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Morocco Normalises Relations with Israel

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Why in News

Recently, **Morocco and Israel** have agreed to normalise relations in a **deal brokered by the USA**.

It makes Morocco the **fourth Arab country, after the UAE, Bahrain (Abraham Accords) and Sudan**, to set aside hostilities with Israel in the past four months.



Key Points

- **Highlights of the Deal:**

- Morocco will **establish full diplomatic relations and resume official contacts** with Israel, **reopen their liaison offices** in Rabat (capital of Morocco) and **Tel Aviv** (a city in Israel) immediately with the intention to open embassies and **promote economic cooperation** between Israeli and Moroccan companies.
- Morocco **intends to facilitate direct flights** for Israeli tourists to and from Morocco.
- The USA has **changed its longstanding policy** and recognised **Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara**.

Since 2007, the **UN Security Council**, of which the USA is a veto-capable permanent member, has called on **Morocco and the Polisario to engage in negotiations without preconditions** to reach a “**mutually acceptable political solution**, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.”

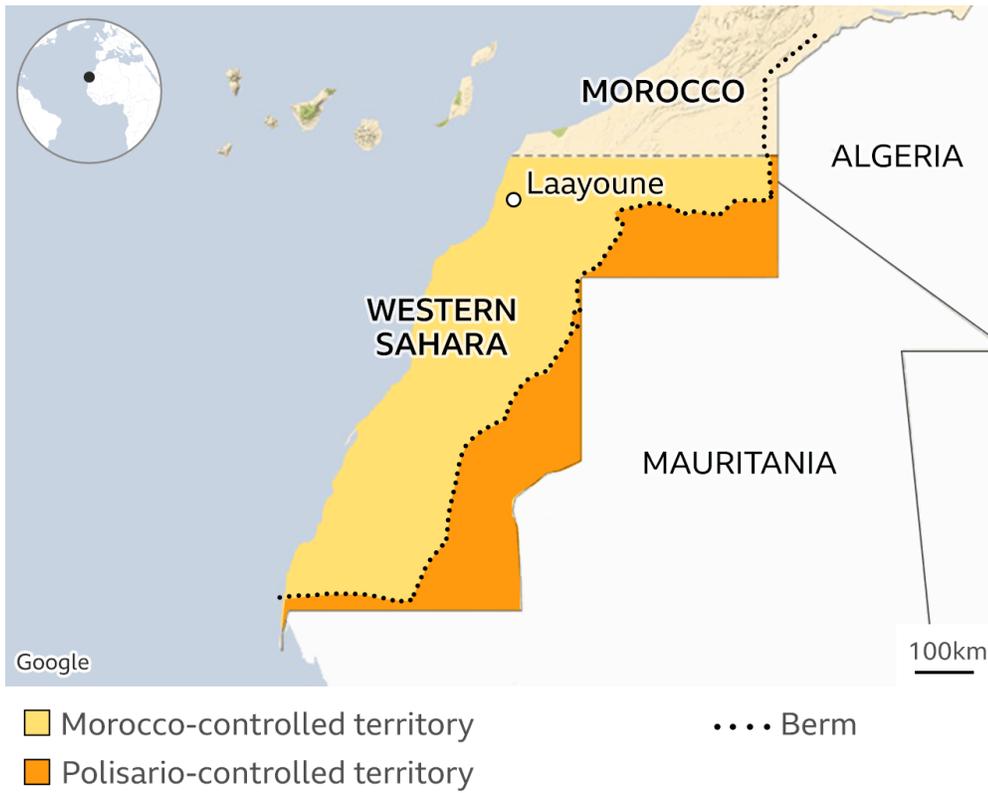
- **Significance:**

- The USA is putting in efforts to **present a united front against Iran and minimise Tehran's regional influence**.
- This step is considered as a sovereign move and will **contribute to strengthening the common quest for stability, prosperity and lasting peace** in the region.
- The deal would **deepen Morocco's engagement with the West and will also boost Israel's motive** which has made it a **priority to forge ties with formerly hostile countries in Africa and the Arab world** in the absence of any progress with the Palestinians.

- **Reactions:**

- **Palestinians have been critical** of the normalisation deals, saying Arab countries have set back the cause of peace by **abandoning a longstanding demand of Israel giving up land for a Palestinian state** before it can receive recognition.
- **Egypt and the UAE have welcomed** Morocco's decision.
Egypt and Israel signed a **peace treaty in 1979**.
- The **Polisario Front “highly regrets”** the change in USA's policy, which it called “**strange but not surprising**.” It holds that the deal will not change an inch of the reality of the conflict and the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination.

Western Sahara



- **Western Sahara** is a desert region, a **former Spanish colony** and was **annexed by Morocco in 1975**.
- Since then, it has been the subject of a long-running territorial dispute between Morocco and its **indigenous Saharawi people**, led by the **pro-independence Polisario Front**.
- **Morocco** says it has **always been part of its territory**, while the **African Union** recognises it as an independent state.
- A 16-year-long insurgency ended with an **UN-brokered truce in 1991** and the **promise of a referendum on independence**, which has yet to take place.

The USA supported the **ceasefire** between **Morocco and the Polisario Front**.

- In **November 2020**, after a border incident, the **Polisario pulled out of that deal** and announced a return to armed struggle.
- The USA's backing of Morocco's claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara is a big deal because it **diminishes the hope of a people who have aspired for the independence** of that territory for decades.

Way Forward

- **President-elect Joe Biden** will face a decision **whether to accept the USA deal on the Western Sahara**, which no other Western nation has done till now.
- While Biden is **expected to move the USA's foreign policy away from the "America First"** posture, he will **continue the pursuit of "the Abraham Accords"** between Israel and Arab and Muslim nations.

Source: IE