
Bridgehead to Western Sahara

China signed 15 Agreements with Morocco

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In May 2016, the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, visited China and signed 15 agreements with President Xi Jinping; covering various aspects of strategic partnership.

These agreements are expected to open Morocco to Chinese businesses in key industries such as aeronautics, automotive and textiles. Chinese investment from state banks, private groups and other enterprises, will be introduced to the Moroccan market. *E.g.*, China's HAITE Group and the government of Morocco are to set up an industrial and residential park in Morocco. Also, Morocco's Office for Electricity and Drinking Water and China's SEPCO III Electric Power Construction are to work on the extension and maintenance of the Jerada power plant.

Such a set of agreements seeks to combine Chinese and Moroccan experts thereby benefitting the entire African society. The ninth agreement, *e.g.*, has especially been placed to back up African enterprises by completing the loan offer through a contribution in capitals and efficient governance. Both countries strive on developing a platform for a China-Africa cross-border e-Trade. By using Morocco as a distribution hub, Chinese products will be available to Africa.

King Mohammed VI's visit is in line with a new orientation of recent Moroccan diplomacy, which is attempting to diversify its economic and political partnerships with various influential countries, including Russia, India, and China. It is believed that this visit will help Morocco strengthen its leading role in the South-South cooperation and lay the groundwork for a real win-win economic partnership with China. Moreover, it is likely to enable Morocco to achieve political gains with regard to Beijing's position on the Western Sahara; a source of tension between Morocco and the UN. Unlike the US and the UK, China is one of the

few influential countries that does not advocate the narrow principle of self-determination as necessarily leading to independence, therefore holding a position of positive neutrality on the Western Sahara dispute.

However, in international relations, what determines the positions of States is not only their political doctrine, but more importantly, their economic interests. Trade value between Morocco and China is lesser than that between China and countries hostile to Morocco, particularly South Africa, Nigeria, and Angola. Nonetheless, the strategic alliance between Morocco and the Gulf Cooperation Council, a fundamental source of energy for China, improves Chinese support for Morocco in the long term.

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