# UK endorses Morocco’s autonomy plan for Western Sahara, deepening economic ties amid geopolitical risks



The UK government has marked a significant shift in its foreign policy by officially endorsing Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara, a territory entangled in a nearly five-decade-long dispute. This decision places the UK alongside countries such as the United States, France, and Spain, who have similarly backed Morocco’s claims. As Foreign Secretary David Lammy stated during a recent visit to Rabat, the plan is presented as the "most credible, viable, and pragmatic" solution to the ongoing conflict, which has seen Morocco at odds with the pro-independence Polisario Front since Spain's withdrawal in 1975.

The endorsement is not merely a political manoeuvre; it is intricately linked to a burgeoning economic partnership between the UK and Morocco. Anticipated infrastructure projects associated with the 2030 FIFA World Cup, among others, are expected to deliver substantial economic returns, particularly for British firms. The UK government has committed to playing a significant role in Morocco’s extensive public procurement opportunities, valued at around £33 billion over the next three years. This includes a noteworthy £1.2 billion project for Casablanca Airport and a £2 billion investment in healthcare reform, which features plans for a new 250-bed hospital, poised to generate revenue for the NHS through clinical and financial expertise.

This realignment in British policy towards Morocco signals a recognition of the "progressive realism" strategy that aims to enhance stability in North Africa while fostering economic ties. Lammy emphasized that promoting growth and prosperity would be central to this partnership, stating, "Africa has one of the greatest growth potentials of any continent - this young, dynamic population makes the continent an engine room for growth." He articulated that the UK sees its relationship with Morocco as a model for future engagements across Africa, especially in light of Morocco's growing significance as a strategic partner in trade and investment.

However, this move is not free from controversy. The endorsement of Morocco's territorial claims is likely to exacerbate tensions with Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front’s aspiration for independence and self-determination in Western Sahara. Critics suggest that the UK’s shift may complicate its diplomatic relations in the region, especially given Algeria's longstanding opposition to Moroccan expansionist policies. Despite the UK's affirmation of Morocco's autonomy proposal, the ongoing humanitarian implications for the Sahrawi people—who have faced displacement and conflict—remain a contentious issue.

The international community, particularly the United Nations, continues to advocate for a referendum to determine the future of Western Sahara, a goal that has repeatedly been stalled by disagreements over voter eligibility criteria and ongoing hostilities that resumed in 2020. Thus, while the UK's endorsement of the autonomy plan reflects a strategic pivot towards bolstering economic ties with Morocco, it also places the UK squarely at the centre of a complicated geopolitical landscape where the aspirations of the Sahrawi people hang in the balance.

With this new direction, the UK government aims not only to solidify its commercial interest in Morocco but also to reassert its influence in North Africa, a region seen as pivotal for future economic collaboration. As these developments unfold, the implications for regional stability, economic growth, and human rights will require careful monitoring in the context of this newly endorsed relationship.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/starmer-morocco-western-sahara-deal-b2762169.html), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/c9d32485e082c1a406207021eb26409f)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/starmer-morocco-western-sahara-deal-b2762169.html), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uk-backs-moroccos-autonomy-plan-western-sahara-lammy-says-2025-06-01/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/34da997f-c4aa-4b4f-a266-65e9c35a2fe6)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/01/uk-swings-behind-moroccos-autonomy-proposal-for-western-sahara), [[6]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/reino-unido-expresa-apoyo-plan-autonomia-marroqui-sahara.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/34da997f-c4aa-4b4f-a266-65e9c35a2fe6), [[7]](https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/06/01/reino-unido-expresa-su-apoyo-al-plan-de-autonomia-marroqui-para-el-sahara-cadena-ser/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/reino-unido-expresa-apoyo-plan-autonomia-marroqui-sahara.html), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uk-backs-moroccos-autonomy-plan-western-sahara-lammy-says-2025-06-01/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/starmer-morocco-western-sahara-deal-b2762169.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uk-backs-moroccos-autonomy-plan-western-sahara-lammy-says-2025-06-01/> - On June 1, 2025, UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the UK's endorsement of Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara, describing it as the most 'credible, viable and pragmatic' solution to the longstanding territorial dispute. This marks a significant shift in UK foreign policy, aligning with countries like the US and France that have previously supported Morocco's stance. The endorsement aims to enhance regional stability and opens avenues for increased economic cooperation between the UK and Morocco, including infrastructure projects related to the 2030 FIFA World Cup.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/34da997f-c4aa-4b4f-a266-65e9c35a2fe6> - The UK government has shifted its stance on the Western Sahara dispute by endorsing Morocco's autonomy plan, which proposes keeping the territory under Moroccan control. Foreign Secretary David Lammy described the plan as the most credible path to a lasting resolution and emphasized support for a UN-led process respecting self-determination. This marks a departure from the UK's previous neutral position that viewed Western Sahara's status as undetermined. The move aligns the UK with countries like the US, France, and Spain that have recently backed Morocco’s stance but may strain relations with Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front—a group advocating for Western Sahara’s independence. The decision comes amid growing economic ties between the UK and Morocco, bolstered by future opportunities linked to Morocco’s role as a 2030 World Cup co-host. British firms are expected to benefit from preferential access to infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects. The UK cited its “progressive realism” foreign policy doctrine as the basis for the shift. Meanwhile, the decades-long conflict remains unresolved, with the UN's proposed referendum repeatedly delayed due to disagreements over voter eligibility, and intermittent hostilities have resumed since 2020.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/c9d32485e082c1a406207021eb26409f> - On June 1, 2025, the United Kingdom officially backed Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara, describing it as the most 'credible, viable and pragmatic' solution to the long-standing territorial conflict. British Foreign Minister David Lammy announced the shift alongside Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita in Rabat, citing the importance of resolving the dispute to enhance North African stability. Western Sahara, a resource-rich coastal desert, has been contested for nearly 50 years between Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front, which is based in Algerian refugee camps. The UK joins France and the U.S. as the third permanent United Nations Security Council member to support Morocco's proposal, which involves limited regional autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. Despite this support, the United Nations continues to advocate for a referendum to determine the territory's final status. Meanwhile, Morocco has attracted foreign investment to the area, particularly in fishing, agriculture, and renewable energy sectors, including the UK-linked XLinks project. The UK’s endorsement of Morocco’s stance has sparked criticism from Algeria, a regional rival, while the Polisario Front has yet to respond.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/01/uk-swings-behind-moroccos-autonomy-proposal-for-western-sahara> - The UK government has officially endorsed Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara, marking a significant shift in its foreign policy. Foreign Secretary David Lammy described the plan as the most 'credible, viable and pragmatic' solution to the longstanding territorial dispute. This endorsement aligns the UK with countries like the US and France, which have previously supported Morocco's stance. The move aims to enhance regional stability and opens avenues for increased economic cooperation between the UK and Morocco, including infrastructure projects related to the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The decision has been met with criticism from Algeria and the Polisario Front, which continue to advocate for a referendum on the territory's final status.
6. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/reino-unido-expresa-apoyo-plan-autonomia-marroqui-sahara.html> - The United Kingdom has officially expressed support for Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara, considering it the most credible, viable, and pragmatic proposal to resolve the territorial conflict. This position, previously backed by the United States, France, and Spain, was announced during a visit by British Foreign Secretary David Lammy to Rabat, where he signed a joint statement with his Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita. The statement highlights that resolving the dispute would strengthen stability in North Africa and revitalise bilateral relations. Additionally, the UK agency UK Export Finance could finance economic projects in the region, including Western Sahara. Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to the UN-led process and the work of Personal Envoy Staffan de Mistura to reach a political solution. The statement also emphasises the intention to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various sectors such as security, defence, economy, energy transition, education, and human rights, within the framework of a strategic partnership based on shared values and a diplomatic relationship of 800 years.
7. <https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/06/01/reino-unido-expresa-su-apoyo-al-plan-de-autonomia-marroqui-para-el-sahara-cadena-ser/> - The United Kingdom has abandoned its neutral position regarding the Western Sahara conflict and declared its support for Morocco's autonomy plan, considered a 'credible, viable and pragmatic' solution. The announcement was made by British Foreign Secretary David Lammy in a joint statement with his Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita, in Rabat. London recognises the importance of resolving the dispute for the stability of North Africa and for fostering bilateral cooperation and regional integration. Additionally, the United Kingdom, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, shows willingness to collaborate actively with the UN's special envoy, Staffan de Mistura, in seeking a solution to the prolonged dispute. Furthermore, London has indicated that it could financially support economic projects in Western Sahara through UK Export Finance. This British decision also opens new economic opportunities in the region.