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GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT STUDY

THE ALGERIA-MOROCCO BOUNDARY

CIA/RR GS 63-28

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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THE ALGERIA-MOROCCO BOUNDARY*

Much of the boundary between Morocco and Algeria has no precise or internationally sanctioned basis. The western two-thirds of the boundary, where territorial claims are currently being made, is in reality a frontier area.

1. Legal Aspects

The border between Algeria and Morocco can be considered in three sectors, each differing markedly from the other two.

From the coast of the Mediterranean Sea south to Teniet Sassi, a distance of 102.5 miles, the boundary is precisely described in the Convention of Lalla-Marnia of 18 March 1845 between Morocco and France. Because the description follows fixed cultural and physical features, most of which can be identified on topographic maps, there would appear to be only a remote possibility of disagreement in this sector. The Convention did not intend that a conventional boundary should be established south of Teniet Sassi because the area to the south was tribal country; the Convention therefore allocated the

* Most of the information on the legal aspect of the boundary that is contained in this report was taken from The Boundaries of Algeria, produced by the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in 1959. This is the latest authoritative work on the boundaries of Algeria.

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tribes, and a few villages, to one country or the other, thereby creating a frontier rather than a boundary. Sovereignty was recognized over tribes, not over territory.

As French control spread southward a more precise definition of the respective sovereignties became necessary. The second sector was defined by the Protocol of Paris, 20 July 1901. It extended the boundary southward from Teniet Sassi to Guir, southwest of Colomb Bechar, using tribal areas, physical features, straight lines between points. Although the portion between Teniet Sassi and Figuig is vague and hard to follow on maps, it has been depicted on published maps of Algeria and Morocco fairly consistently. After the 1901 Protocol proved to be inadequate, an accord covering the whole sector was signed on 4 March 1910, and Varnier, the French High Commissioner in Oujda, was given the task of executing the accord. The Teniet Sassi -- Figuig portion of the "Varnier Line" was identical with the 1901 Protocol boundary, and there appears to be only slight opportunity for disagreement over the location of the boundary in this part of the sector. However, between Figuig and Guir the 1901 Protocol boundary had been found to cut through some of the tribal areas rather than between them. In an attempt to rectify this the Varnier Line was run well west of the 1901 Protocol boundary, thereby increasing Algerian territory in the Colomb-Bechar salient. Since then there have been several versions

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of the Varnier Line, which largely reflect the relative strengths of the governors on both sides of the boundary. The current version is shown on Map 28395. None of them has the stature of an international agreement, and the boundary in this entire sector rests on the 1901 Protocol. In practice the southern end of this sector has ranged from Guir to a point about 75 miles west-northwest of Guir near the western edge of the Hammada du Guir.

The third sector lies between the southern end of Sector 2 and Spanish Sahara. No agreement exists for this sector. Furthermore, available information does not indicate any record of the establishment of an informal boundary based on local usage or allegiance. For the western half of the sector most French sources consider the southern limit of Morocco to be the north cliff of the Hammada du Dra (not the Oued Dra), which is called the "limite de la zone de sécurité" on French maps of Morocco. French maps of Algeria show the boundary as the north bank of the Oued Dra which lies well north of the Hammada du Dra.

The Oued Dra can be considered as a possible line only in the area west of Tagounit (29°58'N-05°35'W) where it turns west after leaving the mountains. East of Tagounit the "Oued Dra Line" must depend on the location of the southern end of the Varnier Line, which has been at several different points. Even for the current version of the Varnier

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Line (see Map 28395) Algerian maps have shown different versions of the Oued Dra Line east of Tagounit.

Two other lines have been put forward unilaterally but neither has any legal status. "Project Trinquet" was carried out in 1930-38 by the French general of that name who was then resident at Tiznit. At that time, French interests lay in expanding Moroccan claims at the expense of Algeria. For the territory southwest of the Varnier Line the Project Trinquet proposed a line following approximately the northern edge of the Hammada du Dra, well south of most other lines, but this line was rejected by the French Government. Later, the northern edge of the Hammada du Dra was called the "limite de la zone de sécurité". In 1958, incidents stemming from the Algerian war caused the French and Moroccans to exchange notes vaguely describing the frontier area southwest of the Varnier Line. On the basis of these notes the French established a "de facto line" which lay north of the Trinquet Line except for the area north of Meridja, $31^{\circ}33'N-02^{\circ}57'W$. It followed the Oued Dra from Spanish Sahara to a point near Tagounit and continued north and east, following the lower course of the Oued Ziz on the north side of the Kem Kem Plateau. From there it apparently followed the western edge of the Hammada du Guir and almost the entire course of Oued Zelmou, thence almost due east to Figuig. The de facto line is reported to have been honored by the Moroccans whenever it was

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invoked by the French between 1958 and 1962. Thus it appears to have been the northermost operational limit of French Algeria during those years.

Moroccan claims to Algerian territory therefore appear not to present a problem in the area north of Figuig. South of Figuig, Moroccan claims are extensive, including Reggane in central Algeria and part of southwestern Mali (see Map 28394), areas far beyond the current zone of conflict. South of Guir there is no legal basis for a boundary.

2. Character of the Problem Sector

The area between Colomb Bechar (31°37'N-02°31'W) and Tindouf (27°42'N-08°09'W) falls in the transition zone between the rugged, semiarid Anti-Atlas mountains to the northwest and the ill-defined, partially-dissected, arid wastes of the Sahara to the southeast. Settlements are limited to valleys with perennially available water.

For the most part the terrain is rugged. North of the Oued Dra -- between Tiglit (28°31'N-10°18'W) and Tagounit (29°58'N-05°35'W) -- a series of rocky ridges form the foothills of the Anti-Atlas (see Map 28395). These ridges are known collectively as the Jebel Bani. In general, their crests rise more than 1,000 feet above the valleys that separate them. The sides are steep and in many instances almost vertical. South of the Jebel Bani the Oued Dra flows across a surface

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that is more subdued, but still rugged. The entire area is covered by a maze of dry streambeds, whose valley sides are steep though relatively low, and areas whose surfaces are extremely flat and in some instances quite sandy, with a few dry lakebeds. Similar wadi and plain terrain characterizes the area northeast of Tagounit, which is drained by the Oued ed Daoura and its main tributary the Oued Ziz.

South and east of the Oued Dra and Oued ed Daoura lowlands lie the plateau surfaces of the Hammada du Dra and Hammada du Guir, which extend southward beyond the frontier region into the sandy wastes of the Erg Iguidi in Algeria. The barren, relatively flat surfaces of these hammadas are interrupted by numerous steep scarps and deep, dry valleys. The borders of the plateaus are irregular, ranging from high, steep scarps to gentle slopes that are difficult to identify.

The entire frontier area is extremely arid; no place averages more than 3 inches of rainfall per year. What rainfall occurs is highly unreliable; in any part of the area, several years may pass between storms. These storms usually are violent local thundershowers of short duration. Extreme temperatures are characteristic. Summer daytime temperatures may exceed 110°F, but near-freezing temperatures may be experienced at night.

Vegetative cover reflects the arid nature of this region. What little plant cover exists is in the form of low, widely scattered,

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drought-resistant shrubs and grasses. The Hammada du Dra and Hammada du Guir are almost completely devoid of vegetation, and what vegetation there is in the rest of the region is limited to the stream courses, where moisture is close enough to the surface to be reached by plant roots.

The valleys of the Oued Dra -- between Agdz (30°42'N-06°29'W) and Tagounit -- and the Oued Ziz -- between Erfoud (31°26'N-04°14'W) and Rissani (31°17'N-04°17'W) -- support relatively dense populations. Berber farmers in these valleys cultivate groves of date palms as well as growing small amounts of wheat and barley. Although most farm products are grown for subsistence purposes, they also serve as a basis for a small amount of trade with a small number of Arab nomads. Otherwise, these nomads subsist on the products of their goats and camels.

West of Tagounit, water rarely flows on the surface in the Oued Dra and the stream course has insufficient water to support settlements. Among the ridges of the Jebel Bani, however, a string of oases stretches from Tagounit to Assa (28°36'N-09°26'W) -- including Foun Zguid (30°05'N-06°52'W), Agadir Tissint (29°54'N-07°19'W), Tata (29°45'N-07°59'W), and Foun el Hassane (29°02'N-08°55'W). These small oases support small but dense groves of date palms. There are a few unreliable wells south of these oases and the Oued Dra, near the northern edge of the Hammada du Dra.

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Transportation is very difficult in this region. At best the "roads" are no better than trails, and off-road movement is often preferable to traveling on them. Most roads and trails follow dry streambeds, which are subject to occasional devastating floods. The high, steep slopes of the Jebel Bani as well as the numerous scarps and steep valleys that occur throughout the Hammada du Dra and the Hammada du Guir present formidable barriers to transportation in the frontier region.

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3. Location of Places

Agadir Tissint	29 54 N	07 19 W
Agdz	30 42 N	06 29 W
Akka	29 25 N	08 15 W
Assa	28 36 N	09 26 W
Bou Nou	29 32 N	09 49 W
Colomb Bechar	31 37 N	02 13 W
El Hafeira	29 28 N	07 05 W
Erfoud	31 26 N	04 14 W
Figuig	32 06 N	01 14 W
Foum el Hassane	29 02 N	08 55 W
Foum Zguid	30 05 N	07 19 W
Guir	30 29 N	02 18 W
Hassi Beida	29 31 N	05 44 W
Meridja	31 33 N	02 57 W
Oued Zelmau	31 45 N	02 48 W
Oued Ziz	30 39 N	04 26 W
Reggane	26 42 N	00 10 E
Rissani	31 17 N	04 17 W
Tagounit	29 58 N	05 35 W
Tata	29 45 N	07 59 W
Teniet Sassi	34 06 N	01 38 W
Tiglit	28 31 N	10 18 W
Tindouf	27 42 N	08 09 W
Tinfouchi	28 53 N	05 42 W
Tinjoub	29 29 N	05 38 W
Tiznit	29 45 N	09 48 W
Tlemcen	34 52 N	01 19 W

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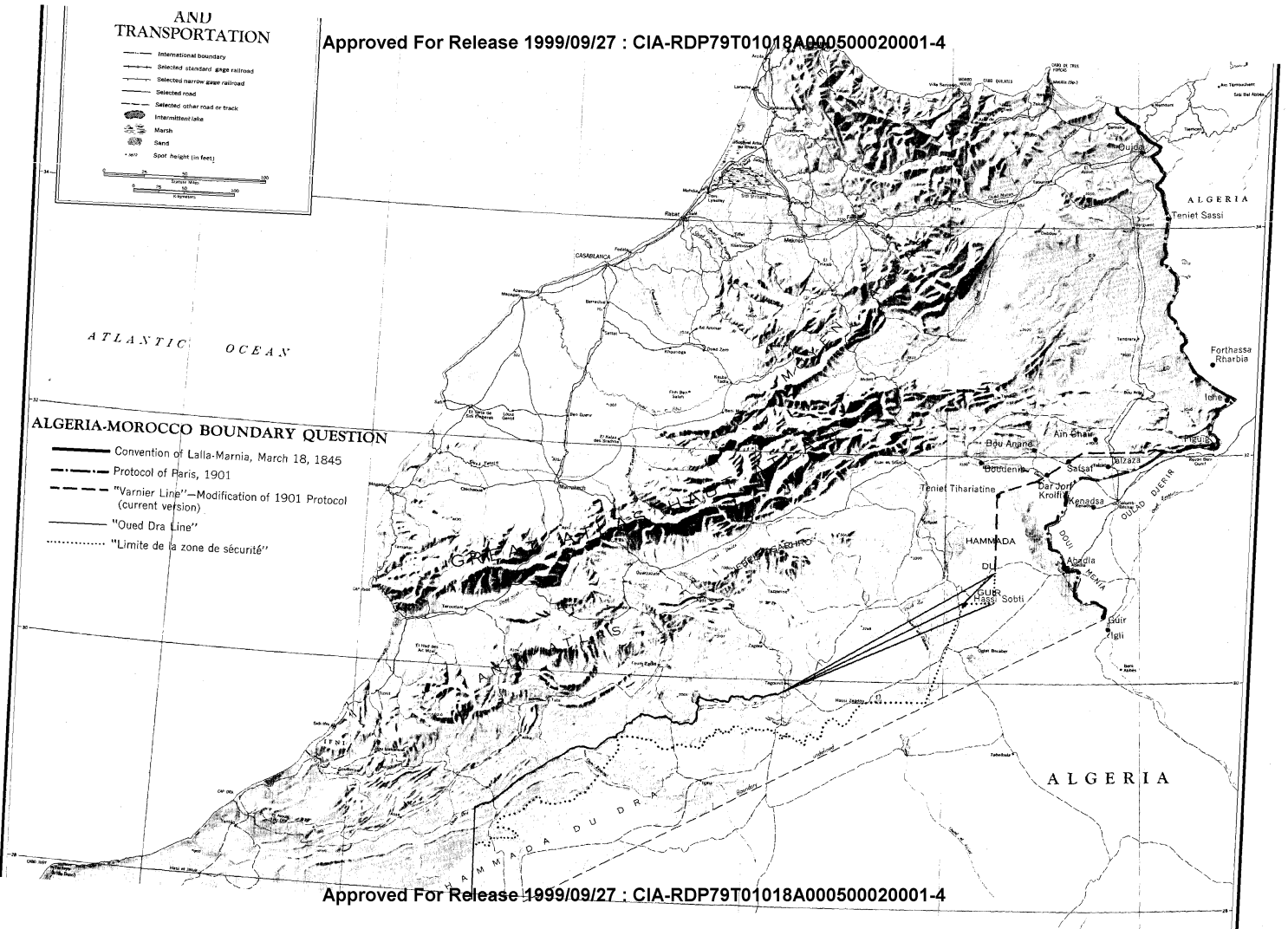
ANU
TRANSPORTATION

- International boundary
- Selected standard gauge railroad
- Selected narrow gauge railroad
- Selected road
- Selected other road or track
- International tele
- Marsh
- Sand
- Spot Height (in feet)



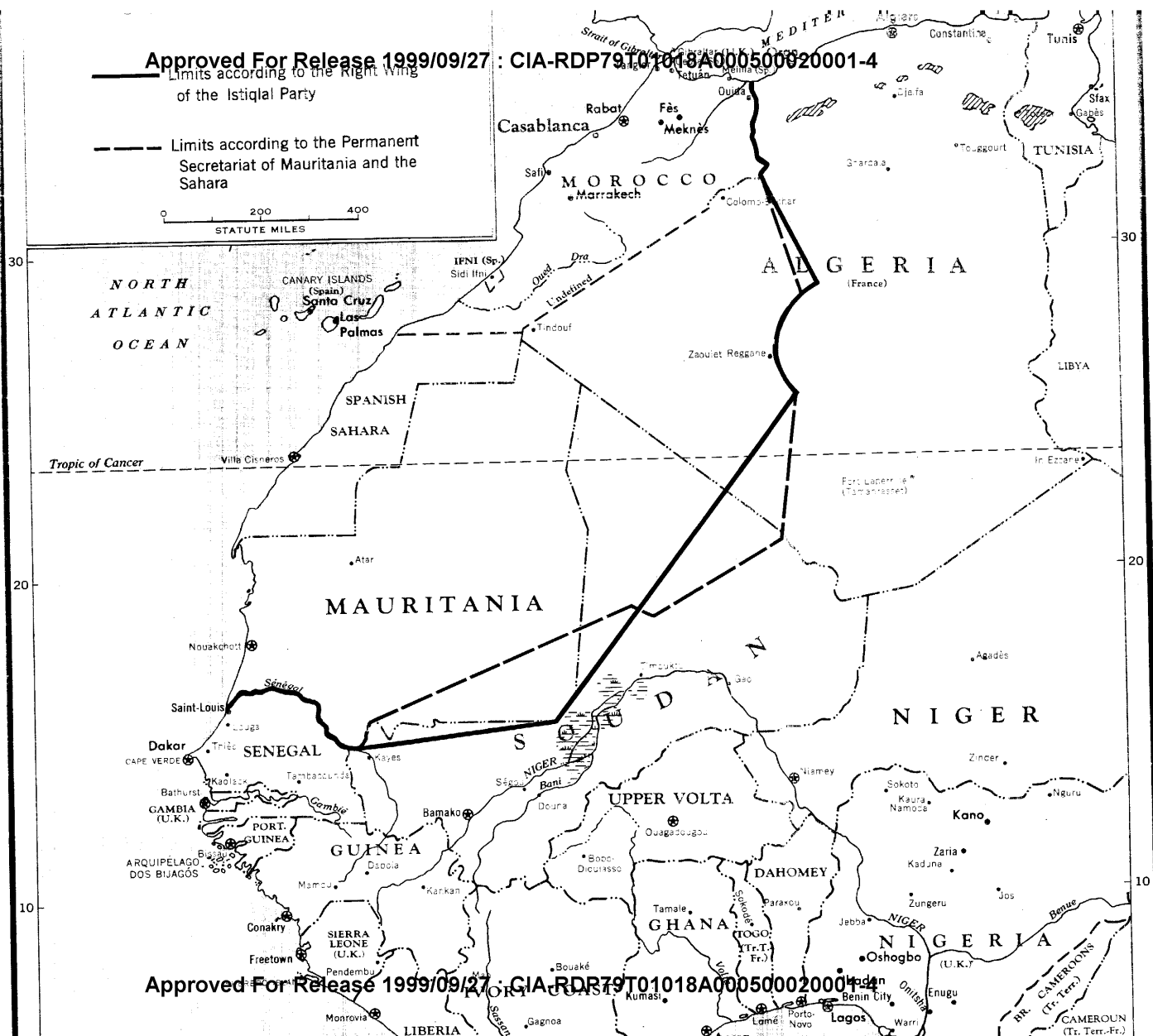
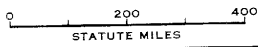
ALGERIA-MOROCCO BOUNDARY QUESTION

- Convention of Lalla-Marnia, March 18, 1845
- Protocol of Paris, 1901
- "Varnier Line"—Modification of 1901 Protocol (current version)
- "Oued Dra Line"
- "Limite de la zone de sécurité"



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Limits according to the Right Wing
of the Istiqlal Party

--- Limits according to the Permanent
Secretariat of Mauritania and the
Sahara



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