



International Boundary Study

No. 149 – January 8, 1975

Mauritania – Western Sahara (*Spanish Sahara*) Boundary

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**The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

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MAURITANIA – WESTERN SAHARA (SPANISH SAHARA) BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Mauritania-Spanish Sahara boundary is approximately 970 miles long. It consists of straight-line segments and is demarcated by widely spaced pillars. Northward from Cap Blanc, the line follows successively short segments utilizing midpoints between the coasts of the peninsula, the parallel of 21° 20' N., short segments joining the highest points of specified hills, the meridian of 12° W., the parallel of 26° N., and the meridian of 8° 40' W. to the Algeria tripoint.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Spanish Sahara. In 1476 Spaniards from the Canary Islands established a fort at Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequena to the north of Cap Juby. The fort was abandoned in 1524, and in general, Spanish claims to the northwest coast of Africa remained dormant until the war with Morocco in 1859-60. Thereafter, a number of Spanish expeditions explored the territory later known as Rio de Oro and attempted to promote trade with the people.

On January 9, 1885, a Spanish notification declared a protectorate over the Atlantic coastal area between the parallels of 20° 51' N. (Cap Blanc) and 26° 08' N. (Cabo Bojador), but it did not indicate a boundary inland. A Spanish decree of April 6, 1887, placed the protectorate under the administration of the Governor-General of the Canary Islands.

In accordance with a Franco-Spanish treaty of November 27, 1912, Spain was afforded 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. The Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco was administered as a part of Rio de Oro. Between 1934 and 1958, Rio de Oro, Infi, and the Spanish Southern Zone of Morocco were administered as parts of Spanish West Africa. A decree of January 10, 1958, created the Provincia de Sahara, commonly referred to as The Spanish Sahara.

Mauritania. French traders operated along the coast of present-day Mauritania as early as the 17th century. In 1903 France proclaimed a protectorate over the territories of the Trarza and Brakna peoples in the Pays Maures (Moorish County). The following year Mauritania was made a civil territory within the framework of French West Africa, and in 1920 it was made a colony.

Following World War II, Mauritania was made an overseas territory in the French Union. It became a republic and an autonomous member of the French Community in November 1958. Mauritania became independent on November 28, 1960.

III. BOUNDARY TREATIES

A Convention was signed by France and Spain on June 27, 1900, delimiting a boundary inland between their respective spheres of influence from Cap Blanc to the 12th meridian as follows:

Article I. On the Sahara coast, the boundary between the French and Spanish possessions shall follow a line which, beginning with the point indicated on insert (a) on the map forming Annex 2 to this Convention, on the west coast of Cape Blanc Peninsula, between the tip of that Cape and Ouest Bay, shall extend to the middle of the aforesaid peninsula; then, dividing it in half in so far as the terrain will permit, it shall run north to where it intersects parallel 21° 20' North Latitude. The boundary shall continue east on the parallel 21° 20' North Latitude to the intersection of that parallel with the meridian 15° 20' west of Paris (13° west of Greenwich). From that point, the demarcation line shall continue in a northwesterly direction describing, between the meridians 15° 20' and 16° 20' west of Paris (13° and 14° west of Greenwich), a curve that shall be drawn in such a way as to leave to France the salt pans of the Idjil region, with their associated facilities; the boundary shall run at a distance of at least 20 kilometers from the outer boundary of the salt pans. From the intersections of the aforesaid curve with the meridian 15° 20' west of Paris (13° west of Greenwich), the boundary shall extend, as directly as possible, to the intersection of the Tropic of Cancer with the meridian 14° 20' west of Paris (12° west of Greenwich) and shall continue northward along the last-mentioned meridian.

It is understood that, in the Cape Blanc area, the delimitation by the Special Commission mentioned in Article VIII of this Convention shall be made in such a way that the western part of the peninsula, including Ouest Bay, is assigned to Spain and that Cape Blanc properly speaking and the eastern part of that peninsula are retained by France.

...

A Franco-Spanish convention of October 3, 1904, delimited a boundary between French and Spanish spheres of influence northward from the intersection of the parallel of 26° N. and the meridian of 12° W. This convention established that part of the present-day Mauritania-Spanish Sahara boundary which extends from the intersection of the 26th parallel and the 12th meridian to the Algeria tripoint.

After the signing of a Franco-Spanish delimitation agreement on December 19, 1956, a joint commission the following year demarcated the Mauritania-Spanish Sahara boundary with pillars numbered from south to north through No. 39¹.

¹ Pillars erected on the Algeria-Spanish Sahara boundary and the Morocco-Spanish Sahara boundary are numbered consecutively in continuation of the Mauritania-Spanish Sahara series to No. 49 on the coast south of Cap Juby.

IV. ALIGNMENT

The Franco-Spanish agreement of December 19, 1956, affords the alignment of the Mauritania-Spanish Sahara boundary between Cap Blanc and the meridian of 12° W. as follows:

Article I. The boundary begins from the coast of Cabo Blanco Peninsula, at a point located to the south of the monument known as the Cross of the Breton Castaways, a monument which belongs to France.

From the monument, it runs in a straight line to the first of the points determined as hereinafter described.

On Cabo Blanco Peninsula, the boundary line shall be defined by the midpoints of the western and eastern coasts of the peninsula, on the parallels that pass through the triangulation vertices made in 1952, as detailed in Annexes 1 and 2. East of these points is joined to the next by a straight line.

From the point thus determined on the parallel corresponding to the "Chuf" vertex, the boundary runs in a straight line to Vertex No. 5 of the Spanish triangulation, until it reaches 1st. 21° 20' N. From that point it follows parallel 21° 20' until it crosses long. 13° W.

The boundary continues in straight lines linking successively the highest points of the following elevations: Galb Azefal, El Gaicha, Lazib, Galb Musa, Galb Tiquit, Gal El Fula, Gleib Um Edferat, Tenimun El Jadra, Gleib Lemhar, Gleib Yerad, from which it runs in a straight line to the intersection of the Tropic of Cancer with long. 12° W., which then constitutes the boundary toward the north, as detailed in Annex 3.

Apparently it was assumed that the terms of the convention of June 27, 1900, made sufficient provision for an extension of the boundary northward along the meridian of 12° W. as far as the parallel of 26° N. The 1904 convention between France and Spain continues the delimitation of the boundary starting from the intersection of the meridian of 12° W. and the parallel of 26° N.

The Franco-Spanish convention of October 3, 1904, delimited the northern part of the boundary from the intersection of the parallel of 26° N. and the meridian of 12° W. to the present-day Algeria tripoint as follows:

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 [Oued Draa],

The location of the tripoint with Algeria has been subject to different locations on various maps. French maps usually have placed the tripoint on the meridian of 8° 40' W. at about 27° 17' 40" N. This site is located on the north bank of a wadi known as the Tenuuchchand, which drains eastward into Algeria.

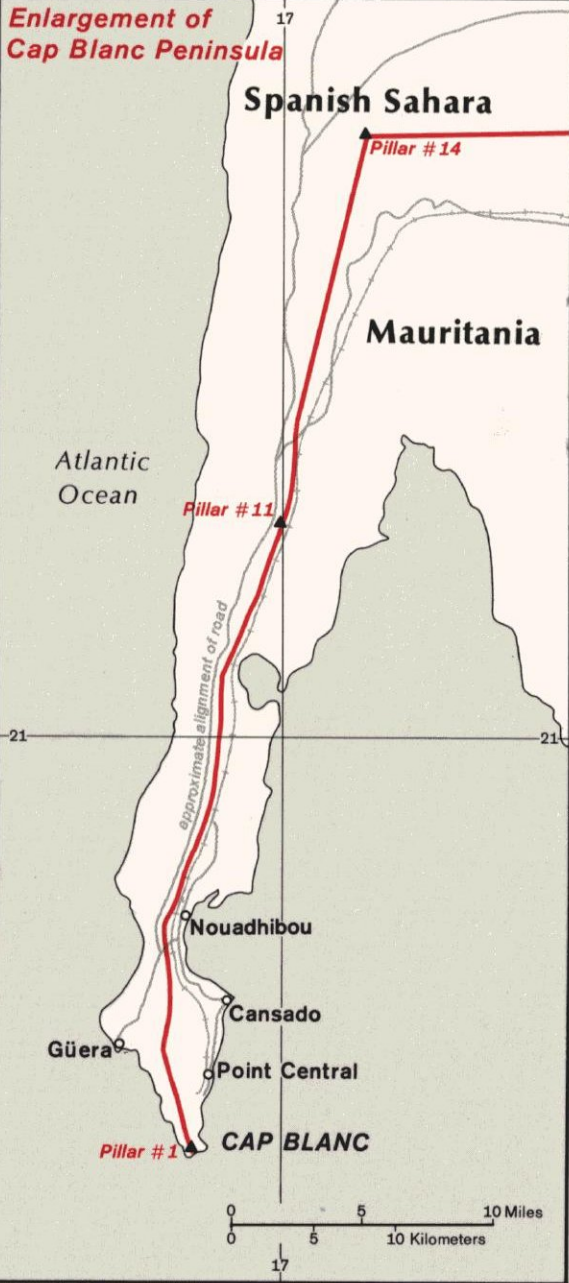
DOCUMENTATION

1. Spanish Notification of the Extension of Spanish protection over certain territories on the North-West Coast of Africa. London, January 9, 1885. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols., 3rd ed. London: Harrison and Sons, 1909, Vol. 3, pp. 1,163-4.
2. Convention between France and Spain for the Delimitation of the French and Spanish Possessions of the Sahara Coast and the Gulf of Guinea Coast. Paris, June 27, 1900. [Ratifications exchanged at Paris, March 22, 1901] British Foreign and State Papers (BFSP), Vol. 92 (1899-1900), pp. 1,014-17. (French)
3. Convention between France and Spain respecting Morocco. Paris, October 3, 1904. BFSP, Vol. 102 (1908-1909), pp. 432-5. (French)

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

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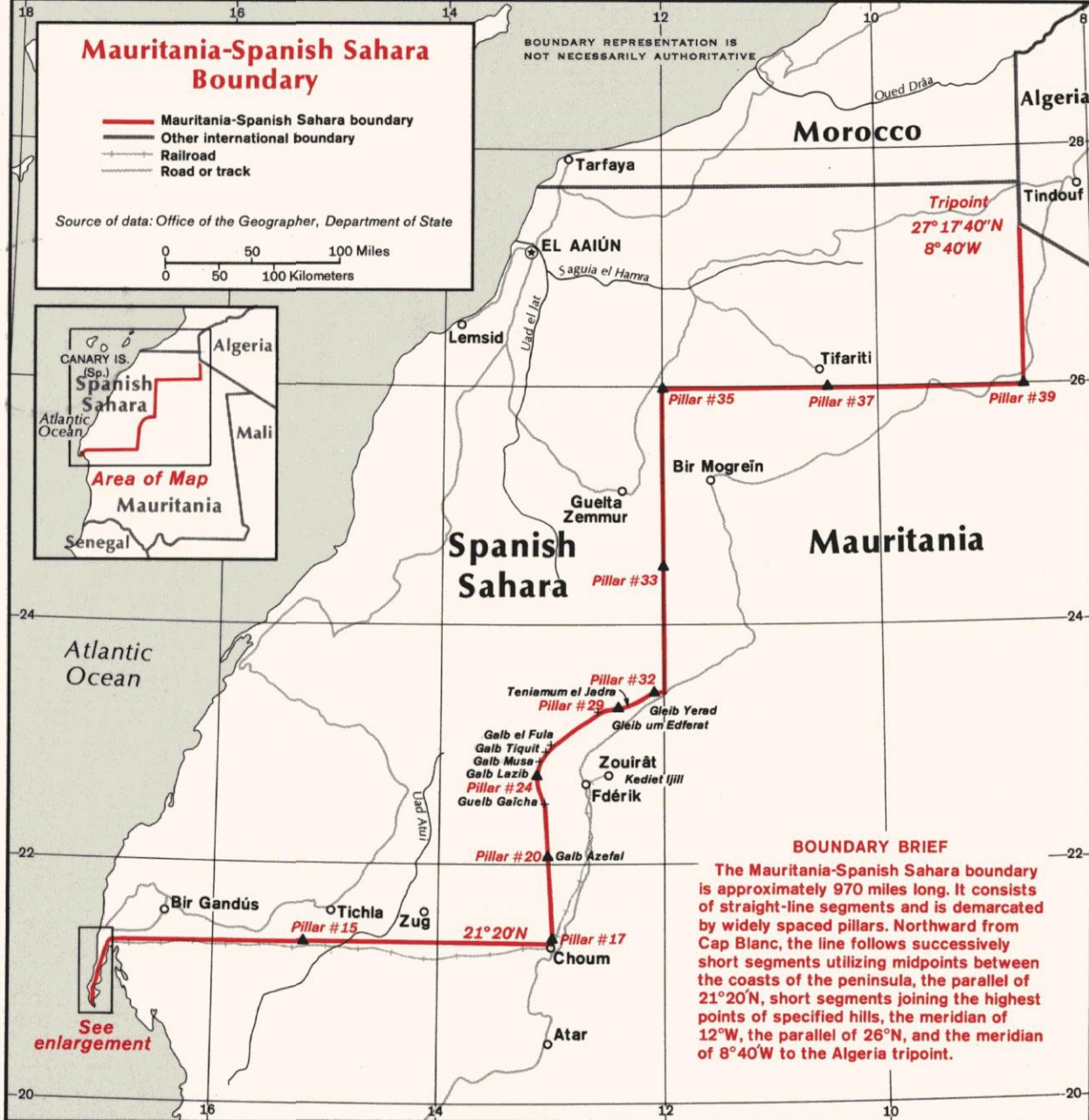
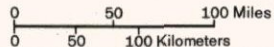
Enlargement of Cap Blanc Peninsula



Mauritania-Spanish Sahara Boundary

- Mauritania-Spanish Sahara boundary
- Other international boundary
- Railroad
- Road or track

Source of data: Office of the Geographer, Department of State



BOUNDARY BRIEF

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See
enlargement