

The Priorities of Morocco's Foreign Policy with the United States, the European Union, and the African Union

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Over the last two decades, Morocco has become one of Africa's most diplomatically engaged and strategically flexible states. Inspired by King Mohammed VI's vision of "strategic autonomy," the Kingdom has positioned itself as a continental bridge with its legacy from African, Arab, Atlantic, Mediterranean cultures, and managed its relations with regional and world powers in a masterly manner. Today its foreign relations pivot around three main axes: a longstanding and intimate alliance with the United States, a difficult though indispensable relationship with the European Union, and an Africa-focused diplomacy that was revitalized with Morocco's reintegration into the African Union in 2017. Each of these partnerships fulfills a distinct strategic role, but together they define Morocco's priorities abroad: preserving its territorial integrity, attracting investment and technology and taking the lead in Africa.

Political trust and security cooperation are the twin pillars on which Moroccan American ties rest. It was the US which first recognized Morocco's independence in 1977, and that historical continuity is a foundation for their practical alliance today. In recent years, their relationship has further developed on three main fronts:

First, no question beats the Western Sahara for the diplomatic priority of Morocco. It cannot be ruled out that ever since the Trump administration recognized Morocco sovereign over that area in 2020, Rabat has been working to make its position legitimate and accepted

internationally. Although the Biden administration has not reversed this initiative, a number of European countries and African states now describe Morocco 's plan for autonomy as 'serious, credible and realistic (AA News, 2024).

Second, the core of the relationship is security cooperation. Morocco takes part in annual joint exercises ``African Lion" and works on counter-terrorism with the US, through intelligence sharing and maritime law enforcement. It is also a major purchaser of US defense technology as part more broadly to reequip the Royal Armed Forces (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Third, economic and technological cooperation are increasingly important. The 2022 Investment Charter and continuous developments in renewable energy, logistics and infrastructure are forming a context that Morocco wants to position. Atlantic American companies have shown interest in green hydrogen, automotive supply chains, and the aerospace sector, all fields where Morocco is looking to shift. This is different from simply being a low-cost center of manufacture high into the value chain.

If the U.S. partnership brings security and strategic recognition, the European Union is Morocco's economic lifeline. The EU commands almost 60% of all trade with Morocco, and millions of Moroccans live or work in Europe. Yet there are also difficulties in the relationship. In their partnership, trade and investment are key. The EU is Morocco's largest trading partner: other than oil or goods closely linked to it such as chemicals and rubber, no country exports more to Morocco than does Europe, while European investment affects virtually every sector from agriculture through tourism. A window of opportunity for Rabat, this green partnership offers both finance and international legitimacy; positioning itself as a regional climate leader is now an easy task. But legal and political disputes over Western Sahara continue to thwart Sino-European rapprochement. The EU Court of Justice has repeatedly questioned the inclusion of Western Sahara in trade and fisheries agreements, leading to diplomatic friction. Morocco for its part has reacted with a harder line, insisting that its "sovereignty cannot be traded" and tying wider cooperation to European acceptance of its plan for autonomy. Despite these disputes, migration, counter-terrorism, and regional stability keep the gears of practical cooperation turning. The EU leans heavily on Morocco to prevent illegal migration across the Mediterranean; if Rabat does not try hard enough, it will become a problem for Europe. Morocco, for its part, uses this leverage to obtain aid,

investment, and political support. So this relationship alternates between strategic partnership and transactional bargaining -well and with a mixture of skill that is highly adaptive.

Morocco's reintegration into the African Union in 2017 turned a new page in Moroccan regional diplomacy. After remaining absent for decades, due principally to differences of opinion over Western Sahara conflict, Rabat has been systematically re-establishing its African partnerships. Moroccan foreign policy is thus guided by a discourse which might be summed up as "African solutions for African problems." In practice, this means a number of priorities. The Kingdom is firstly investing heavily in infrastructure and connectivity - from the Dakhla Atlantic Port to new road and air corridors connecting West and Central Africa. These projects mesh with the Royal Atlantic Initiative which sees Morocco as a logistical and economic bridge between the Atlantic coast and Sahel (Maroc.ma, 2024). Secondly, Morocco champions the model of South-South cooperation which stresses development on the part of both partners rather than ideological alignment. Moroccan banks, telecommunications companies, and energy enterprises have spread across West Africa with diplomatic missions and development financing in tow. Thirdly, Morocco is looking to become a leader in peace and security debates within the AU. It supports a pragmatic, non-interventionist approach focusing on governance, development and institution-building particularly in the fragile states of the Sahel. This stance often contrasts with that of Algeria indicating a discreet diplomatic rivalry beneath the surface of the Union. Through these initiatives, Morocco aims not only to strengthen its ties with the continent but also to confirm its African identity-a major diplomatic counterweight to Western pressures and a means to validate its intertwined territorial claims from within Africa.

Morocco's foreign policy today is defined by multi-alignment rather than exclusive alliances. Its relations with the U.S., EU, and AU illustrate a deliberate balancing act securing Western partnerships while asserting an independent African voice. At the core of this strategy lies a consistent triad of objectives: Territorial integrity, centered on the Western Sahara; Economic modernization and investment attraction, through green and industrial transformation; Regional leadership, rooted in African solidarity and security engagement. For policymakers and analysts, Morocco's approach offers a model of adaptive diplomacy — one that blends pragmatism with ambition, regionalism with global outreach. Yet it also raises questions about sustainability: Can Rabat maintain this delicate balance amid global economic volatility, shifting alliances, and domestic expectations. The answer will depend on how effectively Morocco translates diplomatic capital into tangible development gains at

home — and whether its partners, in Washington, Brussels, and Addis Ababa, continue to see the Kingdom not just as a reliable ally, but as a strategic actor in its own right.

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