

Morocco wants to turn page on W Sahara conflict: Foreign minister

Bourita says the kingdom is committed to finding a solution to 'artificial conflict' that stems from neighbouring state.

Morocco 'does not negotiate' over the Moroccan character of Western Sahara or its rights, Bourita said [File: Youssef Boudlal/Reuters]

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Amid heightened tensions with neighbouring Algeria, Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita says his country is determined to "turn the page definitively" on the Western Sahara conflict but without giving up its "legitimate rights" over the disputed territory.

Speaking to senators in Rabat on Tuesday, Bourita said Morocco is committed to finding a solution to the "artificial regional conflict that stems from the opposition of a neighbouring state (Algeria) to its legitimate rights to the consummation of its territorial integrity".

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Tensions have flared over the past few months between Morocco and its regional rival Algeria over the former Spanish colony that Rabat sees as its own sovereign territory.

Algiers backs Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement.

Last year, the US administration of then-President Donald Trump recognised Morocco's claim over the territory in a [quid pro quo](#) for Rabat's normalisation of ties with Israel.

The move broke with years of international consensus that Western Sahara's future should be settled by a UN-supervised referendum.

'Not negotiable'

Morocco's King Mohamed VI said on Saturday Western Sahara was "not negotiable", in comments the Polisario dismissed as "fabrication".

Morocco controls 80 percent of the largely desert territory, which has mineral reserves and access to rich Atlantic fisheries, and provides a potentially strategic trade route linking Morocco with West African markets.

Algeria in August [severed diplomatic relations](#) with its neighbour, citing various "hostile actions" after months of accusing Morocco of actions including supporting the outlawed Movement for Self-determination of Kabylie and being behind the wildfires that ripped through Algeria in the summer

Morocco denies the allegations.

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Last week, Algiers [accused Morocco of killing three Algerian civilians](#) on a desert highway, raising fears of an escalation in the conflict.

Akram Khariief, editor of Algerian website Mena Defense, said the Algerians were killed along a highway that passes through a part of Western Sahara controlled by the Polisario Front.

An informed source from Morocco said it never targets civilians.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella, on a visit to Algeria last week, called for “due account to be paid to the rights of the Sahrawi people” in an “equitable” and UN-brokered solution to the Western Sahara conflict.

The world body has maintained a peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara since 1991, overseeing a now-broken ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario, and with the aim of organising a referendum.