on April 1, 1958, the Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco became a part of the Kingdom of Morocco on April 17, 1958. The southern limit of the Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco was the parallel of 27° 40' N., and the intersection of this line with the meridian of 8° 40' W. was the Algeria-Morocco-Spanish Sahara tripoint. On January 4, 1969, Ifni was ceded back to Morocco by Spain.

The location of the tripoint with Mauritania has been subject to different interpretations on various maps. French maps usually place the tripoint at about 27° 17' 40" N. and 8° 40' W. (on the north bank of a wadi which drains eastward to Tindouf). The amended text of the Niamey convention of June 20, 1909, determines the location of the tripoint, and it states that the boundary of Algeria runs to the Tarmanant well (situated on the road from Taoudenni to Tafilalet) and then continues towards Cap Noun (or Cap Nun). Apparently the Cap Noun of the convention is the present Cap Draa in southern Morocco.

### **III. ALIGNMENT**

The Algeria-Spanish Sahara boundary follows the meridian of 8° 40' W. between the tripoints of Mauritania at about 27° 17' 40" N. and of Morocco at 27° 40' N. The meridian was established by the Franco-Spanish convention of 1904 as a line separating French and Spanish spheres of influence as follows:

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\* This area has been identified also by such names as the Southern Protectorate of Morocco, Tekna, and the Zone Sur del Protectorado de Marruecos.

Article V-" In order to complete the delimitation set out in Article I of the convention of the 27th June, 1900, it is understood that the line of demarcation between the French and Spanish spheres of influence shall start from the intersection of the meridian 14° 20' west of Paris [12° W. Greenwich] with the 26th degree of north latitude, which it shall follow in an easterly direction as far as its intersection with the 11th meridian west of Paris [8° 40' W. Greenwich]. The line shall follow this meridian as far as the Wad Draa [Qued Draa], the 10th meridian west of Paris [7° 40' W. Greenwich], and lastly the 10th meridian west of Paris as far as the watershed between the basins of the Wad Draa and the Wad Sus, then between the basins bordering the Wad Mesa [Qued Mesa] and the Wad Noun [Qued Noun] as far as the nearest point to the source of the Wad Tazerualt [Qued Tazeroualt].

A mixed Franco-Spanish commission demarcated the boundaries of Spanish Sahara by pillars in 1956-58. The Algeria-Spanish Sahara boundary has two pillars: (1) No. 40 located at 27° 20' N. and (2) No. 41 at 27° 40' N.

## **APPENDIX**

### **I. Documents**

1. Treaty of Peace and Amity, between Spain and Morocco. Tetuan, Apr. 26, 1860. [Ratifications exchanged at Tetuan, May 26, 1860]. British Foreign and State Papers (BFSP), Vol. 51 (1860-1), pp. 928-33.
2. Spanish Notification of the Extension of Spanish protection over certain territories on the North-west Coast of Africa. London, January 9, 1885. [Received by Earl Granville, January 12, 1885]. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols. 3rd Edition. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909) Vol. 3, pp. 1163-4.
3. Convention between France and Spain for the Delimitation of their Possessions in West Africa. Paris, June 27, 1900. [Ratifications exchanged at Paris, March 22, 1901]. Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 1165-7.
4. Convention between France and Spain respecting Morocco. Paris, October 3, 1904. BFSP, Vol. 102 (1908-9), pp. 432-5.
5. Traite entre la France et le Maroc pour l'Establissement d'un Regime regulier et l'Introduction des Reformes necessaires. Fez, March 30, 1912. BFSP, Vol. 106 (1913), pp. 1023-4.
6. Treaty between France and Spain regarding Morocco. November 27, 1912. Supplement to the American Journal of International Law, Official Documents, Vol. 7 (1913), pp. 81-93.

7. France-Morocco Joint Declaration. Paris, March 2, 1956. The American Journal of International Law, Vol. 51, pp. 676-683.

## **II. Maps**

1. Afrique Occidentale Francaise: scale 1:200,000; published 1957 by Service Geographique de l'Afrique Occidental Francaise (Dakar); sheet NG 29-XXII (Tindouf).

2. Maroc: scale 1:200,000; published 1965 by Institut Geographique National (French); sheet NG 29-XXII (Graret ledda).

3. Ifni y Sahara y Archipelago de Canarias: scale 1:200,000; published 1961 by Servicio Geografico del Ejercito (Spanish).

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