

News

Morocco's king says Western Sahara status not up for debate

Mohamed VI says the disputed territory is 'not negotiable' amid rising tensions with Polisario, neighbouring Algeria.



Morocco sees the former Spanish colony as its sovereign territory while Algeria backs Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement in the conflict [File: Philippe Wojazer/Reuters]

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Morocco's King Mohamed VI has said that Western Sahara is “not negotiable”, as tensions flared with Algeria over the disputed territory.

Speaking on Saturday, the 46th anniversary of the Green March by 350,000 Moroccans into Western Sahara in 1975, the king said: “Today as in the past, Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara will never be up for negotiation.”

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Morocco sees the former Spanish colony as its sovereign territory while Algeria backs and hosts Western Sahara’s Polisario Front independence movement, which has been fighting since the early 1970s.

“If we engage in negotiations, it is essentially in order to reach a peaceful solution to this artificial regional conflict,” the king said in his televised speech.

On Wednesday, Algeria accused Morocco of [killing three Algerian civilians](#) on a desert highway through a Polisario-held area of the territory in an attack on their trucks.

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune pledged in a statement that the death of the three men “would not go unpunished”.

Morocco has not officially commented on the accusation, but an informed source from the kingdom told the AFP news agency “it has never targeted and will never target Algerian citizens, regardless of the circumstances and the provocations”.

“If Algeria wants war, Morocco doesn’t,” said the source, who requested anonymity.

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Broken truce

Western Sahara, 80 percent of which is controlled by Morocco, boasts extensive phosphate reserves and rich Atlantic fishing grounds.

To stake Morocco's claim on Western Sahara, the current king's father, Hassan II, sent 350,000 civilian volunteers on the Green March into the territory in 1975 to protest and demand that Spain hand over what was at the time its colony.

The Algeria-supported Polisario Front – which seeks full independence for the territory – has demanded a United Nations-supervised self-determination referendum as provided for in a 1991 ceasefire deal.

In November 2020, the Polisario declared the truce “null and void” after Moroccan forces broke up a blockade of a highway into Mauritania the independence movement said was built in violation of the ceasefire.

The Polisario has since launched multiple attacks on Moroccan forces, killing six Moroccan soldiers, according to an informed Moroccan source.

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Tensions between Morocco and Algeria further escalated in August, when the latter broke off diplomatic ties with Rabat, citing “hostile actions” – charges denied by Morocco.

In December last year, Morocco [normalised diplomatic ties](#) with Israel as part of the US-backed, so-called Abraham Accords in return for the administration of then-President Donald Trump recognising the kingdom’s sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Last Sunday, Algeria ordered state energy firm Sonatrach to stop using a pipeline that passes through Morocco for gas exports to Spain.

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UN calls for respecting the ceasefire

Mohamed VI's speech also came just over a week after the UN Security Council on October 29 called on all sides to resume negotiations towards a solution, as it renewed the [UN peacekeeping mission](#) in Western Sahara for one year.

The resolution calls for a goal of “self-determination of the people of Western Sahara” and also “reaffirms the need for full respect” of a ceasefire that collapsed last year.

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Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita welcomed the text, saying it “specifies the real parties to the conflict by calling for Algeria to take part responsibly and constructively”.

But Algeria said it would not “support” the resolution, saying it was unbalanced.

“Algeria will not support this biased resolution which has the effect of comforting the exorbitant claims of the occupying state (Morocco),” the foreign ministry said in a statement last Sunday.

The Polisario’s UN envoy Sidi Omar tweeted last week that “there will be no new ceasefire as long as Morocco persists in its attempts to forcibly impose a colonial fait accompli in the occupied territories of the Sahrawi Republic”.

24:30



SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES