

## **Resolving Regional Conflicts: The Western Sahara and the Quest for a Durable Solution**

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- It is time to recognize that there no longer is a Moroccan autonomy initiative; it has been superseded by a new “advanced decentralization” project King Mohamed VI launched in the same March 2011 speech in which he announced the writing of a new constitution.
- The idea is to give all provinces of Morocco a degree of self-government, with the Western Sahara receiving the same as all others.
- Thus, when we talk of variants on the Baker plan as possible solutions, on the basis of letting the population choose between federation with Morocco, federalism, or independence after a period of autonomy, we are discussing an option that no longer exists.
- More broadly, this means that the Western Sahara conflict is taking its place among the many intractable conflicts around the world that are not going to be solved in a clear manner on the basis of international law, absolute principles, and certainly not on the basis of restoring the status quo ante.
- It has become practically impossible to determine who would have the right to vote on a referendum for independence. Too many Moroccans have moved into the area, and too many facts have been created on the ground. It is a situation similar to that of Kirkuk, where both Saddam Hussein and the Kurdistan Regional Government have been moving people in and out, so it is no longer clear who should vote in a referendum.
- The Western Sahara will probably become one of the many conflicts that will be decided by facts on the ground, with de facto solutions being created that are not necessarily de jure ones. Similar situations exist in Iraq, where Kurdistan has become almost completely autonomous, or in Somaliland, a de facto state within Somalia nobody recognizes but functions as one. Except in the case of the Western Sahara, facts on the ground push in the direction of annexation by Morocco even if it is not recognized internationally.