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Western Sahara: Scenarios for a Diplomatic Solution



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*NESA 87-10027
April 1987*

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Western Sahara: Scenarios
for a Diplomatic Solution

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by
 Office of Near Eastern and South
Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Arab-
Israeli Division, NESAs,

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**Western Sahara: Scenarios
for a Diplomatic Solution**

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Key Judgments*Information available
as of 18 March 1987
was used in this report.*

The 11-year war in Western Sahara between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front guerrillas shows no sign of ending. Even though Morocco has the upper hand militarily, Algeria and the Polisario hold sway in the diplomatic arena. The chances of a negotiated political solution during the next several years are poor. Neither side is willing to make the necessary compromises. []

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Although Morocco and Algeria want to avoid wider conflict, their competition for preeminence in the Maghreb poses potential dangers for the United States. The jockeying could lead to instability in Morocco and a weakening of US ties to Algeria. []

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Only a political solution will bring lasting peace. Rabat and Algiers recognize that military means will not resolve the dispute, and their views on a negotiated settlement are slowly converging. Algeria's President Bendjedid is the key to progress. He eventually will be forced to make diplomatic concessions because his government will not risk all-out war to stop King Hassan's successful efforts to consolidate his hold on Western Sahara. Algiers, however, will require a face-saving formula. []

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The most likely diplomatic solution would be based on the concept of federation, involving Hassan's sovereignty over Western Sahara in return for a degree of Polisario autonomy. This type of compromise would amount to a Moroccan trusteeship of Western Sahara, probably under UN auspices, and would give Algeria a way out of the conflict without conceding defeat. []

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Political solutions less likely to bring peace include Moroccan incorporation of Western Sahara, a territorial partition, or the formation of an independent state in the region. []

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A settlement of the Western Sahara dispute would only temporarily stabilize the politics of North Africa. Both Algeria and Morocco will continue to compete for influence with other regional states. Hassan would benefit the most from a settlement, but he might be emboldened to renew irredentist claims to the Spanish enclaves and possibly even to Mauritania. []

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Soviet interests in the Western Sahara conflict probably are limited, and a resolution is unlikely to change Moscow's relations with either Morocco or Algeria. The Soviets believe they have little hope of weakening Morocco's strong ties to the United States. Moscow has sanctioned Algiers's transfer of arms to the Polisario, but it does not want to jeopardize relations with Rabat by openly supporting the Polisario. [REDACTED]

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A settlement could enhance the US position in the Maghreb, mainly because it would strengthen Morocco, Washington's closest friend in the region. Nevertheless, it could also encourage King Hassan to take steps—such as unilateral initiatives in the Arab-Israeli peace process—that could complicate other US interests in the region. The King may press the United States to provide increased financial and military aid in return for his willingness to support US strategic interests, but he probably would not weaken his ties to the United States. [REDACTED]

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Algeria is likely to view Washington as partly responsible for a Moroccan success in Western Sahara. Algiers probably would cool relations with Washington, at least temporarily, in response to perceived greater US-Moroccan cooperation and possibly develop closer ties to Moscow. Algeria would also seek to compensate by strengthening ties to Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania, the most vulnerable state in the region. [REDACTED]

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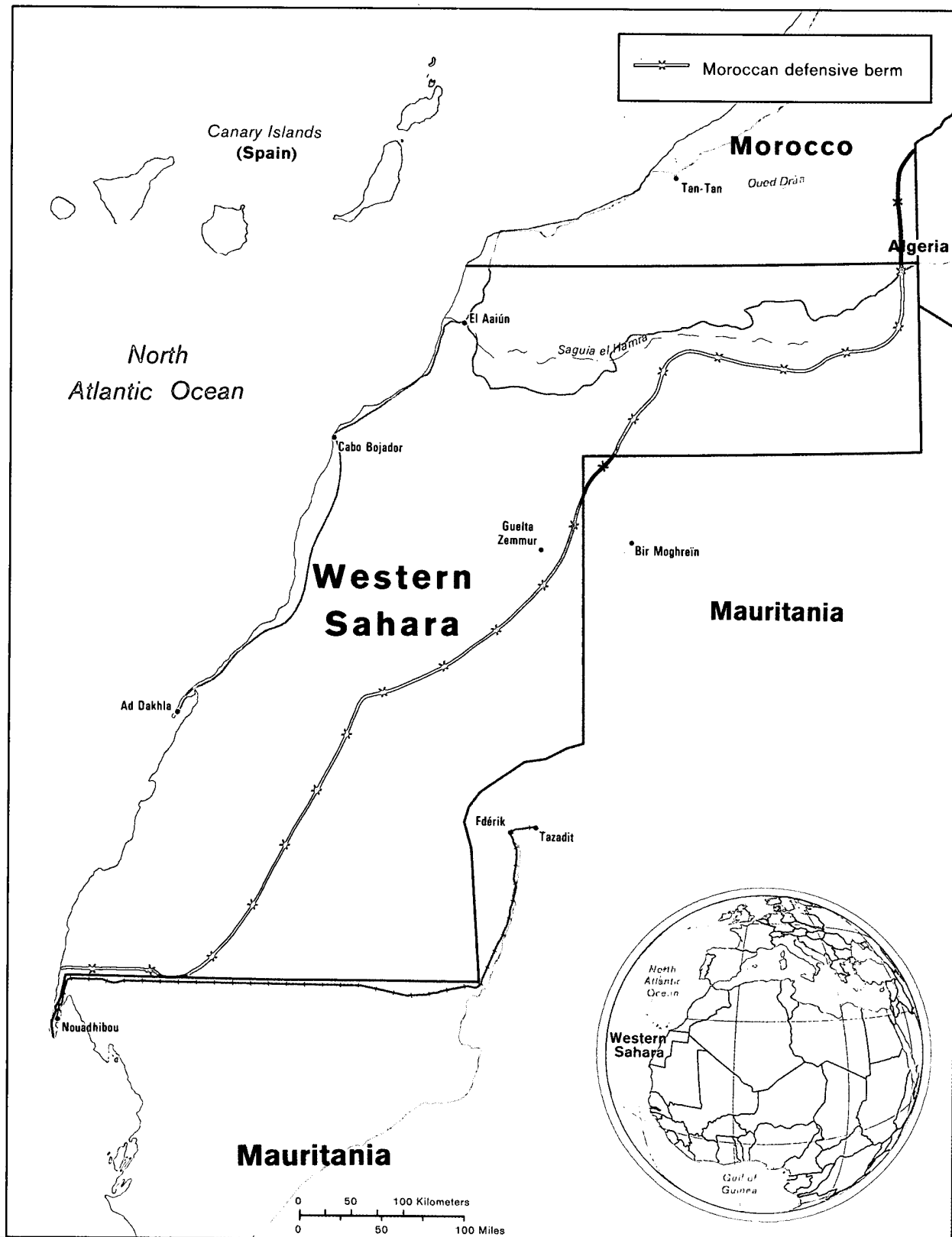
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Figure 1
Western Sahara



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Western Sahara: Scenarios for a Diplomatic Solution

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The contest for control of Western Sahara, pitting Morocco against guerrillas of the Algerian-backed Polisario (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro) is in its second decade. Neither side appears capable of winning a clear-cut military victory. Moreover, the combatants have shown little willingness to end the fighting at the peace table.

Polisario and its Algerian patrons held the upper hand until 1981, when Morocco built its first berm. Since then, Morocco has seized the initiative and now controls more than two-thirds of Western Sahara.

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The struggle continues to be the main point of friction between Morocco and Algeria, who both seek Maghreb leadership. If the existing stalemate drags on indefinitely, it will contribute to political and economic instability in both countries as well as risk wider conflict in North Africa. This assessment will focus on the political options of the key players, possible diplomatic solutions, the ramifications for regional politics, and the implications for US and Soviet interests.

Diplomatically, Rabat has not achieved the same success. Algiers has used its strong position in the Nonaligned Movement and generous aid disbursements in Africa to rally international support for the Polisario. Sixty-five countries, including India, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria, recognize the Polisario government, the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic (SDAR). Algeria's diplomatic muscle has produced strong endorsements for its position in the United Nations and led to the withdrawal of Morocco from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), following OAU recognition of the SDAR in 1984.

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The War Grinds On

Fighting in Western Sahara has its origins in the decolonization process. In 1975 Spain began a phased withdrawal from Spanish Sahara, and in early 1976 Madrid relinquished control over the territory to Morocco and Mauritania, who divided it between them. This prompted Algeria and the Polisario—the only indigenous political movement among the native population of about 75,000 in the colony—to launch armed attacks against Morocco and Mauritania.

Moroccan, Algerian, and Polisario Attitudes
The driving force behind Morocco's pursuit of the war is a national consensus that Western Sahara is an integral part of the country. Morocco claims Western Sahara on the grounds that it possessed the territory before Spanish colonization. In our view, Moroccan King Hassan has little room to maneuver because even the opposition parties have taken a strong supportive stand on the issue. He has generally pursued a hard line and would lose face at home if he were to make concessions that would threaten Moroccan control over the territory. According to the US Embassy in Rabat, most Moroccans believe that Algiers—despite its espousal of self-determination for the Polisario—covets the territory and that the Polisario is a creature of the Algerians.

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The conflict has evolved from a dynamic contest—during which territory changed hands several times—to a static one involving limited Polisario military operations against Moroccan forces entrenched behind a lengthy earthen wall or berm. The

We believe Morocco can continue to fight indefinitely, given the low cost of maintaining the berms and its ample reserves of manpower. According to the US

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Key Facts on Western Sahara

Area: *266,770 square kilometers, comparable in size to Colorado or Great Britain.*

People: *Arab and Berber*

Population: *Estimated at 92,000 (July 1986), including refugees living in Algeria.*

Religion: *Muslim*

Language: *Hassaniya Arabic and Moroccan Arabic*

Capital: *El Aaiun (also La'youn)*

Natural resources: *Phosphates, iron ore, fish*

Major industries: *Phosphate mining, fishing, and handicrafts*

Geography: *The Atlantic coastline features rugged cliffs with sand dunes that extend up to 30 kilometers inland. Most of the interior consists of a rocky plain, and the sand dunes of neighboring Mauritania and Algeria barely extend into Western Sahara. Rainfall averages from 5 to 20 centimeters each year—a total that allows for seasonal vegetation and abundant game. The country contains only one intermittent river.*

History: *The legal status of the territory and the question of sovereignty are unresolved. After Spain abandoned Western Sahara in 1976, Morocco and Mauritania partitioned it, with Morocco acquiring the northern two-thirds, including the rich phosphate reserves at Bu Craa. Mauritania, under pressure from the Polisario guerrillas, abandoned all claims to its part in August 1979. Morocco moved to occupy the Mauritanian sector shortly thereafter and has since asserted administrative control over most of the territory. The Polisario Front and its Algerian-backed government-in-exile continue to contest Morocco for control of the territory.*

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[redacted] the economic burden probably ranges from \$500,000 to \$1 million per day. The number of those killed in combat is about a dozen per month. [redacted]

[redacted] morale problems among the troops are increasing, we do not believe that these problems are serious. The US Embassy in Rabat says that the war is sustainable for Morocco because it is viewed as defensive. [redacted]

In our view, the issue evokes less emotions for most Algerians than it does for Moroccans because Algeria has no claims to Western Sahara. Nevertheless, it is involved in the conflict for ideological reasons. Algiers has always insisted on the principle of self-determination for the inhabitants and views the Polisario quest for self-determination as a legitimate struggle against colonialism. The government has declared itself ready to accept the results of a properly conducted referendum. [redacted]

In addition, national interests have a bearing on 25X1
Algeria's position. Because of its common border with Western Sahara, Algeria sees itself as a party to the dispute. The government supports the Polisario as part of its efforts to deny Morocco access to the region and to drain Moroccan resources. [redacted] 25X1

The costs of the war so far have been tolerable for Algeria because of its oil resources and the Polisario's role as a proxy in the fighting. Although Algerian troops participated in combat during the early phases of the war, their current involvement generally is one of providing logistic and tactical support behind the lines. [redacted]

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Polisario leaders

The Polisario is committed to its goal of independence for Western Sahara despite its setbacks on the battlefield. Officials of the SDAR have publicly expressed satisfaction that Polisario access to international forums, safehaven in southwestern Algeria, and economic support from Algiers give them the means to carry on the struggle indefinitely.

Past Attempts at a Solution

Bilateral Initiatives. Since the beginning of the conflict, Algeria and Morocco have had numerous contacts to resolve the fighting in Western Sahara. Many of these attempts were secret and apparently produced no written proposals for a settlement. For the most part, during the early phases of the war Morocco and Algeria tended to focus on fighting rather than diplomacy because both believed they could win.

The tide of the war changed when Morocco began constructing its berms and winning the war militarily in the early 1980s. Algeria, for its part, began to use

Profile of the Polisario

Structure. The Polisario, or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, was created by Sahrawi nationalists in 1973. The movement formed the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic (SDAR) in 1976. Mohammed Abdelaziz is President of the SDAR and its Council of Ministers, as well as Secretary-General of the nine-man Executive Committee of the Polisario, which is the primary governing body of the organization.

Ideology. Polisario leaders espouse non-Marxist Arab socialism and Sahrawi nationalism.

Numbers. The Polisario claims that as many as 165,000 supporters live in its four refugee camps in the vicinity of Tindouf, Algeria. Morocco, however, contends that the number is as low as 15,000.

the number is between 17,000 and 35,000—a range we endorse.

Polisario troops number about 3,500 and have an arsenal including 100 tanks, 150 armored vehicles, 40 howitzers and mortars, SA-6 air defense missiles, and 500 trucks.

Foreign Support. Algeria provides the bulk of the Polisario's economic and military support. Cuba provides a small number of medical doctors and military advisers.

diplomacy more aggressively in response to Morocco's military moves, particularly pushing its position in the OAU. These two developments, in our view, encouraged Hassan and Bendjedid to hold their first summit meeting in early 1983. Hassan, for his part, probably believed at the time that he would be negotiating from a position of strength. Bendjedid probably believed he had little to gain in continuing the war but would face severe criticism at home and among foreign supporters if he abandoned the fight. Bendjedid may also

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have believed that the Polisario's success in gaining international recognition strengthened his hand in meeting Hassan. []

Even though the summit meeting helped ease bilateral tensions—a resumption of air links and reduction of restrictions on cross-border traffic—it did not settle the Western Sahara issue. The inability of both governments to move forward has encouraged them to seek help from third parties and international organizations to settle the dispute. []

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Third-Party Efforts. Since the war began, several countries—the most prominent of which are France, Spain, and Saudi Arabia—have attempted to mediate between Morocco and Algeria. These efforts primarily have been to ease tensions and foster dialogue rather than to present explicit plans. In our view, third-party reconciliation attempts have foundered, in part, because of Algerian and Moroccan suspicions about the intent of the mediating states. []

Saudi Arabia, long a proponent of Arab unity, has at various times sought to reconcile Algeria and Morocco. King Fahd tried in 1981 to bring Hassan and Bendjedid together, and, according to the US Embassy in Riyadh, the Saudis take credit for the successful meeting between the two leaders in 1983. King Fahd in March visited both countries to lay the groundwork for another Bendjedid-Hassan summit meeting. []

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French efforts have stumbled because of Algiers's belief that Paris favors Morocco in the struggle. This belief stems from French fighting on the side of Mauritania against the Polisario during the 1970s, as well as lingering animosities toward France as a result of the Algerian independence struggle. In 1978 Paris offered a plan for territorial partition, and in 1981, 1983, and 1985 it offered to play a "friendly role" in resolving the dispute. []

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Although Madrid wanted to wash its hands of Western Sahara after abandoning the colony in 1976, it has occasionally made itself available as a mediator, particularly with regard to assisting a referendum. Spain has population records that would be useful in

preparing a vote among the inhabitants of Western Sahara on self-determination, which both sides agree is essential for a political resolution. Even though Madrid is officially neutral, its support for the Polisario in the United Nations has made Spain suspect in the eyes of Hassan. []

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International Attempts. International initiatives increasingly have taken the place of bilateral and third-party mediation as the venue for negotiations. The OAU was the original international forum for discussion of the Western Sahara dispute. Much of this effort is attributable to Algeria, which used its good credentials with African states to press its position. Algiers has been a stronger supporter than Rabat of liberation movements on the continent and has given more financial aid to the emerging nations. Hassan's call at an OAU summit meeting in 1981 for a supervised referendum in Western Sahara was, in our view, largely an effort to preempt Algerian proposals that would damage Morocco's diplomatic position. At the OAU foreign ministers' meeting in February 1982, however, Algeria succeeded in having the SDAR delegation seated—a development that signaled the SDAR's heightened status internationally. In 1984 the OAU recognized the SDAR. []

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We believe that Morocco's subsequent withdrawal from the OAU in 1984 destroyed any hope that this organization could broker an accord and shifted international peace efforts to the United Nations. The most concerted UN initiative to date was undertaken last year, when Secretary General Perez de Cuellar attempted unsuccessfully to solicit terms for a cease-fire and referendum during talks with Moroccan and SDAR diplomats. According to the US Embassy in Algiers, the current UN strategy is to extract a commitment from the Polisario to cease hostilities in return for a Moroccan pledge to withdraw a significant portion of its military forces from Western Sahara. Comments by UN officials to Embassy officers in Algiers indicate that the Secretary General may try to encourage bilateral contacts to improve the atmosphere for negotiations. []

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Conditions for a Diplomatic Settlement

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Algeria/Polisario</i>
<i>Cease-fire</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Negotiations</i>	Morocco and Algeria only	Morocco and the Polisario, with Algeria an observer
<i>Referendum</i>	Yes, with Moroccan civilian administrators remaining, with military confined to barracks	Yes, with removal of all Moroccan civilians and military
<i>Referendum supervisor</i>	UN	UN or OAU
<i>Eligible voters</i>	1974 Spanish census, but only Sahrawis presently in Western Sahara, not including 11,000 refugees in Algeria ^a	1974 Spanish census, but including the 165,000 Polisario refugees in Algeria

^a The most recent census on the population of Western Sahara is the 1974 Spanish census, which listed 73,497 Sahrawis in the territory. We believe that current Moroccan and Algerian claims as to the number of refugees in Algeria are skewed for propaganda purposes.



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Prospects for a Diplomatic Settlement

The chances for a negotiated political solution during the next several years are slim. Even though the views of both sides have converged in recent years—they accept the idea of UN mediation and a referendum of the Sahrawi inhabitants over the territory's status—neither side is willing to compromise on the specific conditions necessary for a settlement. [redacted]

[redacted] Rabat will not compromise on territory or sovereignty, and Algiers remains committed to obtaining concessions on these points. [redacted]

Morocco. Rabat is prepared to pursue the war indefinitely. The government is building a new berm that will allow it to control about 90 percent of the territory. We believe that this move reflects Rabat's pessimism about the chances of reaching a favorable political settlement in the near term. [redacted]

We believe that King Hassan's diplomatic strategy has been to stall for time and to hold firm to his positions for a settlement. Despite his refusal to compromise and his firm military commitment, we believe he realizes that a military victory is not achievable or will not resolve the dispute and that only a political solution can end the conflict. He believes, however, that his strong military position enables him to push for a settlement on his own terms. [redacted]

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Algeria. Although the Algerians also maintain a tough public stance, [redacted] they are convinced that the war cannot be won and [redacted] are becoming more flexible. In our view, Algiers is playing a waiting game, believing that

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**Countries Recognizing the
Saharan Democratic Arab Republic**

	Africa	Middle East and Asia	Latin America	Europe	Total Countries
1976	Algeria Angola Benin Burundi Guinea-Bissau Madagascar Mozambique Rwanda Togo	North Korea			10
1977	Seychelles				1
1978	Congo Sao Tome and Principe Tanzania	South Yemen	Panama		5
1979	Cape Verde Ethiopia Ghana Lesotho Zambia	Afghanistan Cambodia Laos Vietnam	Dominica Grenada Guyana Jamaica Mexico Nicaragua St. Lucia		16
1980	Botswana Libya Mali Sierra Leone Swaziland Chad Zimbabwe	Iran Vanuatu Syria	Costa Rica Cuba		12
1981		Kiribati Nauru Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands Tuvalu			5
1982	Mauritius		Bolivia Suriname Venezuela		4
1983			Ecuador		1
1984	Burkina Mauritania Nigeria		Peru	Yugoslavia	5
1985		India	Colombia		2
1986	Uganda		Guatemala Dominican Republic Trinidad and Tobago		4
Total	30	15	19	1	65

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Morocco cannot bear the economic burden of maintaining its 100,000 troops in Western Sahara indefinitely. []

President Bendjedid's position has evolved from support for the independence of Western Sahara to some sort of federation involving autonomy for the region under nominal Moroccan control. Behind his changing attitude are Algeria's economic problems due to falling oil revenues and the rising costs of economic support for the Polisario population. We believe Bendjedid realizes that military options are limited unless he is willing to risk war with Morocco. []

Most of Algeria's key leaders want a political settlement, but they need a face-saving compromise. []

[] The economic and military dependence of the Polisario on Algeria, however, gives it little leeway to challenge Algiers's wishes. []

Alternative Political Solutions

We believe neither side can force an end to the war, and only a negotiated political solution will bring lasting peace. The pace of negotiations largely depends on several factors. Increasing economic and social problems in Algeria, for example, might make Bendjedid more amenable to a deal. On the other hand, the same trends in Morocco might require Hassan to focus domestic attention on the war and avoid concessions. In addition, the removal of Bendjedid or Hassan from power or widespread political changes in either regime would increase instability in the region and distract the governments from the problem. []

A Compromise Formula

We see signs that both sides are slowly edging toward a negotiated settlement. Not much headway has been made, but they continue to hold periodic, low-level talks searching for common ground. Algeria's President Bendjedid is the key to progress:

- King Hassan has less reason to deal because Morocco already controls most of the territory.
- Bendjedid faces the unpleasant choice of upping the ante militarily, of making distasteful diplomatic concessions to redress the situation, or of even throwing in his hand. []

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We believe that Bendjedid will stall for time but will eventually choose to make diplomatic concessions. He has offered Hassan a federation plan in his "postage stamp and flag" proposal that would give the King titular authority over Western Sahara in return for limited Polisario self-government. Senior Algerian officials recently told the US Embassy in Algiers that their government still supports this plan. Hassan, however, refuses to accept it because it would give the Polisario too much autonomy, including diplomatic representation abroad. Algeria apparently has in mind a federation mirroring Canada's loose ties to Great Britain. Hassan would accept an arrangement similar to Quebec's position within federal Canada. We believe any federal solution would have to bridge these differences. []

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In our view, progress on divisive bilateral problems could help resolve the Western Saharan dispute. For example, most of the 1,300-kilometer border separating Morocco and Algeria is not demarcated, and there have been periodic clashes along the frontier. In 1972 Rabat and Algiers agreed to delimit the border, and Morocco disavowed its claims to small portions of Algerian territory. Hassan, however, has yet to ratify the 1972 accord. Although the two regimes have not made a direct link between border problems and the Western Sahara conflict, a resolution of the frontier could provide Algiers with a "victory" that would help Bendjedid extract himself from the Western Sahara conflict. Algiers may even require Moroccan ratification of the accord, since any settlement of the Western Sahara problem will tend to favor Rabat. []

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Another issue that could spur progress is repatriation of prisoners held by each side, some of whom were taken in the Western Sahara fighting. []

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Given the problems with the federation idea, a possible compromise would involve Moroccan trusteeship under UN auspices. Morocco would gain sovereignty, but only after a specified period of time. This solution would represent an Algerian concession to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, while Rabat would have to guarantee certain rights for the Polisario. These could include a regional parliament, a separate budget, and possibly the right to form their own police force. The arrangement could be modeled after a UN trusteeship, such as the US administration of Micronesia. The transition period might resemble Great Britain's agreement with China to turn over control of Hong Kong by the end of the century. Morocco would achieve its objectives, and Algeria would have a solution to the problem without conceding defeat. The Polisario would be allowed to exercise limited self-government within the Moroccan polity but would have no representation abroad. Even though the Polisario leadership would not be pleased with this arrangement, they would have no choice but to follow Algeria's lead.

Moroccan Incorporation of Western Sahara

If King Hassan continues to rely principally on military force to absorb Western Sahara, he will continue to face harassment from Polisario guerrillas based in Algeria. We believe the current level of harassment is not a serious military challenge for Morocco and will not bring Rabat to the negotiating table.

We believe Bendjedid's frustration over this stalemate and the nearly complete enclosure of the region by berms could eventually impel Algeria to raise the military stakes. Algiers, for example, could allow the insurgents to engage in terrorism inside Morocco. Algeria might also decide to become directly involved in the fighting. In either case, Algiers would hope to force Hassan to the bargaining table without provoking an unwanted war between the two countries. We believe such actions would generate dangerous tension with little hope of forcing an end to the fighting or achieving a political settlement.

Territorial Partition

Although it is probably too late for this option, Morocco and Algeria could decide to partition Western Sahara. We do not believe the earlier territorial proposals, such as the French plan of 1978 that called for Mauritanian control of the southern portion of Western Sahara, Moroccan control of the northern portion, and Algerian acquisition of parts of northern Mauritania, would be acceptable to all parties. Any future partition would need to be heavily weighted in favor of Morocco, since Rabat will soon hold about 90 percent of the region. Rabat would retain the most useful areas of Western Sahara, while Algiers would gain territory in that part of Western Sahara currently outside the berm. This plan could also lead Morocco and Algeria to compel Mauritania to yield a small amount of its northern frontier area to round out Algeria's boundaries—a move we believe Nouakchott would gladly take to ensure a peaceful settlement. Algiers's acquisition of this terrain would ease its concerns about Moroccan encirclement. Bendjedid would have to compel the Polisario to accept resettlement either in Algeria or in the areas ceded by Morocco or by Mauritania.

An Independent Western Sahara

The least likely outcome of the conflict would be a new state in the region governed by the SDAR. Not only is such a prospect implausible, given the military situation in Western Sahara, it is unacceptable to King Hassan, who has staked his prestige on the issue. We believe that Hassan would not even countenance an SDAR entity whose independence was heavily circumscribed by Rabat's having a veto over the domestic and foreign policies of the new state. An independent state would not be viable economically, given its small population and lack of resources. It would be highly dependent on foreign support and vulnerable to subversion, and, in our judgment, Morocco and Algeria would eventually resume the contest for control of the territory.

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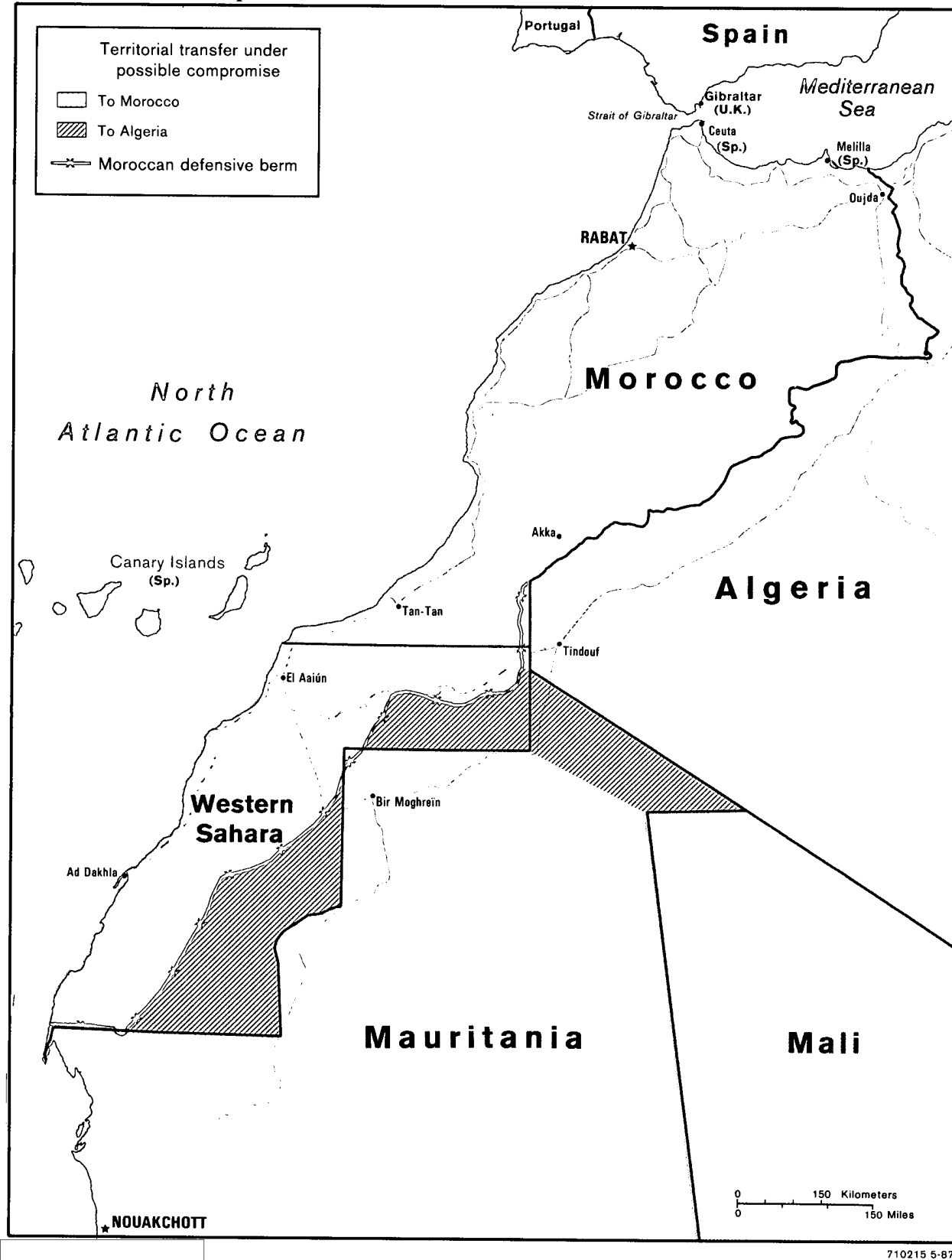
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Figure 2
Possible Territorial Compromise



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Polisario fighters [redacted]

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Wider Implications of a Settlement

The Regional Perspective

We believe that a compromise solution of the Western Sahara conflict would remove one of the destabilizing elements of North African politics, but it would not end the adversarial relationship that exists between Morocco and Algeria. We would expect both countries to continue to view their bilateral relations and their diplomacy with other regional states as competitive. [redacted]

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Morocco's prestige would go up a notch because of the enlargement of its territory, and King Hassan's immediate task would be to consolidate Moroccan control. Algeria, for its part, would suffer a loss of face despite any benefits it would derive from a settlement. Algerian leaders probably would want to compensate by reinforcing political ties to Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania at the expense of Morocco. [redacted]

The Enclaves. We cannot exclude the possibility that Hassan would be emboldened to take up other irredentist issues, in particular, efforts to win sovereignty over the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in northern Morocco. Rabat claims the enclaves as its own and asserts that Spain should have surrendered them when it relinquished the rest of its colonial territories in Morocco in 1955. Madrid, on the other hand, has occupied and administered the enclaves as a part of mainland Spain since the 15th century. The question of sovereignty over these territories is a sensitive issue in Spain and a highly charged rallying cry for nationalism and anticolonialism in Morocco. [redacted]

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Mauritania. In our view, Mauritania will continue to be a vulnerable target for both Algeria and Morocco. The Western Sahara war has had a negative effect on

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Mauritania as the country's more powerful neighbors have attempted to pull Nouakchott into its camp. Mauritania's two coups in 1978 and 1984 were primarily attributable to meddling by Algeria and Morocco. Mauritania also is susceptible to foreign interference because of its economic and social problems due to drought, famine, and ethnic tensions. []

King Hassan probably hopes to maintain his good ties to Mauritania, which in recent years has moved closer to Morocco. []

[] Algeria probably will be concerned about Moroccan designs on Mauritania, and it will use economic blandishments or subversion to influence the Mauritians. []

Libya. We believe that Algiers would be interested in strengthening ties to Libya before and after a settlement of the Western Sahara conflict. Since the breakup of the Moroccan-Libyan union last August, Algeria has increased its contacts with Libya. Algerian leaders almost certainly view such a policy as a hedge against Moroccan expansionism as well as a way to restrain Qadhafi's adventurism, and they would want to secure their eastern flank to exclude the possibility of a two-front military confrontation. Morocco alleges that Libya has resumed aid to the Polisario, but we have no evidence to support this claim. We believe Algeria would accept such aid but would insist upon maintaining its political and military control over the Polisario. []

For his part, King Hassan probably will continue to be concerned about growing Libyan-Algerian ties as well as Libyan meddling in Morocco and will thus seek to maintain normal relations with Tripoli. Libya, too, would want to maintain ties to Morocco because of Rabat's importance as a target of subversion. []

The Chances for Soviet Inroads

Regardless of the outcome of any settlement, the prospects are dim for increased Soviet involvement in Western Sahara. Moscow has close ties to Algeria, sympathizes with the Polisario cause, and has sanctioned the transfer of arms to the insurgents. The

Soviets, however, refrain from direct contact with the Polisario; they have not accorded it the status of a national liberation movement; nor have they recognized the SDAR. The Algerians, too, have kept the Soviets at arm's length on this issue. They have neither pressed them to become involved nor sought Soviet military or financial aid for the insurgents because of their own adequate resources and desire to retain control over the Polisario. []

The outcome of the conflict is not likely to change Soviet perceptions or influence Moroccan or Algerian relations toward Moscow. The Soviets support OAU and UN resolutions on Western Sahara and probably would accept any settlement agreed to by all parties. They undoubtedly will maintain current advantages in Algiers, including access for military overflights and naval port calls and a preferential position for military sales contracts. Even though the Bendjedid government is gradually expanding ties to the West,

[] Moscow probably realizes that it has little chance of seriously weakening US-Moroccan ties, given the strong pro-Western position of King Hassan. Nevertheless, Hassan has shown a willingness in the past year to permit the Soviets to make occasional naval port calls and give Moscow lucrative fishing rights along Morocco's coast. []

The Outlook for US Interests

A compromise involving either a Moroccan-Algerian treaty, a trusteeship, or territorial partition could strengthen the US position in the region and enhance Washington's interests. It would foster:

- Stability along NATO's southern flank, in which Soviet influence is kept to a minimum.
- Opposition to Qadhafi's troublemaking.

- Improvement of US relations with Algeria.

A compromise settlement would constitute a victory for the US position. Washington has remained neutral

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toward the combatants and has called for a nonmilitary solution, direct negotiations by the parties involved, and a settlement that reflects the views of all sides. []

Washington's indirect assistance to Morocco in the conflict—provision of military equipment, economic assistance, [] could even improve US relations with Rabat. King Hassan's incorporation of Western Sahara would boost his image at home, which we believe would reinforce cooperation with the United States. Nevertheless, we believe Hassan's success may make him feisty enough to adopt policies that could complicate other US interests in the region. He might, for example, take unilateral initiatives in the Arab-Israeli peace process or decide to press Moroccan irredentist claims in the Spanish enclaves, and possibly even Mauritania. The King may also press Washington to provide increased

financial and political aid in return for his willingness to support US strategic interests. We do not believe, however, that he would choose to weaken his ties to the United States. In our judgment, Hassan views his strategic links to Washington as contributing to Morocco's national security. []

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We believe that Algiers will view Washington as a contributor to Morocco's success in Western Sahara, regardless of how active Washington is perceived to be in helping to resolve the dispute. Consequently, Algiers could decide to reduce its ties to Washington at least temporarily. The government might also decide to develop closer ties to the Soviets as a counter to greater US-Moroccan cooperation. To the extent, however, that Algeria perceives that the United States extracted concessions from Morocco, US ties to Algeria would stabilize or improve. []

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Secret**Appendix****Chronology of the Western Sahara Dispute****1975**

- 23 May Spain announces intent to relinquish the territory.
- 4 July Algerian-Moroccan communique lists Algiers's approval of Moroccan-Mauritanian partition of the territory.
- 14 October UN Mission to Western Sahara reports indigenous population categorically favors independence and opposes Moroccan-Mauritanian partition. Report calls for plebiscite.
- 16 October International Court of Justice (ICJ) concludes that Morocco's well-founded historical ties to the region do not constitute sovereignty.
- October About 350,000 Moroccans undertake peaceful invasion into portion of the colony following ICJ decision and King Hassan's call for a "Green March" of Moroccans on the territory to demonstrate resolve.
- 14 November Madrid Agreement of Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania establishing interim administration of region and Spanish departure in February 1976. Algeria calls accord null and void.

1976

- 12 January Spain withdraws its military from Western Sahara.
- 26 February Spain withdraws completely.
- 27 February Polisario announces creation of the SDAR.
- March Morocco and Mauritania break relations with Algeria following latter's recognition of the SDAR.
- 14 April Morocco and Mauritania formally partition territory.
- April Polisario undertakes first military operation against Mauritania's one rail line.
- June Polisario leader killed in major attack on Nouakchott.

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1977

January	First substantial units of Moroccan Army stationed in Bir Moghreïn, Mauritania, as well as first joint sweep operations by Moroccan and Mauritanian units.
April	Polisario begins naval operations.
May	Morocco and Mauritania sign mutual defense treaty.
July	Second Polisario attack on Nouakchott.
November	King Hassan threatens right of hot pursuit into Algeria following heavy military losses at Sebkhet Oumm ed Drous Guebli.
December	Polisario releases French captives taken in fighting in Mauritania during year following French airstrikes on Polisario units.

1978

May	Last French airstrikes on Polisario units in Mauritania.
10 July	Military coup in Mauritania brings new government committed to peace settlement. Polisario announces cease-fire with Mauritania two days later.
18-22 July	OAU summit meeting in Khartoum creates ad hoc "Committee of Wise Men" to deal with dispute.
1-3 August	Algerian and Moroccan emissaries meet under French auspices.
September	Algerian President Boumediene's illness prevents summit meeting with King Hassan in Belgium.
27 December	Death of Boumediene.

1979

13 January	Polisario announces new military offensive, attacking Tan-Tan, Morocco, and Cabo Bojador in Western Sahara. Actions mark first instance that guerrillas strike within Morocco and overrun sizable Moroccan town.
9 February	Bendjedid inaugurated new President of Algeria.
July	OAU "Wise Men" call for immediate cease-fire and self-determination through a free referendum for the Western Sahara population. Morocco refuses to accept narrow OAU vote to accept report.

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5 August	Mauritania signs peace treaty with Polisario, renounces territorial claims, and recognizes SDAR as the sole legitimate representative of the region. Shortly after, Nouakchott restores relations with Algeria.
14 August	Morocco annexes Mauritania's portion of the region.
October	Morocco begins major military sweep in Western Sahara that results in capture of much Polisario equipment but little combat.
Fall	Morocco begins construction of the berm.
1980	
25 January	Polisario attacks Akka, Morocco in deepest penetration of Morocco in over a year.
3 March	Hassan declares all of Western Sahara as an integral part of Morocco and makes his first visit to the territory the following day.
April	Libya recognizes SDAR, and Morocco breaks relations with Tripoli.
1981	
June	Hassan declares at OAU summit meeting in Nairobi that Morocco agrees to a supervised referendum in Western Sahara.
October	Polisario victory at Guelta Zemmur results in largest Moroccan military losses since the start of the war.
1982	
22 February	OAU foreign ministers agree to seat SDAR, and 19 delegations walk out of session.
1983	
26 February	Hassan-Bendjedid summit meeting in Oujda, Morocco.
30 May	Morocco and Algeria agree to reestablish airlinks, reduce border restrictions, and develop cooperation at local level.
June	OAU summit meeting in Addis Ababa passes pro-Algeria resolution calling on Morocco and SDAR to engage in direct negotiations.
July	Qadhafi travels to Morocco and Algeria for meetings with Hassan and Bendjedid.

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8 September	Morocco abolishes visa requirements for Algerians.
October	Moroccan troops overrun three Polisario camps in first ground offensive since construction of the berm.
 1984	
27 February	Mauritania recognizes the SDAR.
April	Algerians begin periodic overflights of southern Morocco and Western Sahara.
15 June	Algerian troops ambush Moroccan supply column that strayed across border.
Fall	OAU recognizes the SDAR, and Morocco withdraws its membership.
 1985	
January	Algeria and Morocco complete two months of highly intensive diplomatic contacts on Western Sahara.
 1986	
April	UN Secretary General begins several months of talks with diplomats of Morocco and the Polisario in New York to bridge differences between the two sides. UN initiative continues to the present day.
 1987	
Mid-February	Morocco begins latest extension of the berm to include southern portions of Western Sahara along frontier with Mauritania.
25 February	Polisario responds to Moroccan berm construction with the largest military operations since 1983.
March	Saudi Arabia's King Fahd visits Morocco and Algeria in initiative by Riyadh to resolve dispute.

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