

POLICY
BRIEF

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Morocco Through Donald Trump's First 100 Days in the White House: Navigating the Trump Administration's Second Term**GEOPOLITICAL MONITOR**

For some, Donald Trump is a hero come to save the world; for others, he's the one who will bring about its downfall. Whatever one thinks of him, if there's one certainty with Donald Trump, it's that he leaves no one indifferent. If there's one lesson to be learned from Donald Trump, it's that he always surprises: they tried to assassinate him, and he emerged stronger, chanting "Fight, Fight, Fight" to the cries of his supporters. They had promised him certain imprisonment, and yet, he achieved what no one had ever achieved before, becoming President of the United States of America again after failing to secure re-election. Naturally, every moment of the first 100 days of his term has been scrutinized by the entire world, between those who expected so much change from him, and those who held their breath about the direction his presidency would take. To say the least, these first 100 days have been extremely intense, marked by a long series of presidential decrees on a wide range of subjects. The doctrine that structures his administration now: America First, and this on all issues.

Trump has clearly indicated that the United States will no longer systematically take the lead in resolving international crises. The dismantling of USAID reflects a gradual disengagement of his country from several global issues. For Morocco, this second term of President Trump could have major consequences, good or bad. It is therefore relevant to examine, through a Moroccan lens, the first 100 days since Trump's return to the White House, and those actions that directly or indirectly affect the Kingdom.

Thus, the appointment of Marco Rubio as Secretary of State was met with optimism. Rubio, presented as a friend of the Kingdom, even cited Morocco as an example of successful partnership. Under Trump's first term, the Sahara issue saw a major breakthrough. In 2020, the United States became the first country to officially recognize, in writing, Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. This recognition allowed Morocco to consolidate its position with other partners, such as Spain, France, or Germany, by demanding firmer commitments from them. However, nothing guarantees that a second Trump term will follow the same trajectory. Key figures in the rapprochement between Rabat and Washington, such as Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and the architect of the Abraham Accords, are no longer as involved in the administration. Trump's unpredictability, coupled with his America First doctrine, necessitates strategic caution: he is capable of questioning everything if a situation does not offer him tangible advantages.



Signals to Decode

The decisions made by President Donald Trump in matters of foreign policy all converge toward a new American approach to its international presence. Among other things, with the dismantling of USAID, the United States seek to reduce its diplomatic footprint worldwide, particularly within the UN institutions. Peacekeeping missions are costly operations that, for the Trump administration, are not a priority to maintain indefinitely. The American president set the tone early in his re-election regarding his desire to put an end to prolonged conflicts. There may also be a deeper wish to leave a legacy as a “peacemaker,” a title he had already claimed upon signing the Abraham Accords, the landmark achievement of his first term. It would therefore be wise to expect a shift in the American position regarding MINURSO, the UN peacekeeping mission in the Sahara, and the UN’s special envoy, Staffan de Mistura, since the U.S. State Department favours conflict-resolution negotiations outside the UN system. It is worth asking whether Donald Trump presents an opportunity to accelerate the resolution of this conflict. The staffing of important positions provides early signals of the administration’s leaning. The appointment of Duke Buchan III as US Ambassador to Morocco is particularly noteworthy. Buchan, a longtime Trump loyalist who played a pivotal role in the last presidential campaign, and who’s past brings a glimpse on what to expect from his appointment. His previous tenure as US Ambassador to Spain (2017–2021) makes him knowledgeable of the region, particularly in matters of security and trade. His strategic foresight in strengthening ties with Madrid, a key player in the Sahara issue, suggests he may leverage this experience to advance US-Morocco relations, especially in consolidating the 2020 recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. Morocco, a major non-NATO ally, and Spain, a NATO member, share a “Joint Military Commission”, leveraging their partnership to align with broader security frameworks, including U.S. Africa Command.

Moreover, the recent visit of Morocco’s Foreign Minister, Nasser Bourita, to Washington offers tangible signals of progress. High-level meetings with Rubio, reportedly focused on advancing the Sahara issue, with US officials reiterating support for Morocco’s autonomy plan. Notably, Morocco’s behind the scenes discussions might lay the groundwork for a potential high-profile announcement, similar to the 2020 recognition, to further isolate the Polisario Front. The involvement of Buchan, with his Spain expertise, could also signal a push for broader European backing, building on France’s 2024 endorsement of Morocco’s plan.



Does Morocco have a Role to Play?

Morocco is the only country in the region still capable of engaging in dialogue with all regional actors in Sahelian conflicts. Given the instability of ECOWAS and its tensions with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), one could argue that if discussions for resolving conflicts in the region are feasible, they should naturally involve the Kingdom. Moreover, Morocco, which already cooperates militarily with the United States through the “African Lion” military exercise and beyond, is a serious partner for the Americans. Through their “multi-partnership” policy, Morocco constantly seeks reliable allies aligned with their security vision in targeted regions, especially after the withdrawal of US troops from Niger in 2024. Although the United States appears to be disengaging from its presence in Africa, particularly in terms of financial support, it continues to closely monitor the development of conflicts on the continent. Morocco’s soft diplomacy strategy, which balances relations with the U.S., the EU, and Gulf states, enables it to mobilize diverse resources for regional stabilization. A Moroccan-led mediation effort in the Sahel could allow the U.S. to claim a “victory” in reducing conflicts without direct intervention, aligning with Trump’s rejection of “endless wars.”

Morocco, which has already proven its effective discreet diplomacy by facilitating backchannel talks on the Libyan conflict between warring factions, enjoys credibility among AES nations despite their anti-Western rhetoric. This positions the Kingdom to help de-escalate tensions in the region and position itself as a strategic partner, already renowned for its expertise on countering terrorism.



Points of Vigilance

The man often described as a “dealmaker” truly operates through transactional logic, and the trade war he provoked is clear proof of this. The announcement by US President Donald Trump of the imposition of global tariffs sent shockwaves through financial markets. In the name of reciprocity, all imports were subjected to a minimum tariff of 10%. This decision represents one of the most drastic shifts in US trade policy in modern history, reversing decades of globalization and free-trade principles. For its part, Morocco, which has had a free-trade agreement with Washington since 2006, has also been hit with a 10% tariff. Although this rate is significantly lower than those imposed on several other countries, this abrupt decision by the American president calls for vigilance.

Moreover, Morocco’s booming automotive industry, which exports vehicle parts and assembled cars to Europe and beyond, could face setbacks if global supply chains are disrupted by a broader trade war. Morocco, which aims to become a regional hub for electric vehicle battery production thanks to Chinese investments like Gotion’s in Kenitra, must closely monitor potential US sanctions targeting partnerships with Beijing. While the 10% tariff keeps Morocco relatively competitive compared to the European Union (taxed at 20%) or Tunisia (28%), it introduces uncertainty that could deter foreign investment decisions. Investors, already wary of global trade tensions, may hesitate to commit to a country where access to the US market, though secondary to the EU, has now become more costly. Furthermore, Morocco’s growing partnerships with Chinese investors, particularly in battery production, risk drawing scrutiny from the Trump administration, which could impose additional restrictions if it perceives these projects as an extension of Beijing’s economic influence.

OPPORTUNITIES & RISKS



Opportunities



Consolidation of Gains on the Sahara Issue

Donald Trump’s first term marked a decisive turning point for Morocco with the official recognition, in December 2020, of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara, a decision that strengthened Rabat’s position on the international stage. This breakthrough prompted key partners, such as France with its July 2024 letter endorsing Morocco’s autonomy plan, to clarify their support. Under Trump’s second term, Morocco could capitalize on this momentum to secure even broader backing, particularly from other UN Security Council members. The appointment of Marco Rubio, a known supporter of the Kingdom, as Secretary of State strengthens prospects for advancing these gains. During Foreign Minister Bourita’s visit, Rubio reaffirmed U.S. support for Morocco’s autonomy plan as the sole basis for a just and lasting solution. This aligns with the United States’ current role as the penholder for the Western Sahara conflict at the UN Security Council.



Potential Strengthening of Military Cooperation

Military cooperation between Morocco and the US, exemplified by the annual “African Lion” exercises and arms sales approved since 2019, could intensify under Trump. In March 2025, Morocco finalized its acquisition of Stinger surface-to-air missiles from the US Army, a contract that bolsters its air defense capabilities against regional threats, particularly in an unstable Sahel. This sale, worth tens of millions of dollars, is part of a series of US equipment purchases, including F-16 fighters, Reaper drones, and Apache helicopters, that cement Morocco’s role as a key strategic partner in the region. With Trump, known for favoring arms sales as a diplomatic tool, Rabat could gain expanded access to cutting-edge technology, reinforcing its position as a security hub in North Africa.

Thus , Morocco appears to hold a privileged status, now recognized as a key strategic partner of the

United States, with exclusive access to the best in military equipment and combat helicopters. This aligns with the ongoing reinforcement and modernization of the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) and Morocco's increasing efforts to expand its strategic military capabilities in the South.

Moreover, the U. withdrawal from Niger in September 2024 presents an opportunity for Morocco to position itself as a privileged relay for American counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel. Thanks to its balanced relations with regional actors, including members of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Morocco could play a mediating role, enhancing its standing with Washington, and play a keyrole for stability in the region.

Economic Opportunities to Seize

Despite challenges posed by Trump's tariffs, Morocco can leverage its competitive edge. The 10% tariff, significantly lower than the 20% imposed on the EU or 28% on Tunisia, offers a relative advantage in sectors like textiles and agribusiness, which accounted for 25% and 30% of Moroccan exports to the US in 2023, respectively. This differential could attract relocations of European firms seeking to bypass higher taxes, particularly in free zones like Tanger Med, where exports grew by 12% in 2024. Morocco's trade resilience, demonstrated by its diversification toward the EU (64% of exports), Africa, and Asia (notably through agreements with South Korea and Turkey), helps cushion the impact of US measures. Additionally, Morocco could appeal to investors in the electric vehicle battery industry by prioritizing non-Chinese partnerships, such as with European firms, to avoid Trump's punitive measures while capitalizing on soaring global demand for batteries.



Risks:

Volatility of US Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's unpredictability, favouring a transactional approach over long-term commitments, poses a major risk for Morocco. While the 2020 recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara was a diplomatic success, the reduced involvement of key players from his first term, such as Jared Kushner, architect of the Abraham Accords, does not necessarily signal a retreat in privileged Rabat-Washington relations. Yet this volatility demands agile diplomacy from Morocco to anticipate potential reversals; the Kingdom will need to navigate cautiously with Trump in the White House to avoid unexpected setbacks.

Impact on Strategic Chinese Investments

Trump's trade war against China, marked by tariffs of up to 145% on Chinese goods, threatens Chinese investments in Morocco, particularly in the strategic electric vehicle (EV) battery sector. Gotion's \$1.3 billion gigafactory project in Kenitra, aimed at establishing Morocco as a regional battery hub, could face US sanctions if Washington perceives these investments as an extension of Chinese influence. In 2024, Chinese investments accounted for 15% of Morocco's industrial FDI, a growing share vulnerable to geopolitical pressures. These tensions may force Morocco to curb cooperation with Beijing, potentially stifling its industrial ambitions. Moreover, reliance on Chinese supply chains for EV raw materials exposes Morocco to disruptions if Sino-American tensions escalate.

A Delicate Geopolitical Balance

Morocco, whose foreign policy hinges on a careful equilibrium between Western (US, EU), Asian (China, South Korea), and African partners, risks coming under pressure amid intensifying great-power rivalry. The US may demand clearer alignment from Rabat, especially in technological and security cooperation, at the expense of ties with China. The situation is further complicated by the EU, Morocco's top trade partner, potentially retaliating against Trump's tariffs, indirectly harming Moroccan exports. Additionally, a global recession, feared by economists due to supply-chain upheaval, could slash European demand for Moroccan goods, worsening the Kingdom's trade deficit, which hit 28 billion euros in 2024. Morocco must tread carefully to preserve strategic neutrality while maximizing gains in a fractured international landscape.

The re-election of Donald Trump marks a decisive turning point in international relations, reshaping the contours of a world order dominated by transactional logic and the “America First” principle. For Morocco, this second term represents both an opportunity to consolidate the gains of the first term, particularly the US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara in 2020, and a challenge in the face of an administration guided by unpredictable national priorities. Trump’s first 100 days, characterized by a sweeping trade war, disengagement from multilateral institutions, and a selective approach to international partnerships, require the Kingdom to adopt a posture that is both proactive and vigilant. In this uncertain context, Morocco must capitalize on its diplomatic, economic, and strategic assets while anticipating the risks of an accelerated global geopolitical reconfiguration.

Looking ahead, Morocco must strengthen its resilience in the face of uncertainties in a world marked by great-power rivalry and the fragmentation of traditional alliances. Trump’s “America First” doctrine, combined with his disinterest in multilateral frameworks, could limit Morocco’s ability to rely on institutions like the UN to defend its interests. In this context, Moroccan diplomacy, recognized for its finesse and ability to maintain a balanced stance among major powers, will need to seize emerging opportunities. A key priority should be exploiting the Trump administration’s favorable stance on the Sahara issue to push for a definitive resolution. Morocco has a rare opportunity to leverage U.S. presidential support to deliver a decisive breakthrough. The most pressing opportunity for Morocco lies in the escalating push within U.S. political and policy circles to designate the Polisario Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Key figures, such as Congressman Joe Wilson, and influential think tanks like the Hudson Institute, argue that the Polisario’s destabilizing actions, including military cooperation with Iran’s IRGC, justify this move. Evidence suggests the Polisario receives Iranian drones, smuggles arms to Sahelian jihadists, and directly endangers U.S. forces and regional security. Given the Trump administration’s aggressive posture toward Iran, an FTO designation is a realistic and strategically viable outcome. On the other hand, Morocco’s strategic military and diplomatic efforts in the south, in its relationship with the United States, extend beyond the Sahara issue. The country aims to position itself on the long-term, as a stabilizing force and a key partner in counterterrorism and conflict resolution across the continent.

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