

AUGUST 2025

RESEARCH PAPER

THE ATLANTIC INITIATIVE AND MOROCCO- MAURITANIA RELATIONS: **Strategic opportunities and shared challenges**



FADOUA AMMARI & RIDA LYAMMOURI



The Atlantic Initiative, announced by King Mohammed VI in November 2023 to provide landlocked Sahelian countries with access to the Atlantic Ocean via Moroccan territory, promises to profoundly reshape the bilateral relationship between Rabat and Nouakchott. This research paper examines how this unprecedented project creates new strategic opportunities while raising shared challenges for Morocco and Mauritania. Diplomatically, the rapprochement around the Atlantic Initiative unfolds in a delicate regional context, where the Sahara issue remains politically sensitive and the balances within the African Union (AU) are constantly evolving. Economically, this cooperation could open trade corridors crossing Mauritania, develop infrastructure (roads, railways, ports), and stimulate Mauritanian development—particularly through the port of Nouadhibou—while contributing to food security and regional integration. On the security front, the realization of the Initiative requires addressing significant challenges linked to Sahelian instability, including terrorism, road protection, and military collaboration between Rabat and Nouakchott. In complex regional and international environments—shaped by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), reconfigurations in West Africa, and the interests of the European Union (EU)—the success of the Atlantic Initiative will depend on the ability of Morocco and Mauritania to overcome these diplomatic, economic, and security obstacles.

FADOUA AMMARI & RIDA LYAMMOURI

INTRODUCTION

On November 6, 2023, during the speech marking the 48th anniversary of the "Green March," King Mohammed VI announced the launch of an unprecedented Atlantic Initiative.¹ This initiative aims to provide landlocked Sahelian countries—particularly Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad—with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean by leveraging Morocco's transport infrastructure. Specifically, Rabat proposes to make its road, port, and rail networks available to open up the Sahel, constructing new logistical corridors linking these states to Morocco's Atlantic ports, especially the future deep-water port of Dakhla in the southern provinces.² Beyond its infrastructural dimension, the Atlantic Initiative reflects Morocco's vision of "committed and unifying" cooperation in Africa, focusing on economic development as a response to the security challenges of the Sahel.³

For Morocco, this megaproject addresses several strategic objectives. On one hand, it serves as a lever to strengthen the Kingdom's foothold in West Africa, particularly following the suspension of the process of joining the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2017–2018.⁴ Rabat views it as an opportunity to build new pragmatic and sustainable partnerships amid the gradual withdrawal of some Western actors from the Sahel.⁵ On the other hand, the project aligns fully with Morocco's Sahara diplomacy. By directing the corridor toward the port of Dakhla, the Kingdom is betting on an implicit recognition of its sovereignty by partner countries. This orientation is significant: it connects the Sahel to the Atlantic while reinforcing the centrality of the Moroccan Sahara in regional dynamics.⁶ Early signs of success are evident, as reflected in 2024 by Burkina Faso and Chad opening consulates in Dakhla, signaling growing diplomatic support for Morocco's position.⁷

For Mauritania, Morocco's southern neighbor and the only Sahel country with an Atlantic coastline, the Atlantic Initiative raises significant hopes as well as important questions. Long marginalized in inter-African trade, Mauritania stands to benefit from new corridors crossing its territory to connect Morocco with Sahelian countries. This prospect forms part of a gradual rapprochement between Nouakchott and Rabat, evident since the election of President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani in 2019. After years of lukewarm relations due to historical disputes over the Moroccan Sahara, the two capitals are now multiplying gestures of goodwill. President Ghazouani's visit to Rabat in December 2024—the first by a Mauritanian head of state in over a decade—provided an opportunity to showcase converging views and

1. Mapnews (MAP). (2023, November 6). His Majesty the King delivers a speech to the Nation on the occasion of the 48th anniversary of the Green March [Full text of the speech]. Mapnews.<https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/discours-messages-sm-le-roi/sm-le-roi-adresse-un-discours-%C3%A0-l'occasion-du-48%C3%A8me>

2. Mapnews (MAP). (October 2024). New York: Follow-up meeting on the operationalization of the Royal Initiative to facilitate access for Sahel countries to the Atlantic Ocean [Article]. Mapnews. [-follow-up-meeting-on-the-operationalization-of-the-royal-initiative-tohttps://www.mapnews.ma/fr/actualites/politique/new-york](https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/actualites/politique/new-york)

3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccans Living Abroad. (December 2023). Ministerial coordination meeting on the international initiative of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to facilitate access for Sahel countries to the Atlantic Ocean.<https://diplomatie.ma/fr/r%C3%A9union-minist%C3%A9rielle-de-coordination-sur-l'initiative-internationale-de-sm-le-roi-pour-favoriser-l%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-des-pays-du-sahel-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99oc%C3%A9an-atlantique>

4. Zaanoun, A. (2024, October 10). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and Potential Challenges to Regional Leadership. Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/10/moroccos-atlantic-initiative-and-potential-challenges-to-regional-leadership?lang=en>

5. Karr, L. (2024, August 29). North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiraling. Institute for the Study of War.<https://www.understandingwar.org/background/africa-file-august-29-2024-north-african-competition-sahel-libya-edge-burkina-faso>

6. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry (Megatrends Spotlight No. 49). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.<https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mauritania-balancing-act-amid-intensifying-algerian-moroccan-rivalry>

7. Karr, L. (2024, August 29). North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiraling.

to seal key cooperation agreements.⁸ An electricity interconnection agreement was reached, linking the energy networks of the two countries and creating an electricity corridor from Morocco to Mauritania.⁹ Meanwhile, Nouakchott has facilitated the movement of goods: since February 2025, Moroccan truck drivers can obtain a multiple-entry Mauritanian visa valid for three months, a measure long requested to streamline transit to the rest of West Africa. These developments demonstrate a shared commitment to revitalizing bilateral cooperation in economic and logistical areas.

However, the enthusiasm generated by the Atlantic Initiative is accompanied by reservations on the Mauritanian side. Officially, Nouakchott welcomes the spirit of shared development promoted by Morocco, but it is proceeding cautiously, keen to preserve its diplomatic balance and safeguard its own strategic interests. The Atlantic project places Mauritania at the crossroads of several sensitive issues: the question of the Moroccan Sahara, on which it has maintained a principle of neutrality since the 1980s; the evolving dynamics between Morocco and Algeria in seeking influence across the Sahel; and the competition among Atlantic ports to capture Sahelian trade.¹⁰ Mauritania, which provides Morocco with its only land border to sub-Saharan Africa, is courted by both Rabat and Algiers¹¹ and aims to leverage the opportunities presented without fully aligning with either side. This posture of strategic balance has become the cornerstone of Mauritania's foreign policy towards the two Maghreb powers.

In this context, this research paper addresses the following question: How does the Atlantic Initiative reconfigure bilateral relations between Morocco and Mauritania, and what strategic, diplomatic, economic, and security challenges does this new cooperation raise? To answer this, the paper will successively analyze: (1) the diplomatic and geopolitical stakes of the Morocco-Mauritania rapprochement through the Atlantic Initiative; (2) the potential economic benefits and development prospects for Mauritania; and (3) the joint security challenges in the face of Sahelian threats.

I. STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT MOROCCO–MAURITANIA: DIPLOMATIC AND GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS

1.1. The Question of the Sahara: Mauritanian Neutrality and Moroccan Ambitions

The question of the Moroccan Sahara occupies a central place in the rapprochement between Rabat and Nouakchott, driven by the Atlantic Initiative. A legacy of decolonization, this dispute has pitted Morocco against the Polisario Front—supported by Algeria—since 1975 over the status of the former Spanish colony.

Mauritania, for its part, has been directly involved in the Sahara issue. Following Spain's withdrawal from the territory, Nouakchott initially claimed and occupied the southern part of the Sahara (the region of

8. Chahid, S. (2025, February 24). Morocco-Mauritania Rapprochement: New Strategy to "Stifle" the Polisario [FULL]. *L'Opinion*. https://www.lopinion.ma/Rapprochement-Maroc-Mauritanie-Nouvelle-strategie-pour-etouffer-le-Polisario-INTEGRAL_a64233.html

9. Idem

10. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry.

11. Idem

Tiris al-Gharbiyya) from 1975 to 1979.¹² Exhausted by its war against the Polisario, Mauritania withdrew in 1979, signed peace with the separatists, and in 1984 recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) proclaimed by the Polisario.¹³ Since then, Mauritanian leaders have adopted a so-called "constructive" neutrality between their two powerful northern neighbors.¹⁴ In practice, this neutrality consists of maintaining cordial relations with Morocco, Algeria, and the Polisario, while avoiding any explicit stance on the Sahara question. Nouakchott continues to officially recognize the SADR and has maintained ambassadorial relations with the Polisario since the 1980s, but it carefully avoids declarations or initiatives that Rabat might perceive as hostile.¹⁵ For Mauritania, this posture is essential to preserve both internal stability and external balance: as an immediate neighbor of the contested territory, it fears that any excessive partisanship could once again drag the country into the Sahara conflict.¹⁶

However, the Atlantic Initiative, as conceived by Morocco, is intrinsically linked to the consolidation of the Kingdom's sovereignty over its Sahara. The proposed logistics corridor would traverse the Saharan territory and terminate at the Atlantic port of Dakhla, which Morocco is actively developing as a future regional hub.¹⁷ From Rabat's perspective, the use of this Atlantic corridor by Sahelian countries would amount, *de facto*, to an implicit recognition of its authority over the concerned territory. As Lacher & Werenfels observe, "the [Atlantic] project aims to build road and rail infrastructure across the Sahel to provide landlocked states with access to the Atlantic via the port of Dakhla—thus consolidating their recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over this territory."¹⁸ Evidence of this dynamic is already visible: Burkina Faso opened a consulate in Dakhla in 2021, followed by Chad in August 2024, making it the second central Sahel state to establish a consular presence in Morocco's southern provinces. Moreover, Mali and Niger—once aligned more closely with the Polisario—have in recent years moved toward positions more favorable to Morocco.¹⁹

This dynamic places Mauritania in an increasingly delicate diplomatic position. On one hand, Rabat hopes for Nouakchott's explicit adherence to the regional architecture emerging around the Atlantic Initiative. By leveraging the logistical corridor and the economic benefits it offers, Morocco is betting on a gradual repositioning of Mauritania—and, in the longer term, even the possibility of revisiting its official recognition of the SADR. On the other hand, Mauritania remains firmly committed to its principle of neutrality. In February 2025, when rumors circulated about a possible revision of its stance, the government spokesperson publicly reaffirmed the country's "positive neutrality" on the Sahara issue.²⁰

12. Sankari, F. A. (1990). THE WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE INEVITABILITY OF A SETTLEMENT. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 7(1), 153–168. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45193250>

13. Daadaoui, M. (2008). The Western Sahara conflict: towards a constructivist approach to self-determination. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 13(2), 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380801996471>

14. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry (Megatrends Spotlight No. 49). *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mauritania-balancing-act-amid-intensifying-algerian-moroccan-rivalry>

15. *Idem*

16. *Idem*

17. Karr, L. (2024, August 29). North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiraling. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/africa-file-august-29-2024-north-african-competition-sahel-libya-edge-burkina-faso>

18. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry

19. Yade, R., & Bassou, A. (2024, May 24). Behind Morocco's bid to unlock the Sahel. *AfricaSource*, Atlantic Council's Africa Center. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/behind-moroccos-bid-to-unlock-the-sahel/>

20. Hot Spots. (2025, February 19). Mauritania: The government spokesperson, Hussein Madou, states that no one dictates Mauritania's position on the Sahara [Article]. *Hot Spots*. <https://pointschauds.info/mauritanie-le-porte-parole-du-gouvernement-hussein-madou-personne-ne-dicte-aux-autorites-mauritaniennes-une-certaine-volonte-dans-leur-position-sur-la-question-du-sahara/>

For Nouakchott, abandoning this balance would entail incalculable risks.²¹ A complete alignment with Morocco's position could generate discontent among certain segments of Mauritanian society, particularly in the northern regions where cultural and familial ties with Sahrawi populations in the Tindouf camps remain strong—potentially fueling internal tensions.²² Yet these domestic sensitivities do not diminish Mauritania's strategic interest in engaging in a constructive regional dynamic alongside Morocco, one grounded in stability, shared development, and mutual respect for sovereignty.

Furthermore, Nouakchott fears concrete reprisals from Algeria or the Polisario should it deviate from its policy of neutrality. In May 2025, Mauritania closed the strategic border post at Lebriga, citing the need to reinforce national security in response to the growing militarization of the Tindouf camps, perceived as linked to the Polisario.²³ The Polisario Front subsequently intensified its military activity in June–July 2025, notably through attacks in Es-Smara, where several projectiles landed near Moroccan positions. Although these incidents caused no civilian casualties, they underscored an escalation of the conflict.²⁴

In this context, Mauritania perceives a clear risk: a marked alignment with Morocco could expose it to Algerian retaliation—whether economic or migratory—as well as to potential Polisario actions targeting its interests or threatening its border regions.

For now, Nouakchott maintains a cautious and measured stance toward the Atlantic Initiative. Although officially invited to participate, it has shown little enthusiasm and was absent from the coordination meeting of Sahel countries held in Marrakech in December 2023. Observers note that Nouakchott is "distancing itself" from the Moroccan Initiative in order to "remain neutral in the geopolitical rivalry between Morocco and Algeria."²⁵ Mauritania's reluctance to formally associate with the project reflects its determination not to appear as endorsing Morocco's approach to the Sahara. Supporting a corridor that prominently highlights Dakhla and the Moroccan Sahara would inevitably be perceived as alignment—a step that Nouakchott is, for now, unwilling to take.

The Sahara issue thus remains a persistent source of tension in the rapprochement between Morocco and Mauritania around the Atlantic Initiative. Rabat seeks a gradual shift by Nouakchott toward more explicit support for its territorial claims, while Mauritania continues to uphold neutrality, which it views as essential to safeguarding its national interests. This delicate balance could evolve as the economic and strategic promises of the Initiative begin to materialize. Mauritania may eventually choose to lend stronger support to Morocco, but it is likely to do so cautiously, at its own pace, and while carefully preserving its relations with other regional actors—first and foremost Algeria.

21. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry

22. Idem

23. The North Africa Post. (2025, July 7). Algeria uses Polisario militias to destabilize Mauritania. The North Africa Post. <https://northafricapost.com/88592-algeria-uses-polisario-militias-to-unsettle-mauritania.html>

24. Sahrawi NGOs Condemn Polisario Attack on EsSmara, UN Mission Launches Field Investigation. (2025, June 28). Morocco World News. Retrieved from <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/06/221733/sahrawi-ngos-condemn-polisario-attack-on-es-smara-un-mission-launches-field-investigation>

25. Zaanoun, A. (2024, October 10). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and potential challenges to regional leadership. Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/10/moroccos-atlantic-initiative-and-potential-challenges-to-regional-leadership?lang=en>

1.2. Between Morocco and Algeria: Maintaining the Regional Balance in a Sensitive Diplomatic Context

The launch of the Atlantic Initiative by Morocco comes at a time of intensified geopolitical competition in the Maghreb, whose effects increasingly extend into the Sahel and Mauritania. In this context, Morocco promotes a vision of African cooperation rooted in connectivity, integration, and co-development, while other regional actors pursue more assertive and competitive approaches. As Lacher and Werenfels observe, Mauritania occupies an increasingly central place in this regional rebalancing, becoming a coveted partner for Maghreb powers seeking stability and influence in the Sahel.²⁶ Likewise, Zaanoun underlines that the Atlantic Initiative explicitly aims to "transform the geostrategic landscape of the Sahel" in response to the pressure exerted by Algiers to counter Rabat's growing regional role.²⁷

Since Algeria's official break in diplomatic relations with Morocco in 2021, the rivalry between the two main Maghreb powers has only deepened, fueling influence maneuvers on a regional scale. In this geopolitical contest, Mauritania holds a pivotal position and increasingly finds itself at the center of tensions. Both Algiers and Rabat are seeking, each through their own strategies, to draw Nouakchott into their respective spheres of influence, with the dual aim of consolidating their positions on the Sahara question and reinforcing their economic presence in West Africa.

From Morocco's perspective, Mauritania constitutes a natural strategic partner for the Atlantic corridor, serving as a vital gateway to the Sahel. Beyond infrastructure, it represents an indispensable pillar for realizing the African vision championed by King Mohammed VI. In this context, Rabat has intensified its diplomatic and economic engagement with Nouakchott: ministerial visits, expanded trade exchanges,²⁸ and major investments by Moroccan companies in banking, telecommunications, and construction (notably Maroc Telecom/Mauritel, Moroccan Office of Mines). To these are added religious cooperation²⁹—such as the training of Mauritanian imams and the strengthening of ties between Sufi brotherhoods—as well as cultural cooperation. Together, these initiatives form part of a broader strategy of regional anchoring, rooted in historical convergence and shared cultural and human ties.

Moroccan-Mauritanian relations have not been this dynamic since the 1970s, a trend crystallized in the decisive meeting of December 2024 between King Mohammed VI and President Ghazouani, described as the "beginning of a promising rapprochement."³⁰ The joint statements issued on that occasion highlighted an unprecedented strengthening of bilateral cooperation across economic, security, and cultural domains.³¹ Within this framework, the Atlantic Initiative emerges as an additional strategic lever for Rabat: it consolidates Mauritania's anchoring within Morocco's regional orbit by actively integrating it

26. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry

27. Zaanoun, A. (2024, October 10). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and potential challenges to regional leadership.

28. In 2023, Morocco's exports to Mauritania amounted to USD 338 million, with an average annual increase of 10.2%, compared to USD 208 million in 2018. These exchanges represent 19% of Mauritania's total trade with Africa, making Morocco one of its main regional partners.<https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/mar/partner/mrt?utm>

29. Bava, S., & El Asri, F. (2022). Chapter 2. Morocco at the Crossroads of Religious Education between Europe and Africa. In F. El Asri & M. Kolly (eds.), *Are we Europe?* (1–). Presses universitaires Saint-Louis Bruxelles.<https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pusl.28177>

30. Chahid, S. (2025, February 24). Morocco-Mauritania Rapprochement: New Strategy to "Stifle" the Polisario [FULL]. *L'Opinion*.https://www.lopinion.ma/Rapprochement-Maroc-Mauritanie-Nouvelle-strategie-pour-etouffer-le-Polisario-INTEGRAL_a64233.html

31. Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP). (2024, December 20). Statement from the Royal Cabinet regarding the meeting between His Majesty King Mohammed VI and the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani. *MapNews*.<https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/activites-royales/communiqu%C3%A9-du-cabinet-royal-111>

into an Atlantic integration project conceived and led by the Kingdom.³²

Faced with Morocco's increasingly proactive diplomacy in the Sahel, Algeria has sought to deepen its ties with Mauritania as a means of preserving regional influence. A key step came in 2018, when Algiers opened the Mustapha Ben Boulaïd border post linking Tindouf (Algeria) to Zouérate (Mauritania), the first official land crossing between the two countries, intended to boost bilateral trade.³³ This rapprochement was reinforced in February 2024 with the inauguration of two additional crossing points in the presence of Presidents Ghazouani and Tebboune. However, the initially unpaved road limited its practical use. To remedy this, Algeria launched in 2021 a transboundary road project connecting Tindouf to Zouérate over nearly 800 km, though construction delays persisted. In early 2024, the two presidents met at the border to symbolically inaugurate these border posts, marking the official start of the works.³⁴

Security dynamics, however, complicated this trajectory. In May 2025, Nouakchott closed the Lebriga border post, a strategic crossing point, citing the need to control clandestine crossings linked to the Tindouf camps and to prevent incursions by the Polisario. Mauritania framed the decision as a sovereign security measure.³⁵ Meanwhile, Algeria announced the creation of free trade zones with several neighboring countries, with Mauritania singled out as a priority partner—a move clearly aimed at counterbalancing Morocco's competitive economic offer. Remarkably, 2024 marked the first visit of an Algerian president to Mauritania in 37 years.³⁶

It is clear that Algeria's increased diplomatic and economic activism in the Sahel-Saharan region has been partly motivated by the launch of the Moroccan Atlantic Initiative. Algiers, which has historically perceived itself as the natural link between the Sahel and the Mediterranean, views with suspicion the emergence of a strategic corridor connecting the Sahel to the Atlantic Ocean—one that would bypass its own hinterland and strengthen Morocco's geopolitical standing on the African scene. This perception is reinforced by Algiers' concern that its traditional economic interests in Chad and Mali, long regarded as its "strategic backyard," could be eroded by this dynamic of openness driven by Rabat.³⁷

To counter the Moroccan Initiative, Algiers has adopted a strategy mix of "carrot and stick."³⁸ On the "stick" side, it did not hesitate to economically sanction the Sahel countries tempted by the Moroccan offer. In January 2024, the Algerian government suspended the repayment of loans granted to states engaged in the Atlantic Initiative³⁹—a measure that particularly targeted Mali and Niger, both beneficiaries of Algerian aid, in an attempt to dissuade them from aligning too closely with Rabat. On the "carrot" side, Algiers advanced its own cooperation proposals: the free trade zone mentioned earlier, as well as the idea of an alternative Maghreb bloc. In November 2023, shortly after the Moroccan announcement, Algeria suggested the creation of an economic group including Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya—explicitly

32. Lyammouri, R., & Ghoulidi, A. (2024, December). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative: A catalyst for Sahel-Saharan integration (Policy Brief No. 6824). Policy Center for the New South. https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-12/PB_68-24_Rida%20Lyammouri.pdf

33. NATO Defense College Foundation. (2018, August). MAGHREB Strategic Trends: Algeria-Mauritania border opening marks a turning point in regional relations [Policy Brief]. NATO Foundation. <https://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MAGHREB-August-2018.pdf>

34. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry.

35. Sharawi, A. (2025, June 9). Why the Polisario Front Threatens Morocco and the Region. FDD – Foundation for Defense of Democracies. https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op_ed/2025/06/09/why-the-polisario-front-threatens-morocco-and-the-region/

36. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry.

37. Zaanoun, A. (2024, October 10). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and potential challenges to regional leadership.

38. Karr, L. (2024, August 29). North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiraling. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/africa-file-august-29-2024-north-african-competition-sahel-libya-edge-burkina-faso>

39. Idem

excluding Morocco.⁴⁰ The "small Maghreb" project aims to offer the region an alternative integration framework, designed to counterbalance Moroccan ambitions. However, these initiatives have struggled to materialize: the Maghreb mini-summit of February 2024, which brought together Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, produced no tangible outcome, while the announced free trade agreements with Mali, Niger, and Mauritania remain at the declaratory stage, without any effective treaty being signed.⁴¹

In his speech on the occasion of Throne Day 2025,⁴² King Mohammed VI reaffirmed his preference for a peaceful and conciliatory approach towards Algeria, underscoring a strategy of appeasement that transcends traditional bilateral disputes. By calling for reconciliation and unity among the Maghreb nations, the Moroccan sovereign emphasized the need to overcome historical tensions to foster deeper regional cooperation. This proposal goes beyond the Sahara issue, aiming to establish a climate of trust conducive to economic and political integration across the Maghreb. Through this approach, King Mohammed VI seeks to encourage a collective regional dynamic rooted in stability and shared prosperity for the entire region.

In this context, Mauritania adopts a carefully calibrated stance of balance. Faithful to the principle of "positive neutrality," regularly affirmed by its leaders, Nouakchott avoids openly aligning with either of the two Maghreb poles. This strategy of caution is notably reflected in its absence from initiatives aligning with either one of its neighbors—whether Algeria's project for a regional bloc without Morocco or the Atlantic Initiative led by Rabat, to which it has not yet formally adhered.

However, this equidistance does not prevent Mauritania from capitalizing on overlapping cooperation offers. It benefits simultaneously from infrastructure projects proposed by both sides: the Atlantic corridor and the electrical interconnection with Morocco (via ONEE), as well as the Tindouf-Zouerate road with Algeria. This adaptability enables Nouakchott to adjust its trade and security partnerships according to its priorities, reinforcing both its stability and regional integration. Ultimately, this pragmatic approach allows Mauritania to preserve its decision-making sovereignty while optimizing the benefits of its strategic position at the crossroads of the Maghreb and the Sahel.⁴³

Morocco's economic influence in Mauritania far exceeds that of Algeria. The Moroccan private sector is firmly established: Maroc Telecom (through its subsidiary Mauritel) and Attijariwafa Bank rank among the country's leading investors, while major agreements—such as the project to create the first stock exchange in Nouakchott in partnership with the Casablanca Stock Exchange—further anchor Morocco's presence.⁴⁴

By contrast, Algerian involvement remains limited. Algerian companies are only marginally present in Mauritania, mainly through occasional partnerships in the pharmaceutical or maritime sectors, without

40. Zaanoun, A. (2024, October 10). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and potential challenges to regional leadership.

41. El Yaaqoubi, S. (2024, June 27). Maghreb Disunion: Morocco and Algeria's divergent strategies in shaping future regional geopolitics. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/maghreb-disunion-morocco-and-algerias-divergent-strategies-shaping-future-regional>

42. Royal Cabinet. (July 29, 2025). Speech to the Nation on the occasion of the Throne Day. <https://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-messages-royaux/discours-royaux/sm-le-roi-adresse-un-discours-a-la-nation-loccasion-de-la-fete-du-trone-texte>

43. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry.

44. Reuters. (2025, February 25). Maroc Telecom appoints former finance minister as chair. ; Morocco World News. (2025, April 18). Morocco to help Mauritania create Nouakchott Stock Exchange. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/maroc-telecom-appoints-former-finance-minister-chair-2025-02-25/> <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/04/191311/morocco-to-help-mauritania-create-nouakchott-stock-exchange/>

any significant foothold in banking, telecom, or industry.⁴⁵ Thus, although Nouakchott maintains relations with Algeria, its current diplomatic trajectory is gradually tilting toward Rabat. This trend may be further accentuated by the Atlantic Initiative, which provides Mauritania with access to a network of infrastructures and exchanges in which Morocco serves as a pivotal hub.⁴⁶

The Atlantic Initiative also acts as a catalyst reshaping regional dynamics on both geopolitical and diplomatic levels. It provides Morocco with a strategic tool to deepen its partnership with Mauritania while strengthening its influence in West Africa—thereby contributing to the marginalization of Algerian presence in the Sahel.⁴⁷ In response, Algeria has sought to revive ties with Nouakchott through infrastructure projects and bilateral agreements, but these efforts have so far had only limited impact.

The sustainability of Mauritania's balancing act remains uncertain as the Atlantic Initiative gains momentum. The real challenge for Nouakchott will be to maintain its equidistance without alienating either Rabat or Algiers. Should the Initiative succeed in realizing its economic, logistical, and institutional dimensions, it could emerge as a powerful lever for inclusive development and regional cooperation.

II. ECONOMIC AND TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS INDUCED BY REGIONAL LOGISTICS INTEGRATION

2.1. The Atlantic Initiative as a Lever for Trade Opening and Regional Integration

At the heart of the Atlantic Initiative lies the objective of opening and securing trade corridors through Mauritania in order to establish new strategic routes between Morocco and the Sahel. At present, Maghreb land exchanges with West African countries partly transit through Mauritania but remain concentrated on a single paved axis: Morocco's RN1, which crosses the Sahara to connect, via Guerguerat, to the Nouadhibou–Nouakchott road, opened in 2005. This coastal link has facilitated a significant expansion of trade between Morocco, Mauritania, and Senegal over the past fifteen years.⁴⁸ However, this route now faces mounting congestion, with truck traffic steadily increasing and creating a structural bottleneck. In addition, until 2020, the Guerguerat area was repeatedly disrupted by Polisario Front elements attempting to block this vital passage—an episode that underscored the vulnerability of relying on a single trade corridor.⁴⁹

Morocco aims to develop a nearly 2,200 km trans-Saharan road corridor, linking the future Atlantic port of Dakhla to Mali via Mauritania. This planned route would follow the coast—from Nouadhibou to Nouakchott, then on to Néma before reaching the Malian border—with extensions envisaged toward

45. Algeria Invest. (2025, May 25). Algeria signs 3 cooperation agreements with Mauritania. <https://algeriainvest.com/AlgeriaIC/public/en/premium-news/lalgerie-signe-3-accords-de-cooperation-avec-la-mauritanie>

46. Laadam, J. A. (2024, December 28). Exploring the vital strategic relations between Morocco and Mauritania. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/12/28/exploring-the-vital-strategic-relations-between-morocco-and-mauritania/>

47. de León Cobo, B., Hopton, N., & Özcelik, B. (2025, February 13). Morocco as a Strategic Partner in Supporting the Sahel Region's Security. *RUSI Commentary*. Royal United Services Institute. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/morocco-strategic-partner-supporting-sahel-regions-security>

48. Mareï, N. and Lombard, J. (2024). All Roads Lead to Nouakchott. Routes, Uses, and Territories in Contemporary Mauritania. *Flux*, 135-136(1), 59-88. <https://doi.org/10.3917/flux1.135.0059>

49. Jensen, G. (2013). War and Insurgency in the Western Sahara. US Army War College Press. <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/526>

Niger and Chad.⁵⁰ Morocco has committed \$1.2 billion to modernize the port of Dakhla by 2028, targeting a capacity of 35 million tons per year.⁵¹ This effort is complemented by initiatives to pave and secure the Moroccan coastal road up to the border, while Mauritania is invited to undertake similar work on its own territory, notably rehabilitating non-viable segments between the country's western and eastern regions. As a true transportation backbone, this corridor would connect Morocco to the main landlocked countries of the Sahel, diversifying and densifying regional commercial infrastructure.⁵²

Notable progress has already been achieved with the planned opening of a second border crossing between Morocco and Mauritania, further east than Guerguerat. In February 2025, Moroccan and Mauritanian authorities confirmed the development of a new road corridor from Es-Smara (in the southern provinces) to the Mauritanian locality of Bir Moghreïn (northeastern Mauritania), via Amgala and Tifariti.⁵³ Spanning 93km on the Moroccan side, this RN17/RN17B road was reported to be more than 95% complete in the second half of 2025. It will enable the opening of a new border crossing in an area previously accessible only through an undeveloped section of the Sahara.⁵⁴ Accompanying infrastructure is expected to boost the local economy around this corridor.⁵⁵ On the Mauritanian side, a decree issued by the Ministry of the Interior in February 2025 authorized the opening of this new crossing point, one of 82 officially recognized in the country.⁵⁶ The agreement on this route also includes a joint commitment by both states to secure it, effectively mitigating risks of Polisario infiltration in this remote area.⁵⁷

For Mauritania, the development of trans-Saharan corridors initiated under the Atlantic Initiative represents a major strategic opportunity. Moving beyond its historically marginalized position, the country could position itself as a central logistical hub between the Maghreb and West Africa, thereby enhancing its geoeconomic attractiveness. Such a shift would foster deeper integration into regional value chains, while stimulating investment in transport infrastructure, logistical services, and trade.

According to the latest World Bank report⁵⁸ on Mauritania's economy, the country's average annual growth of around 3.7% is already largely driven by transport and trade, demonstrating the structuring role of these sectors. In this context, transforming Mauritania into a regional transit hub could consolidate this momentum and strengthen the country's economic resilience in the medium term through promising development mechanisms.

First, the development of a direct Mali–Mauritania–Morocco route would represent a significant departure from existing corridors, currently dominated by those transiting through Senegal (Dakar–Bamako),

50. France 24. (2025, May 1). Opening up the Sahel: Moroccan megaproject to strengthen its regional influence through the Atlantic. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250501-desenclaver-sahel-megaprojet-maroc-influence-r%C3%A9gionale-atlantique>

51. Business Focus Magazine. (2024, October 28). Dakhla Atlantic Port: a new gateway to Africa. Business Focus Magazine. <https://businessfocusmagazine.com/2024/10/28/dakhla-atlantic-port-a-new-gateway-to-africa/>

52. France 24. (June 29, 2025). Morocco's Atlantic gambit: linking restive Sahel to ocean. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250629-morocco-s-atlantic-gambit-linking-restive-sahel-to-ocean>

53. Africa News Service (AP News in French). (2025, July 2). A new cross-border axis to link Morocco and Mauritania. APA News. <https://fr.apanews.net/diplomacy/un-nouvel-axe-transfrontalier-pour-relier-le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-2/>

54. Idem

55. Idem

56. Chahid, S. (2025, February 24). Morocco-Mauritania Rapprochement: New Strategy to "Stifle" the Polisario [INTEGRAL]. L'Opinion. https://www.lopinion.ma/Rapprochement-Maroc-Mauritanie-Nouvelle-strategie-pour-etouffer-le-Polisario-INTEGRAL_a64233.html

57. Idem

58. World Bank. (2025). Mauritania Overview. World Bank. <https://www.banquemonde.org/fr/country/mauritania/overview>

which carry about 80% of Malian trade.⁵⁹ The creation of a new corridor running through Nouakchott or Nouadhibou, towards Dakhla and then Tangier, could capture part of this traffic by offering a shorter route to Europe and the Americas. Similarly, for Niger, which mainly exports uranium through Benin, diversification towards a western corridor via Mauritania appears increasingly strategic, particularly in the face of political instability with its current partners.⁶⁰ Each truck, container, or cargo transiting through Mauritania would generate considerable revenue in customs duties, visa fees, and logistical services, while also stimulating the regional economies of the cities along the route.

Then, and still at the heart of the Atlantic Initiative, Mauritania must strengthen its infrastructure to fully assume its strategic role (see Figure p.16). This transformation requires paving and widening major roads, constructing bridges, modernizing border posts, and developing adequate rest areas. Moroccan expertise and financial support could prove decisive, particularly for transnational projects such as the Nouakchott–Bamako corridor via Ayoun el Atrouss and Néma.⁶¹

According to the World Bank,⁶² about 40% of Mauritania’s national road network is in poor condition. While more than 5,900 km are already paved—providing a solid foundation for future improvements—significant upgrades are still needed to sustain growing traffic flows. In addition, nearly 1,800 km of regional and local roads require interventions to ensure their economic viability within a densified corridor.⁶³

As part of a long-term vision, the Atlantic Initiative also includes the prospect of a rail connection linking Zouérate–Nouadhibou to Morocco via Dakhla. Although still at the exploratory stage and highly costly, this project illustrates the transformative potential of the Initiative for cross-border mobility (Lacher, 2025; Lyammouri & Ghoulidi, 2024).

59. Byiers, B., & Karkare, P. (2022, September). Actors and interests along the Dakar–Bamako corridor (Discussion Paper No. 328). European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).

60. Ouedraogo, R., & Mineyama, T. (2023, February 27). Fostering Export Diversification in Niger (IMF Selected Issues Paper No. 2023/010). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/Selected-Issues-Papers/2023/English/SIPEA2023010.ashx>

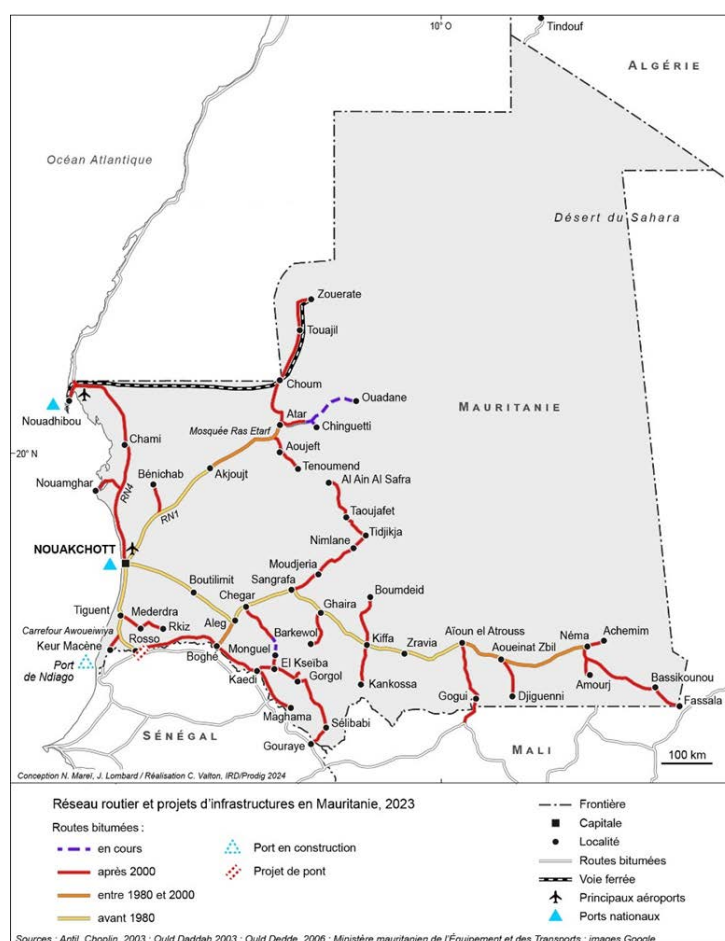
61. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania’s balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry (Megatrends Spotlight No. 49). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mauritania-balancing-act-amid-intensifying-algerian-moroccan-rivalry>

62. World Bank. (2021). Mauritania Transport Policy Note. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/878001625140712976/pdf/Mauritania-Transport-Policy-Note.pdf>

63. Idem

Figure

Major Mauritanian Infrastructure – Existing Road Network and Planned Projects



Source: Mareï, N. and Lombard, J. (2024). All Roads Lead to Nouakchott. Routes, Uses, and Territories in Contemporary Mauritania. *Flux*, 135-136(1), 59-88. <https://doi.org/10.3917/flux1.135.0059>

On the maritime front, Mauritanian ports occupy a strategic position within the Atlantic Initiative. The country has two main Atlantic infrastructures: the port of Nouakchott, dedicated to general trade, and Nouadhibou, a northern port focused on minerals and fisheries. Mouadhibou, with an annual iron ore processing capacity of approximately 11 million tons, ranks among Mauritania's most important ports.⁶⁴ Currently, the port of Nouakchott serves as the main gateway to Mali, particularly for the import of hydrocarbons and consumer goods, thereby connecting the country to the Sahel region.

However, with increasing focus on Morocco's new port of Dakhla, Mauritanian authorities fear that traffic could be diverted from their own ports, reinforcing their cautious stance toward the Atlantic corridor. Mauritania appears intent on preserving strategic leeway to protect its port interests amid a shifting regional trade landscape. This approach can be seen as a deliberate waiting strategy, designed to maximize potential benefits from future engagement, provided explicit guarantees are made—especially regarding the inclusion of a second maritime access point in the corridor, such as Nouadhibou, alongside Dakhla.

64. World Port Development (WPD). (2011, December 1). In Focus: Port of Nouakchott in Mauritania. *World Port Development*. <https://dev.worldportdevelopment.com/2011/12/01/in-focus-port-of-nouakchott-in-mauritania/>

To maintain its competitive position, Mauritania has invested in enhancing the capacities of the port of Nouakchott, including the construction of new container docks and improvements to port management systems. Simultaneously, the port of Nouadhibou—with its natural depth and proximity to the Moroccan border—is being upgraded through projects supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the African Development Bank (ADB). These initiatives aim to dredge and widen the access channel, enabling accommodation of larger ships and positioning the port as a sub-regional hub.⁶⁵

In this perspective offered by the trans-Saharan logistics corridors, Mauritania can position itself as a commercial hub between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, thus reconnecting with its historical vocation as a trans-Saharan link, illustrated by the ancient caravan routes passing through Chinguetti and Oualata.⁶⁶ The ambition to resume this role in the 21st century through modern infrastructure is part of a broader dynamic of regional connectivity driven by the AU's Agenda 2063.⁶⁷

If structural and security challenges persist (discussed later in this article), the dynamics of the Atlantic Initiative continue to offer Mauritania promising prospects for development and regional integration. In the short term, several infrastructure projects already underway, such as the new Smara–Bir Moghrein road corridor or joint electrification initiatives, are likely to significantly improve the country's territorial connectivity. In the medium term, the partial commissioning of the Dakhla–Bamako corridor, even if only through the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, would allow Mauritania to capture a share of Malian commercial traffic. Each advancement in connectivity will thus contribute to strengthening the country's integration into regional economic circuits, laying the groundwork for a more assertive geoeconomic positioning, which leads us to examine other sectoral spillovers of Moroccan-Mauritanian cooperation.

2.2. Infrastructure Development: Ports, Energy, and Cross-Border Exchanges

In addition to the road infrastructures mentioned above, the Atlantic Initiative paves the way for enhanced cooperation in strategic sectors that could benefit Mauritania. A key area is energy.

In January 2025, Morocco and Mauritania signed an electricity interconnection agreement aimed at linking their national grids.⁶⁸ This agreement is part of the larger Atlantic–West Africa energy corridor project.⁶⁹ For Mauritania, where many inland localities are not connected to the national grid, it offers the possibility of importing Moroccan electricity to address deficits, particularly in the north. Morocco, with a potential surplus thanks to its investments in renewable energies (solar and wind), could provide Mauritania with competitive electricity, thereby improving energy access for the Mauritanian population and industries.⁷⁰

65. Marine Insight. (2025, February 8). Major Ports in Mauritania. *Marine Insight*. <https://www.marineinsight.com/know-more/major-ports-in-mauritania/>

66. Lydon, G. (2009). *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa*. Cambridge University Press. https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/87243/frontmatter/9780521887243_frontmatter.pdf

67. African Union Commission. (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. African Union Commission. Retrieved from <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

68. MAP / APA News. (2025, February). Morocco and Mauritania sign an electric interconnection agreement. <https://fr.apanews.net/maroc/le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-signent-un-accord-d-interconnexion-electrique/>

69. World Bank. (2025). *West Africa Regional Electricity Market Program (Phase 1): Transmission Corridor Project in Mauritania (P505173)* [Report]. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099050125104627792/pdf/P505173-ceed5df-0c0c-487c-9965-186b9f9126d8.pdf>

70. Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (Morocco). (2025, January 23). Joint press release: Morocco and Mauritania sign a memorandum of understanding to develop their partnership in the electricity and renewable energy sectors. Ministry of Environment, Morocco. <https://www.environnement.gov.ma/fr/133-a-la-une/4505-communique-de-presse-conjoint-le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-signent-un-protocole-d-accord-pour-developper-leur-partenariat-dans-les-secteurs-de-l-electricite-et-des-energies-renouvelables>

In the longer term, this electricity corridor could be integrated into the West African energy market. Thus, energy integration would complement transport integration.

Furthermore, Morocco has for several years been promoting an offshore pipeline project along the West African coast, from Nigeria to Morocco, which would serve several countries including Mauritania.⁷¹ This megaproject, Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, would allow gas to be transported to Morocco and onward to Europe. For Mauritania, such a pipeline raises questions, as it would involve passing either through its territorial waters or nearby. Mauritania itself holds significant offshore gas reserves, notably within the framework of the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) project developed with Senegal.⁷² The first phase of this project began producing gas in January 2025, with an estimated annual capacity of 2.3–2.5 million tons of LNG, and recoverable reserves estimated at 400–425 billion cubic meters.⁷³

This abundance stimulates Mauritania's interest in advocating for the integration of its own resources into any future energy corridor. A central objective is to ensure that if a trans-Saharan pipeline or energy corridor is developed from Morocco, Mauritania integrates its own gas into it, thereby generating transit revenues and enhancing its national added value—a crucial issue within the framework of the multisectoral Atlantic Initiative.

In terms of port infrastructure, we have previously highlighted the importance for Mauritania of modernizing Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. The modernization of these maritime infrastructures represents a key challenge for the logistical integration of Mauritania into future trans-Saharan corridors.⁷⁴ Strengthened cooperation with Morocco, which has extensive experience in developing world-class port platforms—notably Tanger Med, considered one of the most efficient ports on the African continent—would offer Mauritania a valuable opportunity to benefit from skill transfers and technical assistance. In this regard, the National Ports Agency (ANP) and Tanger Med Port Authority (TMPA) could play a strategic advisory role in the expansion or modernization of existing infrastructures, particularly for the deep-water port of Nouadhibou.

The financial dimension is not negligible: within a South-South partnership logic, Morocco could support Mauritania in mobilizing international funding, particularly from donors such as the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Gulf sovereign wealth funds, or multilateral financing windows dedicated to African infrastructure.

Such collaboration, aligned with the strategic vision of the Atlantic Initiative, would aim to make Nouadhibou a complementary logistical link to Moroccan ports rather than a competitor. This would enhance the attractiveness of the shared Atlantic seaboard and consolidate the idea of an integrated regional port network serving both inter-African and Euro-African trade.

On the commercial front, the Atlantic Initiative could become a major lever for intensifying bilateral trade between Morocco and Mauritania. In recent years, Moroccan exports to Mauritania have grown significantly, supported by improved infrastructure, notably the commissioning of the Nouadhibou-

71. Idem

72. Global Energy Monitor. (2025). Greater Tortue Ahmeyim Gas Complex (Senegal-Mauritania). https://www.gem.wiki/Greater_Tortue_Ahmeyim_Gas_Complex_%28Senegal-Mauritania%29

73. Enerdata. (January 3, 2025). BP's GTA gas project offshore Senegal and Mauritania produces first gas. <https://www.enerdata.net/publications/daily-energy-news/bps-gta-gas-project-offshore-senegal-and-mauritania-produces-first-gas.html>

74. World Bank. (2022). Trade and Infrastructure Integration in Africa [Report]. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099424311162313828/pdf/IDU0fca49b5b01b530416009eab02c488f834b70.pdf>

Nouakchott road in 2004.⁷⁵ Today, Morocco exports a wide range of products to Mauritania: foodstuffs (sugar, fruit, and vegetables), construction materials, manufactured products, and everyday consumer goods.⁷⁶ In return, Rabat mainly imports fishery products and certain minerals from Mauritania. Between 2007 and 2022, the value of Moroccan exports to Mauritania increased from about USD 100 million to more than USD 322 million—more than tripling in 15 years.⁷⁷ This trend highlights Morocco's growing importance as a strategic trading partner for Nouakchott. Through the Atlantic Initiative, this dynamic is likely to accelerate, encouraging diversification of trade flows and deeper integration of regional logistics chains.

In the agricultural and food sectors, Morocco is well positioned to play a central role in strengthening Mauritania's food security. Mauritania imports the majority of its staple goods—cereals, vegetables, dairy products—given that less than 0.5% of its land is arable and its local agricultural sector remains fragile.⁷⁸ A reliable logistics corridor with Morocco would enable the cost-effective transport of Moroccan agricultural products to Mauritania and the Sahel. Furthermore, the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP), through its subsidiary OCP Africa, is already active in the region: in 2022, Morocco provided Mauritanian small farmers with 5,000 tons of fertilizers, offered training programs, and introduced sustainable agronomic practices.⁷⁹ In addition, OCP Africa also entered into a partnership with the World Bank (2023) to promote customized fertilization programs and improve soil health in West Africa.⁸⁰ Thanks to these initiatives, Mauritania could access fertilization programs at preferential rates, thereby optimizing its cereal production. In return, Mauritania can make a significant contribution to Morocco's food security—most notably through the export of fishery products from its rich waters, which complement the protein supplies in Moroccan value chains.

On the industrial and mining fronts, the development of the Atlantic corridor offers Mauritania a strategic opportunity to enhance its industrial and mining resources while fostering the emergence of a structuring tertiary sector. With substantial deposits of iron, gold, and copper—mainly exploited by the National Industrial and Mining Company (SNIM) and the Guelb Moghrein mine operated by First Quantum Minerals⁸¹—Mauritania could, through modernized regional logistics, directly export raw materials to Moroccan steel mills, thereby strengthening regional industrial integration. At the same time, the Mauritanian, Malian, and Nigerien markets could benefit from a regular influx of Moroccan manufactured goods, textiles, materials, and equipment through shared commercial platforms.

In this perspective, the expansion of trade will also generate strong demand for associated services, particularly in logistics, transport, handling, finance, and insurance. Moroccan banking institutions in Nouakchott—such as BMCE Africa, Banque Populaire, and Attijariwafa Bank—are well-positioned to facilitate the financing of regional trade. Finally, the free zone model, successfully tested in Morocco with

75. Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, April 7). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry (Megatrends Spotlight No. 49). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mauritania-balancing-act-amid-intensifying-algerian-moroccan-rivalry>

76. Trading Economics. (2025). Maroc exportations vers la Mauritanie. <https://tradingeconomics.com/morocco/exports/mauritania>

77. CountryEconomy. (2024). Comparison: Morocco vs Mauritania – International trade. Retrieved from <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/compare/morocco/mauritania?sc=XE87>

78. European Commission. (2025, May 8). Trade in goods with Mauritania. Eurostat Comext. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_mauritania_en.pdf

79. North Africa Post. (2022, December 19). Morocco's OCP continues to support African farmers. <https://northafricapost.com/63654-63654.html>

80. World Bank. (2023, October 11). OCP Group and World Bank join forces to boost food security and agricultural development in West Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/10/11/ocp-group-and-world-bank-join-forces-to-boost-food-security-and-agricultural-development-in-west-africa>

81. Business Focus. (2023). Mauritania Report 2023. https://businessfocus.org.uk/reports/Mauritania_report_2023.pdf

the Tanger Free Zone, could inspire the development of the Nouadhibou free zone, thereby enhancing Mauritania's economic attractiveness.

This economic potential is part of a broader diplomatic strategy, reflected in the strengthening of ties between Rabat and Nouakchott. The participation of Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani in a mini-summit organized at the White House in July 2025, alongside other West African leaders, illustrates Mauritania's determination to integrate further into the regional dynamics driven by its strategic partners. This diplomatic orientation reinforces Mauritania's credibility as a central actor in the Atlantic corridor project and a key partner in the continent's emerging geoeconomic configurations.

Thus, on the economic and developmental front, the Atlantic Initiative represents a historic opportunity for Mauritania to overcome its relative landlocked situation and stimulate the development of its infrastructure, trade, and regional integration. However, the expected benefits will only materialize in the medium to long term, and only if political, institutional, and financial obstacles are successfully addressed. If Rabat and Nouakchott manage to overcome these challenges, Mauritania could transform into a true Afro-Atlantic hub, benefiting from growth driven by transit and trade.

Nevertheless, before these economic benefits can be fully realized, a fundamental requirement remains: ensuring the security of the corridors and the associated flows of cooperation. In a Sahelian context marked by persistent instability and growing cross-border threats, the success of the project will also depend on the joint ability of Morocco and Mauritania to build a secure and resilient environment. These security challenges—essential to the success of the Atlantic Initiative—will be the focus of the next section.

III. TRANS-SAHARAN SECURITY CHALLENGES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION

3.1. Insecurity Along the Corridors: Persistent Vulnerabilities

The Atlantic Initiative is unfolding in a Sahelian region marked by severe insecurity, driven by the proliferation of extremist armed groups and other insurgent movements. The central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) has become the epicenter of terrorism in Africa: in 2024, it accounted for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide.⁸² Groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, JNIM, and the Islamic State organization (EIGS) control large swathes of territory, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. Roads and highways are frequently targeted by attacks, ambushes, sabotage, and extortion.⁸³ In this context, the prospect of establishing a road corridor from Morocco to Mali via Mauritania poses serious security challenges: how can infrastructure and convoys be protected over hundreds of kilometers of areas potentially held by fighters?

For Mauritania, the priority will be to prevent insecurity from spilling over onto its soil and to ensure the safety of routes crossing its territory. To date, Mauritania has been an exception in the Sahel, managing to shield itself from terrorism attacks for nearly a decade (none since 2011). This relative success is attributed

82. Institute for Economics & Peace. (2025). Global Terrorism Index 2025. Vision of Humanity.<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>

83. Dideberg, R., & Melly, P. (2025, April 11). Navigating a path beyond regional division is essential for West Africa's security [Expert comment]. Chatham House.<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/04/navigating-path-beyond-regional-division-essential-west-africas-security>

to a combination of factors, including strengthening the army in the north and east and a policy of deradicalization.⁸⁴ Yet the regional environment remains volatile, with Katibas linked to JNIM operating near Mauritania's borders.⁸⁵ An increased influx of traffic and the development of infrastructure in northern Mauritania could attract the attention—and hostility—of criminal and terrorist groups.

From Morocco's perspective, the security of the Sahel is also a matter of national interest. While Morocco does not border the Mali-Niger-Burkina tri-border area, it is not immune to its repercussions: infiltration of armed fighters through the Sahara, as well as arms and drug trafficking transiting via Mauritania represent concrete risks.⁸⁶ This reality was confirmed in 2024, when terrorist cells dismantled in Morocco were found to have links with the Islamic State in the Sahel, which was preparing attacks in the Kingdom—underscoring the persistence of the trans-Saharan risk.⁸⁷

Therefore, Rabat has every interest in contributing to regional stability.⁸⁸ The Atlantic Initiative, presented by King Mohammed VI as a non-military response to the challenges of the Sahel, cannot, however, overlook the military aspect.⁸⁹ In this context, Morocco has expanded its security cooperation with Sahelian states in recent years.⁹⁰ As early as 2020, Rabat proposed training programs for the armed forces of Mali and Niger, aiming at strengthening their capacity to combat terrorist groups.⁹¹ With Mauritania, ties are more structured: a bilateral military cooperation framework exists, including the training of Mauritanian officers in Moroccan academies and schools, as well as small-scale joint exercises.⁹² This partnership could be intensified to secure the trade corridors envisaged by the Atlantic Initiative. Joint anti-terrorism training in desert environments could be developed, potentially involving Malian forces, to enhance regional coordination around the security of trans-Saharan routes.

Another security risk is the threat posed by the Polisario, albeit of a different nature from Islamist terrorism. Some experts highlight its problematic connections with trans-Saharan networks. According to R. Greenway and A. Ghoulidi, the movement benefits from logistical and political support in the region, as well as links with state and non-state actors, notably within the Iranian and Russian spheres. The Polisario is reportedly involved in certain cross-border trafficking routes, with risks of convergence

84. The Arab Weekly. (2025, May 5). Mauritania's strategy keeps terrorists at bay while they ravage Sahel countries. The Arab Weekly.<https://the arabweekly.com/mauritania-s-strategy-keeps-terrorists-bay-while-they-ravage-sahel-countries>

85. Timbuktu Institute. (2025, May 16). JNIM threat in the tri-border area of Mali, Mauritania and Senegal [Report]. Timbuktu Institute.<https://timbuktu-institute.org/media/attachments/2025/05/16/raport-jnim-threat-in-the-tri-border-area-of-mali-mauritania-and-senegal.pdf>

86. Kapetanovic, T. (2025). Applying the transplantation framework to JNIM's expansion in the Sahara–Sahel. Journal of Illicit Economies and Development, 7(1), 1–19. LSE Press.<https://jied.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/jied.253>

87. Le Monde. (2025, February 20). Against a backdrop of rising terrorist threats, Morocco announces it has dismantled an Islamic State cell. Le Monde.https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/02/20/sur-fond-de-hausse-de-la-menace-terroriste-le-maroc-annonce-avoir-demantele-une-cellule-de-l-etat-islamique_6556146_3212.html

88. Marangio, R. (2025, May). Shifting sands: Hedging strategies in Sahel–Maghreb relations [Policy Brief]. European Union Institute for Security Studies.<https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/shifting-sands-hedging-strategies-sahel-maghreb-relations>

89. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccans Living Abroad. (December 2023). Ministerial Coordination Meeting on the International Initiative of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to Promote Access for Sahel Countries to the Atlantic Ocean.<https://diplomatie.ma/fr/r%C3%A9union-minist%C3%A9rielle-de-coordination-sur-l'initiative-internationale-de-sm-le-roi-pour-favoriser-l%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-des-pays-du-sahel-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99oc%C3%A9an-atlantique>

90. Cherkaoui, N., & Tobi, Y. (2021, October). The Maghreb's Outlook Towards the Sahel: An analysis of Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania standpoints (Policy Paper No. 19/21). Policy Center for the New South.https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2021-10/PP_19-21_Cherkaoui_Tobi_0.pdf

91. de León Cobo, B., Hopton, N., & Özcelik, B. (2025, February 13). Morocco as a Strategic Partner in Supporting the Sahel Region's Security. RUSI Commentary. Royal United Services Institute.<https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/morocco-strategic-partner-supporting-sahel-regions-security>

92. Morocco World News. (2023, November 2). Morocco, Mauritania committed to strengthening bilateral military cooperation.<https://www.morocroworldnews.com/2023/11/27266/morocco-mauritania-committed-to-strengthen-bilateral-military-cooperation/>

with armed groups operating in the Sahel. Its positioning in a sensitive area near the Strait of Gibraltar raises additional security concerns. The authors also note that the movement broke the ceasefire in 2020, reigniting regional tensions. They consequently call for a more rigorous assessment of the Polisario's role in Sahelo-Saharan security dynamics.⁹³

3.2. Towards a Deepening of the Security Partnership Between Rabat and Nouakchott

To address security challenges, military and security cooperation between Morocco and Mauritania is expected to strengthen. Historically, relations between the two armies have fluctuated: during the Sahara War in the 1970s, they were briefly allied against the Polisario, followed by a period of coolness in the 1980s-90s when Mauritania kept its distance.⁹⁴ Since the 2010s, however, a rapprochement has been observed, illustrated by exchanges of visits by senior officers and joint participation in international exercises (Mauritania is, for instance, regularly invited to take part in the African Lion exercise organized by Morocco and the United States⁹⁵). In 2020, Morocco provided logistical support to Mauritania when the Guerguerat crossing was blocked by Polisario elements: the Moroccan army intervened, and coordination with Mauritanian forces allowed the border to be reopened peacefully.⁹⁶ This was a strong signal of renewed trust between the two countries.

In this perspective, military and security cooperation between Morocco and Mauritania should be intensified along two axes:

- Intelligence sharing and surveillance: the vast desert expanses of Mauritania require enhanced monitoring. Moroccan services could support Nouakchott through advanced technologies—satellite imagery, drones—specifically targeting terrorism and the trans-Saharan trafficking of drugs and weapons;
- Training and exercises: the Mauritanian army could benefit from expanded training in renowned Moroccan institutions, such as the Royal Military Academy (RMA) in Meknes. This training could be complemented by annual joint exercises, for example focusing on the protection of humanitarian convoys in desert environments, thereby strengthening the interoperability of both countries' armed forces.

Ultimately, security remains the most vulnerable link in the Atlantic Initiative. Without minimal guarantees of stability and territorial control, neither trade nor structural investments can be sustained over time. Aware of this imperative, Morocco and Mauritania are called upon to coordinate their efforts within an integrated and cooperative security framework. Mauritania, with its operational expertise and in-depth knowledge of the tribal and territorial dynamics of the Sahel, can play a pivotal role in local security. Morocco, for its part, brings complementary assets—intelligence capabilities, active multilateral diplomacy, logistical support, and financing—that can enhance regional resilience. Such synergy would make it possible to move beyond a strictly military response and instead adopt a human security strategy

93. Greenway, R., & Ghouli, A. (2025, May 21). Why We Must Confront the Terror Proxy Polisario Front. *The Daily Signal*. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2025/05/21/why-must-confront-terror-proxy-polisario-front/>

94. Sansanwal, K., & Kamath, R. (2020). The Unspoken Conflict In Western Sahara. *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, 24(2), 106–119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48629027>

95. United States Africa Command. (2025, May 12). U.S. and Royal Moroccan Armed Forces launch African Lion 25 in Morocco [Press release]. <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/35825/us-and-royal-moroccan-armed-forces-launch-african-lion-25-in-morocco>

96. Benkheira, R. (2020, November). A conflict that time forgot: The enduring stalemate in Western Sahara. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2020/11/a-conflict-that-time-forgot>

centered on inclusive development and the prevention of extremism. This orientation is consistent with the Moroccan royal doctrine, which promotes a holistic approach to the Sahel, addressing the structural causes of radicalization and integrating peripheral regions into formal economic flows.

CONCLUSION

The Atlantic Initiative represents a major strategic shift in relations between Morocco and Mauritania, intertwining economic opportunities, geopolitical ambitions, and security imperatives within a transforming Sahelo-Saharan context. It is not merely an infrastructure project but carries the promise of a new regional architecture—more integrated, more inclusive, and better connected to the rest of the world. For Mauritania, it represents a historic opportunity to turn its relative landlocked position into a lever for multidimensional development. For Morocco, the challenge is to consolidate its role as a strategic bridge between the Atlantic, the Maghreb, and the Sahel, exemplifying a partnership diplomacy grounded in co-construction.

Yet this dynamic will only be sustainable if it is anchored in balanced coordination, mutual recognition of national interests, and strong international support. Mauritania's diplomatic prudence must be reconciled with Morocco's regional ambitions in a spirit of respect and complementarity. Likewise, the economic benefits of the corridor will materialize only if Mauritania assumes a central role in its implementation, rather than serving merely as a transit point. Crucially, without effective security along the routes, the project will remain vulnerable to the transnational threats destabilizing the region.

The future of the Atlantic Initiative will therefore depend on the capacity of both countries to institutionalize their partnership and mobilize enduring alliances to address shared challenges. Only under these conditions can the corridor transcend its role as a trade route to become a vector of regional transformation, shared stability, and renewed economic sovereignty.

Bibliography

- Africa News Service (AP News in French). (2025, juillet 2). Un nouvel axe transfrontalier pour relier le Maroc et la Mauritanie. APA News. <https://fr.apanews.net/diplomacy/un-nouvel-axe-transfrontalier-pour-relier-le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-2/>
- African Union Commission. (2015). Agenda 2063: The Africa we want. African Union Commission. Retrieved from <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>
- Algeria Invest. (2025, May 25). Algeria signs 3 cooperation agreements with Mauritania. <https://algeriainvest.com/AlgeriaC/public/en/premium-news/lalgerie-signe-3-accords-de-cooperation-avec-la-mauritanie>
- Banque mondiale. (2021). Mauritania Transport Policy Note. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/878001625140712976/pdf/Mauritania-Transport-Policy-Note.pdf>
- Banque mondiale. (2022). Trade and infrastructure integration in Africa [Report]. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099424311162313828/pdf/IDU0fca49b5b01b530416009eab02c488f834b70.pdf>
- Banque mondiale. (2023, October 11). OCP Group and World Bank join forces to boost food security and agricultural development in West Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/10/11/ocp-group-and-world-bank-join-forces-to-boost-food-security-and-agricultural-development-in-west-africa>
- Banque mondiale. (2025). Mauritania overview. Banque mondiale. <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/mauritania/overview>
- Banque mondiale. (2025). West Africa Regional Electricity Market Program (Phase 1): Projet de corridor de transmission en Mauritanie (P505173) [Rapport]. World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099050125104627792/pdf/P505173-ceed5df-0c0c-487c-9965-186b9f9126d8.pdf>
- Bava, S., & El Asri, F. (2022). Chapitre 2. Le Maroc au carrefour de la formation religieuse entre Europe et Afrique. In F. El Asri & M. Kolly (eds.), *Are we Europe?* (1–). Presses universitaires Saint-Louis Bruxelles. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pusl.28177>
- Benkheira, R. (2020, November). A conflict that time forgot: The enduring stalemate in Western Sahara. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2020/11/a-conflict-that-time-forgot>
- Business Focus Magazine. (2024, 28 octobre). Dakhla Atlantic Port: a new gateway to Africa.
- Business Focus Magazine. <https://businessfocusmagazine.com/2024/10/28/dakhla-atlantic-port-a-new-gateway-to-africa/>
- Business Focus. (2023). Mauritania Report 2023. https://businessfocus.org.uk/reports/Mauritania_report_2023.pdf
- Byiers, B., & Karkare, P. (2022, septembre). Actors and interests along the Dakar–Bamako corridor (Discussion Paper No. 328). European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).
- Cabinet Royal. (2025, 29 juillet). Discours à la Nation à l'occasion de la Fête du Trône. <https://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-messages-royaux/discours-royaux/sm-le-roi-adresse-un-discours-a-la-nation-loccasion-de-la-fete-du-trone-texte>
- Chahid, S. (2025, 24 février). Rapprochement Maroc–Mauritanie : nouvelle stratégie pour “étouffer” le Polisario [INTÉGRAL]. L'Opinion. https://www.lopinion.ma/Rapprochement-Maroc-Mauritanie-Nouvelle-strategie-pour-etouffer-le-Polisario-INTEGRAL_a64233.html
- Cherkaoui, N., & Tobi, Y. (2021, octobre). The Maghreb's Outlook Towards the Sahel: An analysis of Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania standpoints (Policy Paper No. 19/21). Policy Center for the New South. <https://www.pcnss.org/publications/policy-paper/19-21-the-maghreb-s-outlook-towards-the-sahel-an-analysis-of-morocco-algeria-and-mauritania-standpoints>

policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2021-10/PP_19-21_Chерkaoui_Tobi_0.pdf

CountryEconomy. (2024). Comparison: Morocco vs Mauritania – International trade. Retrieved from <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/compare/morocco/mauritania?sc=XE87>

Daadaoui, M. (2008). The Western Sahara conflict: towards a constructivist approach to self-determination. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 13(2), 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380801996471>

de León Cobo, B., Hopton, N., & Ozcelik, B. (2025, February 13). Morocco as a Strategic Partner in Supporting the Sahel Region's Security. RUSI Commentary. Royal United Services Institute. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/morocco-strategic-partner-supporting-sahel-regions-security>

Dideberg, R., & Melly, P. (2025, April 11). Navigating a path beyond regional division is essential for West Africa's security [Expert comment]. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/04/navigating-path-beyond-regional-division-essential-west-africas-security>

El Yaaqoubi, S. (2024, June 27). Maghreb Disunion: Morocco and Algeria's divergent strategies in shaping future regional geopolitics. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/maghreb-disunion-morocco-and-algerias-divergent-strategies-shaping-future-regional>

Enerdata. (2025, January 3). BP's GTA gas project offshore Senegal and Mauritania produces first gas. <https://www.enerdata.net/publications/daily-energy-news/bps-gta-gas-project-offshore-senegal-and-mauritania-produces-first-gas.html>

European Commission. (2025, May 8). Trade in goods with Mauritania. Eurostat Comext. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_mauritania_en.pdf

France 24. (2025, 1 mai). Désenclaver le Sahel : mégaprojet marocain pour renforcer son influence régionale via l'Atlantique. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250501-desenclaver-sahel-megaprojet-maroc-influence-r%C3%A9gionale-atlantique>

France 24. (2025, 29 juin). Morocco's Atlantic gambit: linking restive Sahel to ocean. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250629-morocco-s-atlantic-gambit-linking-restive-sahel-to-ocean>

Global Energy Monitor. (2025). Greater Tortue Ahmeyim Gas Complex (Senegal-Mauritania). https://www.gem.wiki/Greater_Tortue_Ahmeyim_Gas_Complex_%28Senegal-Mauritania%29

Greenway, R., & Ghoulidi, A. (2025, May 21). Why We Must Confront the Terror Proxy Polisario Front. *The Daily Signal*. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2025/05/21/why-must-confront-terror-proxy-polisario-front/>

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2025). Global Terrorism Index 2025. Vision of Humanity. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>

Jensen, G. (2013). War and insurgency in the Western Sahara. US Army War College Press. <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/526>

Kapetanovic, T. (2025). Applying the transplantation framework to JNIM's expansion in the Sahara–Sahel. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 7(1), 1–19. LSE Press. <https://jied.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/jied.253>

Karr, L. (2024, 29 août). North African Competition in the Sahel; Libya on the Edge; Burkina Faso is Spiraling. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/africa-file-august-29-2024-north-african-competition-sahel-libya-edge-burkina-faso>

Laadam, J. A. (2024, décembre 28). Exploring the vital strategic relations between Morocco and Mauritania. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/12/28/exploring-the-vital-strategic-relations-between-morocco-and-mauritania/>

Lacher, W., & Werenfels, I. (2025, 7 avril). Mauritania's balancing act amid intensifying Algerian-Moroccan rivalry (Megatrends Spotlight No. 49). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mauritania-balancing-act-amid-intensifying-algerian-moroccan-rivalry>

Le Monde. (2025, 20 février). Sur fond de hausse de la menace terroriste, le Maroc annonce avoir démantelé une cellule de l'État islamique. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/02/20/sur-fond-de-hausse-de-la-menace-terroriste-le-maroc-annonce-avoir-demantele-une-cellule-de-l-etat-islamique_6556146_3212.html

Lyammouri, R., & Ghoulidi, A. (2024, décembre). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative: A catalyst for Sahel-Saharan integration (Policy Brief No. 6824). Policy Center for the New South. https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-12/PB_68-24_Rida%20Lyammouri.pdf

Lydon, G. (2009). On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa. Cambridge University Press. https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/87243/frontmatter/9780521887243_frontmatter.pdf

Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP). (2024, 20 décembre). Communiqué du Cabinet Royal concernant la rencontre entre SM le Roi Mohammed VI et le président de la République islamique de Mauritanie, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani. MapNews. <https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/activites-royales/communiqu%C3%A9-du-cabinet-royal-111>

MAP / APA News. (2025, Février). Le Maroc et la Mauritanie signent un accord d'interconnexion électrique. <https://fr.apanews.net/maroc/le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-signent-un-accord-d-interconnexion-electrique/>

Mapnews (MAP). (2023, 6 novembre). SM le Roi adresse un discours à la Nation à l'occasion du 48e anniversaire de la Marche Verte [Texte intégral du discours]. Mapnews. <https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/discours-messages-sm-le-roi/sm-le-roi-adresse-un-discours-%C3%A0-la-nation-%C3%A0-l'occasion-du-48%C3%A8me>

Mapnews (MAP). (2024, octobre). New York : réunion de suivi de l'opérationnalisation de l'Initiative Royale pour favoriser l'accès des États du Sahel à l'océan Atlantique [Article]. Mapnews. <https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/actualites/politique/new-york-reunion-de-suivi-de-l-operationnalisation-de-l-initiative-royale-pour>

Marangio, R. (2025, mai). Shifting sands: Hedging strategies in Sahel-Maghreb relations [Policy Brief]. European Union Institute for Security Studies. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/shifting-sands-hedging-strategies-sahel-maghreb-relations>

Mareï, N. et Lombard, J. (2024). Tous les chemins mènent à Nouakchott. Routes, usages et territoires dans la Mauritanie contemporaine. Flux, 135-136(1), 59-88. <https://doi.org/10.3917/flux1.135.0059>.

Marine Insight. (2025, February 8). Major Ports in Mauritania. Marine Insight. <https://www.marineinsight.com/know-more/major-ports-in-mauritania/>

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la Nature et du Développement Durable (Maroc). (2025, 23 janvier). Communiqué de presse conjoint : le Maroc et la Mauritanie signent un protocole d'accord pour développer leur partenariat dans les secteurs de l'électricité et des énergies renouvelables. Ministère de l'Environnement, Maroc. <https://www.environnement.gov.ma/fr/133-a-la-une/4505-communique-de-presse-conjoint-le-maroc-et-la-mauritanie-signent-un-protocole-d-accord-pour-developper-leur-partenariat-dans-les-secteurs-de-l-electricite-et-des-energies-renouvelables>

Ministère des Affaires étrangères, de la Coopération africaine et des Marocains résidant à l'étranger. (2023, décembre). Réunion ministérielle de coordination sur l'initiative internationale de SM le Roi Mohammed VI pour favoriser l'accès des pays du Sahel à l'océan Atlantique. <https://diplomatie.ma/fr/r%C3%A9union-minist%C3%A9rielle-de-coordination-sur-l'initiative-internationale-de-sm-le-roi-pour-favoriser-l%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-des-pays-du-sahel-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99oc%C3%A9an-atlantique>

Ministère des Affaires étrangères, de la Coopération africaine et des Marocains résidant à l'étranger. (2023, décembre). Réunion ministérielle de coordination sur l'initiative internationale de SM le Roi Mohammed VI pour

favoriser l'accès des pays du Sahel à l'océan Atlantique. <https://diplomatie.ma/fr/r%C3%A9union-minist%C3%A9rielle-de-coordination-sur-l'initiative-internationale-de-sm-le-roi-pour-favoriser-l%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-des-pays-du-sahel-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99oc%C3%A9an-atlantique>

Ministère des Affaires étrangères, de la Coopération africaine et des Marocains résidant à l'étranger. (2023, décembre). Réunion ministérielle de coordination sur l'initiative internationale de SM le Roi Mohammed VI pour favoriser l'accès des pays du Sahel à l'océan Atlantique. <https://diplomatie.ma/fr/r%C3%A9union-minist%C3%A9rielle-de-coordination-sur-l'initiative-internationale-de-sm-le-roi-pour-favoriser-l%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-des-pays-du-sahel-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99oc%C3%A9an-atlantique>

Morocco World News. (2023, 2 novembre). Morocco, Mauritania committed to strengthen bilateral military cooperation. <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2023/11/27266/morocco-mauritania-committed-to-strengthen-bilateral-military-cooperation/>

Morocco World News. (2025, April 18). Morocco to help Mauritania create Nouakchott Stock Exchange. <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2025/04/191311/morocco-to-help-mauritania-create-nouakchott-stock-exchange/>

NATO Defense College Foundation. (2018, août). MAGHREB Strategic Trends: Algeria–Mauritania border opening marks a turning point in regional relations [Policy Brief]. NATO Foundation. <https://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MAGHREB-August-2018.pdf>

North Africa Post. (2022, December 19). Morocco's OCP carries on support to African farmers. <https://northafricapost.com/63654-63654.html>

Ouedraogo, R., & Mineyama, T. (2023, February 27). Fostering Export Diversification in Niger (IMF Selected Issues Paper No. 2023/010). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/Selected-Issues-Papers/2023/English/SIPEA2023010.ashx>

Points Chauds. (2025, 19 février). Mauritanie : Le porte-parole du gouvernement, Hussein Madou, affirme que personne ne dicte la position de la Mauritanie sur le Sahara [Article]. Points Chauds. <https://pointschauds.info/mauritanie-le-porte-parole-du-gouvernement-hussein-madou-personne-ne-dicte-aux-autorites-mauritaniennes-une-certaine-volonte-dans-leur-position-sur-la-question-du-sahara/>

Reuters. (2025, February 25). Maroc Telecom appoints former finance minister as chair. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/maroc-telecom-appoints-former-finance-minister-chair-2025-02-25/>

Sahrawi NGOs Condemn Polisario Attack on EsSmara, UN Mission Launches Field Investigation. (2025, 28 juin). Morocco World News. Retrieved from <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2025/06/221733/sahrawi-ngos-condemn-polisario-attack-on-es-smara-un-mission-launches-field-investigation>

Sankari, F. A. (1990). THE WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE INEVITABILITY OF A SETTLEMENT. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 7(1), 153–168. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45193250>

SANSANWAL, K., & KAMATH, R. (2020). The Unspoken Conflict In Western Sahara. *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, 24(2), 106–119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48629027>

Sharawi, A. (2025, 9 juin). Why the Polisario Front Threatens Morocco and the Region. FDD – Foundation for Defense of Democracies. https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op_ed/2025/06/09/why-the-polisario-front-threatens-morocco-and-the-region/

The Arab Weekly. (2025, 5 mai). Mauritania's strategy keeps terrorists at bay while they ravage Sahel countries. The Arab Weekly. <https://the arabweekly.com/mauritanias-strategy-keeps-terrorists-bay-while-they-ravage-sahel-countries>

The North Africa Post. (2025, 7 juillet). Algeria uses Polisario militias to unsettle Mauritania. The North Africa Post. <https://northafricapost.com/88592-algeria-uses-polisario-militias-to-unsettle-mauritania.html>

Timbuktu Institute. (2025, 16 mai). JNIM threat in the triborder area of Mali, Mauritania and Senegal [Rapport]. Timbuktu Institute. <https://timbuktu-institute.org/media/attachments/2025/05/16/rapport-jnim-threat-in-the-triborder-area-of-mali-mauritania-and-senegal.pdf>

Trading Economics. (2025). Morocco exports to Mauritania. <https://tradingeconomics.com/morocco/exports/mauritania>

United States Africa Command. (2025, May 12). U.S. and Royal Moroccan Armed Forces launch African Lion 25 in Morocco [Press release]. <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/35825/us-and-royal-moroccan-armed-forces-launch-african-lion-25-in-morocco>

World Port Development (WPD). (2011, December 1). In Focus: Port of Nouakchott in Mauritania. World Port Development. <https://dev.worldportdevelopment.com/2011/12/01/in-focus-port-of-nouakchott-in-mauritania/>

Yade, R., & Bassou, A. (2024, 24 mai). Behind Morocco's bid to unlock the Sahel. AfricaSource, Atlantic Council's Africa Center. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/behind-moroccos-bid-to-unlock-the-sahel/>

Zaanoun, A. (2024, 10 octobre). Morocco's Atlantic Initiative and Potential Challenges to Regional Leadership. Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/10/moroccos-atlantic-initiative-and-potential-challenges-to-regional-leadership?lang=en>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



RIDA LYAMMOURI

Rida Lyammouri is a senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS). He is also a senior West Africa and Lake Chad Basin researcher and advisor, with expertise in regional conflicts, violent extremism, climate change, migration, and trafficking. He specialises in analysing climate-conflict interactions in the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa, and the Sahel, studying resource scarcity, adaptive strategies, and socio-economic impacts. His multidisciplinary approach combines climate science and conflict analysis, offering insights into the region's climate-security nexus.



FADOUA AMMARI

Dr. Fadoua AMMARI, PhD in International Relations and Public International Law from Hassan II University of Casablanca, conducts her research on the issues of security and development in West Africa. She also holds a Master's degree in Diplomatic Studies from Mohammed V University in Rabat. With over 20 years of experience in university administration, she also serves as a part-time lecturer at Hassan II University Casablanca.

ABOUT THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable, and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions. [read more](#)

All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors.

Policy Center for the New South

Rabat Campus of Mohammed VI Polytechnic University,
Rocade Rabat Salé - 11103
Email : contact@policycenter.ma
Phone : +212 (0) 537 54 04 04
Fax : +212 (0) 537 71 31 54

www.policycenter.ma

