

How Highways Decided Morocco's Victory in the Western Sahara Conflict

Reese Hollister - Master of International Studies (MIS), SPIA 2026
North Carolina State History Graduate Student Association Conference
Advisors: Dr. Kristen Alff and Dr. Robert Reardon

11 April 2026



Introduction: The Mural in Sidi Ifni



6 November 1975
The Green March



Postage stamp celebrating The Green March. Shared online via bibliomonde.fr

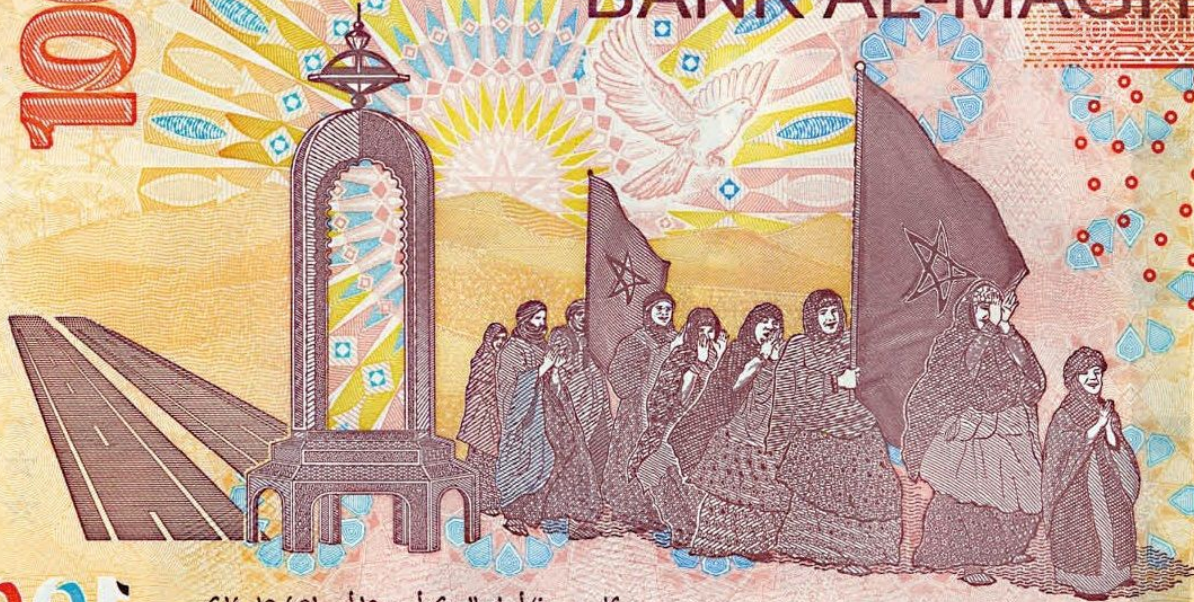
31 October 2025
UNSC Res. 2797



Moroccans celebrating diplomatic victory in front of Parliament. Shared via yabiladi.com

100

BANK AL-MAGHRIB



100

كل من صرف أوراق البنك أو زورها أو ساعد على ذلك
سيعاقب صلباً للقوانين والقرارات الصادرة بهذا العمل

100

DIRHAMS

Research Question

To what extent did Moroccan highway development in Western Sahara affect international recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory, 1975–2025?



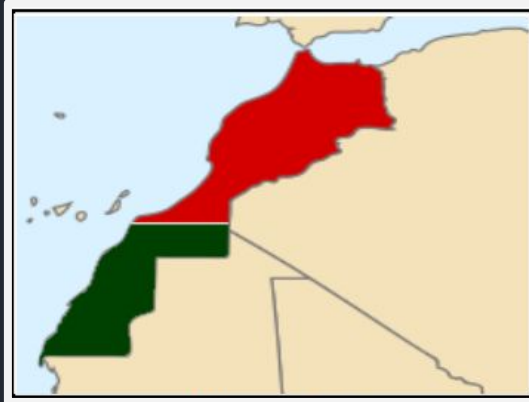
Argument

Roadway development was a primary mechanism through which Morocco converted de facto territorial control in Western Sahara into stronger claims of state legitimacy in the international sphere.

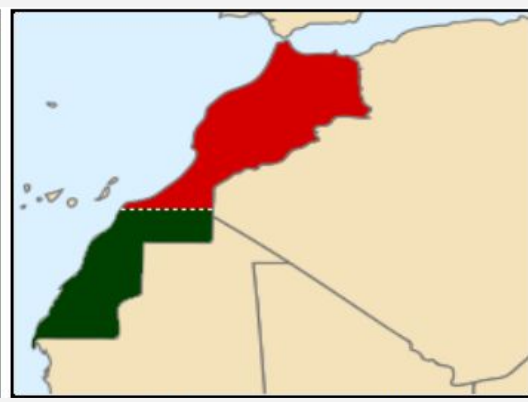


Where is Western Sahara?

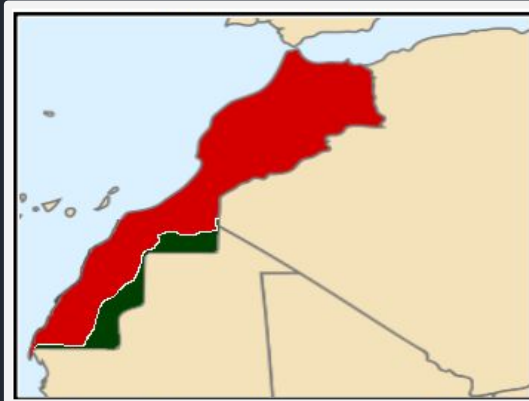
Shown Separately



Shown as Disputed



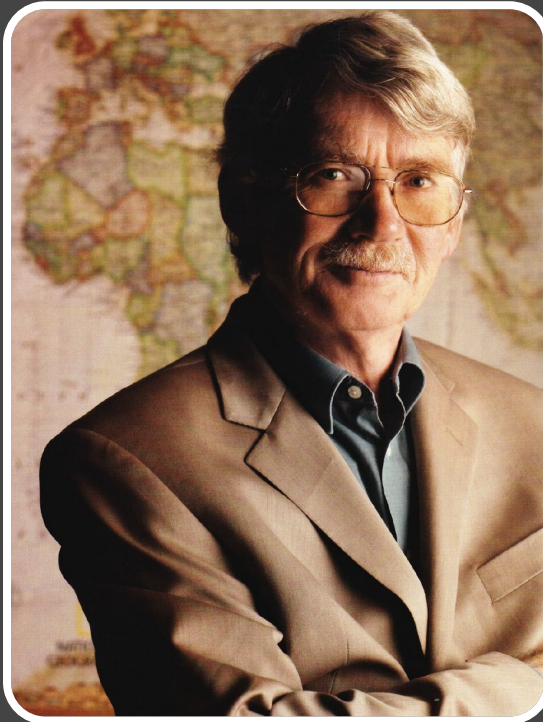
Showing Areas
controlled by SADR



Shown as a Part
of Morocco



Theoretical Framework



MICHAEL MANN

*The autonomous power of the state :
its origins, mechanisms and results*

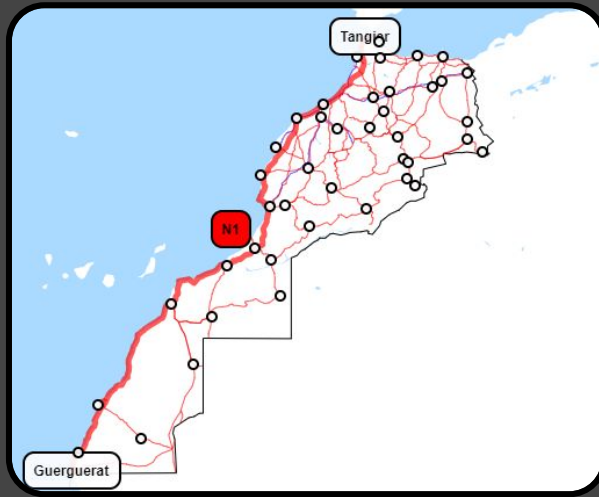
Infrastructural Power

“...the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions.”

Despotic Power

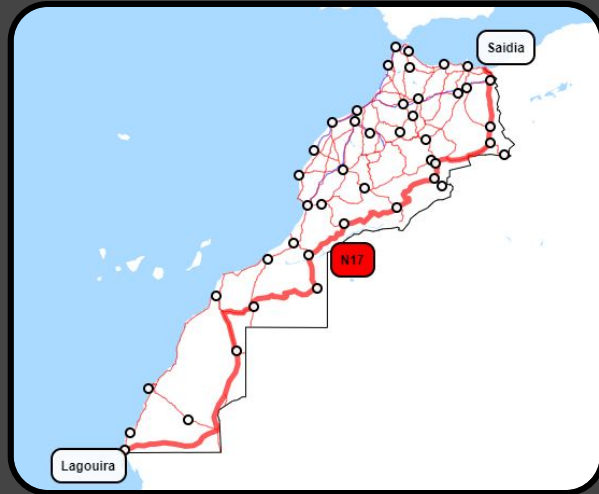
“...actions undertaken by the elite without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups.”

Infrastructure



N1 Highway (Left)

Tiznit-Dakhla
Expressway (Right)



N17 Highway (Left)

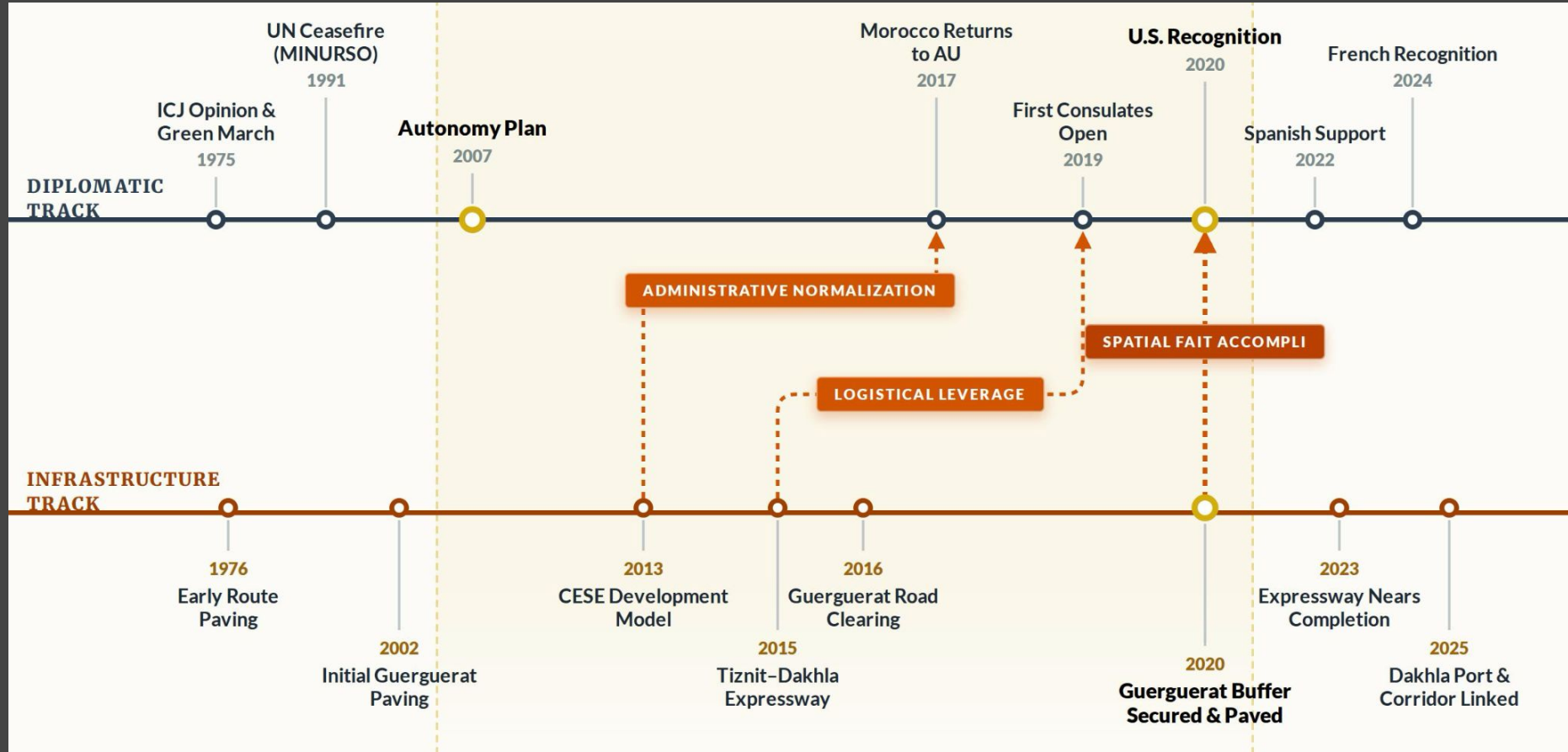
Guerguerat Border
Crossing (Right)



Methods: Process Tracing



Methods: Process Tracing



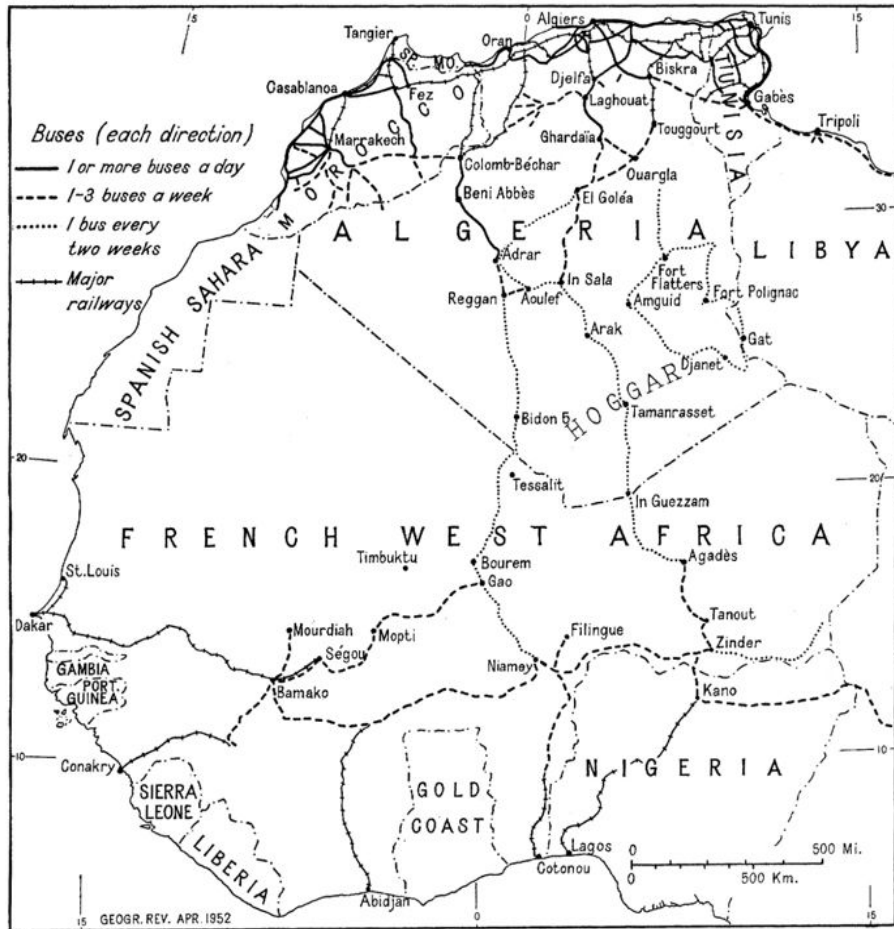


FIG. 1—Bus traffic in the western Sahara, February, 1951. The schedule is approximately the same for the eight months October to May.



Sahara Overland

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A is for Atlantic Highway to Mauritania

Search



Nom	<i>Surname</i>	<u>Passeport n°</u>	<i>Passport #</i>
<u>Prénoms</u>	<i>Forename</i>	<u>Délivré le</u>	<i>Issue date</i>
Date de naissance	<i>Date of birth</i>	<u>Délivré à</u>	<i>Place of issue</i>
Lieu de naissance	<i>Place of birth</i>	<u>Valide jusqu'à</u>	<i>Expiry date</i>
<u>Nationalité</u>	<i>Nationality</i>	<u>Date d'entrée Maroc</u>	<i>Date of entry</i>
Profession	<i>Occupation</i>		<i>Port of entry</i>
Domicile	<u><i>Home address</i></u>	<u>Ville d'entrée</u>	<i>CIN #</i>
Situation <u>familiiale</u>	<i>Marital status</i>	<u>CIN or visa #</u>	<u><i>Tourisme</i></u>
Nom du <u>père</u>	<i>Father's name</i>	Motif du voyage	<i>Vehicle make</i>
Nom de la <u>mère</u>	<i>Mother's name</i>	Marque du <u>véhicule</u>	<i>Registration #</i>
		<u>Immatriculation</u>	

Atlantic Ocean

80 km
Bir Gandouz

WESTERN SAHARA

ZONE UNDER MOROCCAN OCCUPATION

« RESTRICTED AREA »

« BUFFER ZONE »

MAURITANIA

« RESTRICTED AREA »

1 KM

RESTRICTED AREA OF GUERGUERAT WESTERN SAHARA

◇◇◇ Border

CUSTOMS POSTS

- Moroccan (crossing point opened in 2001 in the military berm - a violation of military agreement №1)
- Mauritanian (Customs post PK55, extra territorial)

— Separation wall and military posts.
The berm (2,700 km) delimits the Moroccan occupation on the territory.

■ Guerguerat military barracks

✈ Military landing strip

→ Road tracks, Moroccan military zone

— Former defensive wall

● "KANDAHAR" Place of trafficking (cars ...)

☠ Landmines

■ SHOPS
Petrol stations, Cafés, restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, butcher.

— PAVED ROAD

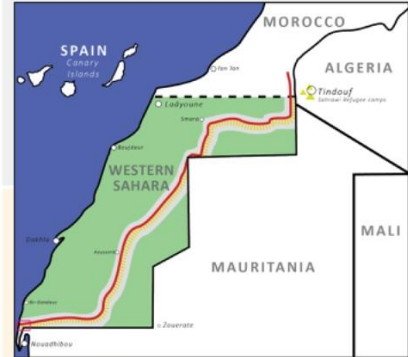
— Moroccan initiative to tarmac between the two border posts in 2016. In violation of the cease-fire, these roadworks have ceased.

— TRACKS

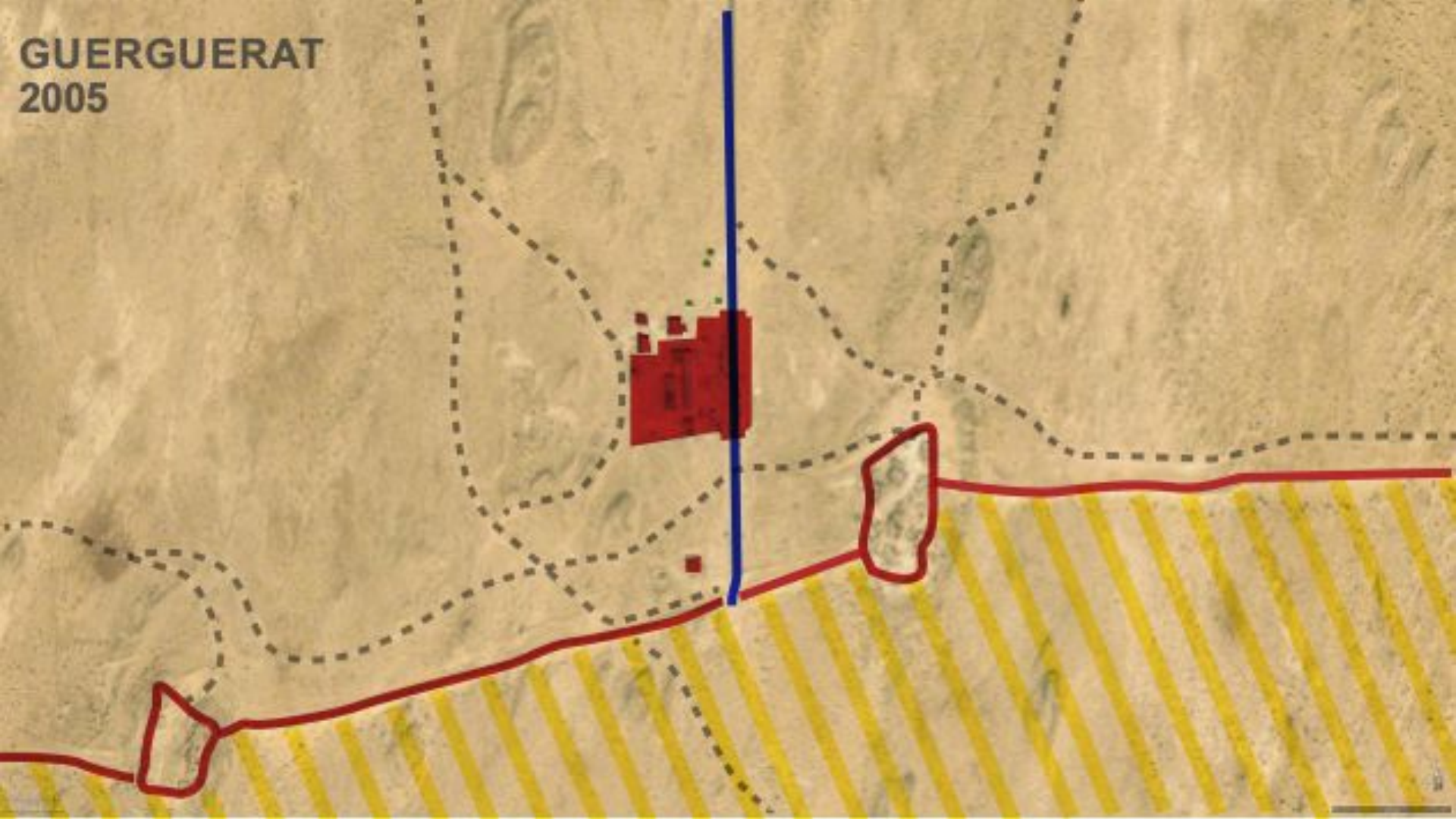
||||| RAILWAY (iron ore carrier)
Nouadhibou - Zouérate

MILITARY AGREEMENT N° 1 FOLLOWING THE 1991 CEASE-FIRE

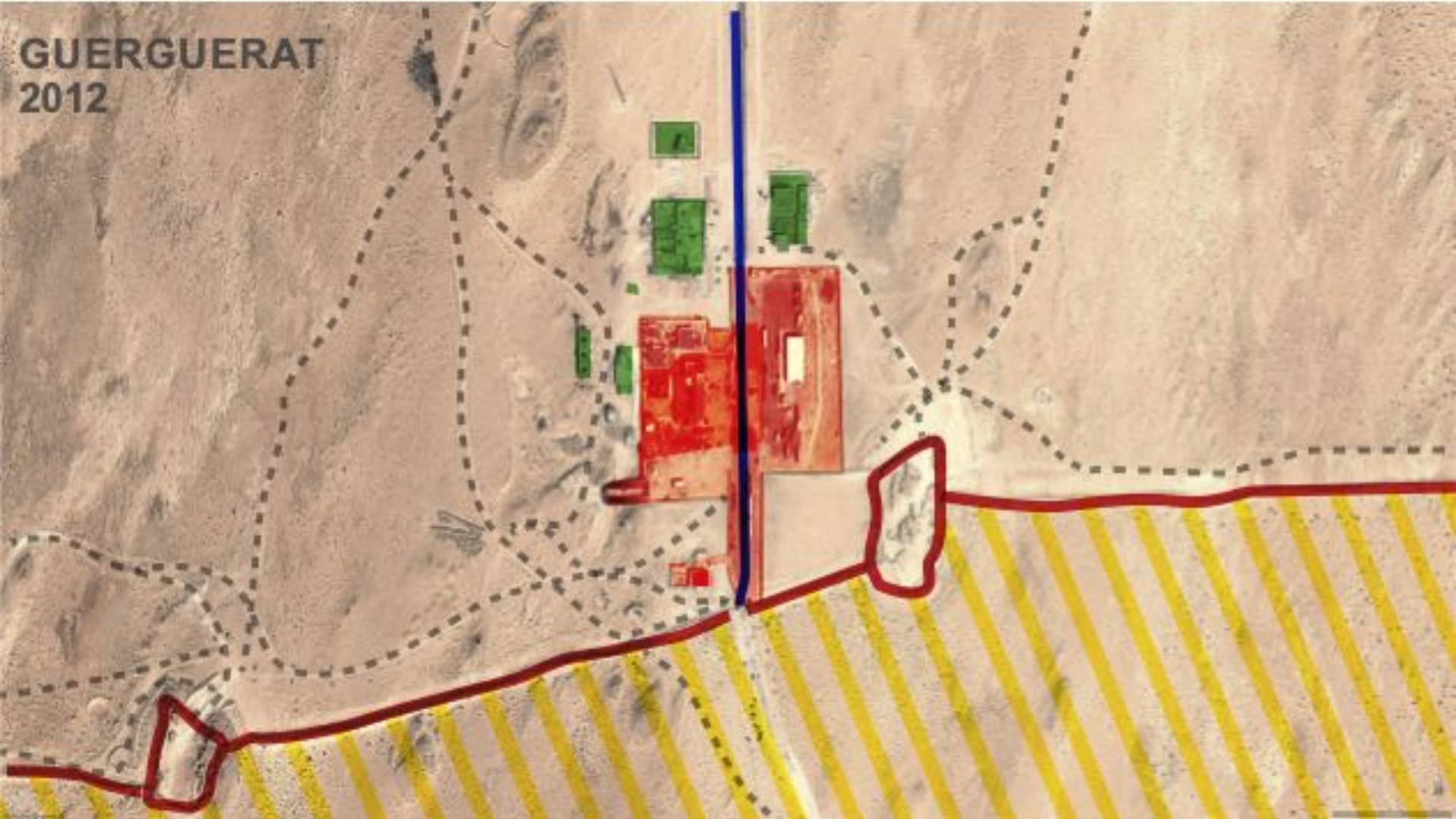
Under Moroccan occupation	AREA WITH LIMITED RESTRICTIONS	The rest of the territory
	RESTRICTED AREA	30 KM
	BERM	
	BUFFER ZONE	5 KM
Under Polisario control	RESTRICTED AREA	25 KM
	AREA WITH LIMITED RESTRICTIONS	The rest of the territory



GUERGUERAT
2005

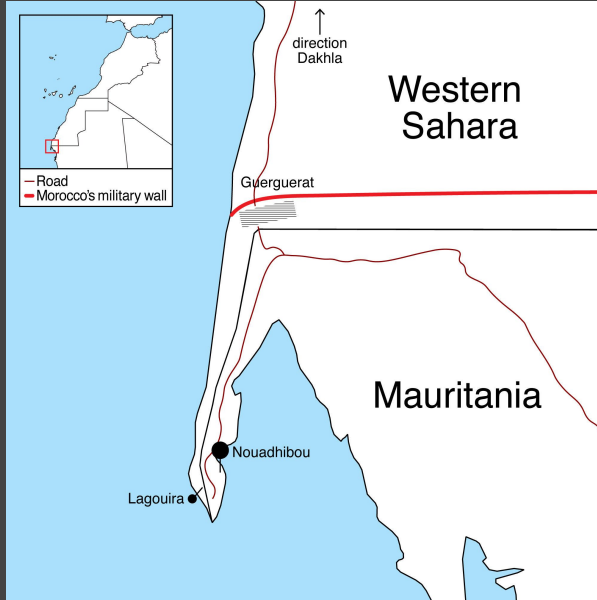


GUERGUERAT
2012



GUERGUERAT
2019





200

BANK AL-MAGHRIB

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كل من حرق أوراق البنك أو زورها أو ملأها علم غلبي
سيعاقب كسيفا للقوانين والقرارات الجاري بها العمل

200 DIRHAMS

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