



Moroccan–British Relations:

An Overview

Historical Contacts

Britain and Morocco have had a long history of relations. The first diplomatic contacts between Britain and Morocco were established in the Thirteenth Century with the first ambassadors being exchanged during the mid-Seventeenth Century.

Morocco's second ambassador to London, Qaid Mohammed Ben Haddu Ottur made a particular impression and was invited to Oxford University and to become a Fellow of the Royal Society during his stay in the 1680s. Commercial exchanges between the two kingdoms grew at an even faster rate. The first trade mission in Morocco was established in the 1550s, and thereafter trade expanded rapidly with English traders being granted a special status by the Moroccan authorities.

Although there were tensions in the relationship – notably British control of Tangier between 1661 and 1684 and attacks by Moroccan corsairs on British ships - by the Eighteenth Century political and economic ties became interlinked and the two countries signed two treaties of 'Peace and Commerce' in 1721 and again in 1760. By the following century, Britain had become Morocco's most important commercial and political partner. The fact that Morocco was able to avoid being colonised throughout the Nineteenth Century, when most of the African continent was falling under European control, owed much to Britain's commitment to maintaining the Kingdom's independence, which it saw as the best means of protecting British interests in neighbouring Gibraltar.

Relations in the Modern Era

Britain and Morocco have continued to enjoy good relations in the modern era and since Morocco gained independence from France and Spain in 1956. Royal visits occurred in the 1980s with Queen Elizabeth visiting Morocco in 1980 and King Hassan II visiting London in 1987.

Visits by British government ministers have become more frequent, reflecting the increased importance Britain attaches to Morocco. On a visit to Morocco in 1999, Foreign Office Minister Peter Hain announced a new Partnership between Morocco and Britain for the new Millennium. The British Parliament now has a British-Moroccan Group comprising twenty members of both houses. Economic and commercial ties have also strengthened and increased, particularly over recent years. Aided by the

British Chamber of Commerce (established in Morocco in 1923), bilateral trade tripled during the 1990s, making Britain Morocco's third largest trade partner. In 2002, Britain exported £351 million worth of goods to Morocco and the UK is now the second largest investor in Morocco, mainly through portfolio investment.

Educational and cultural as well as diplomatic and economic ties have also grown. The first British Council office was established in Morocco in 1960 and now has centres in Rabat and Casablanca offering courses in English, information on educational opportunities in the UK, as well as organising cultural events. Every year Chevening Scholarships are granted to Moroccan university graduates to study for higher degrees at universities in the UK.

Many Britons experience Morocco first hand through visiting the country as tourists. An estimated 130,000 Britons visited Morocco in 2003 with a further 90,000 in the first six months of 2004 indicating the increasing popularity of Morocco as a holiday destination. In response to this growing demand, flights between the two countries are set to expand. Royal Air Maroc and British Airways currently both operate daily flights between London and Casablanca. British Airways will start flights to other cities from November and plans have been recently approved for the first British charter route to begin flights to Morocco. In Britain, the Moroccan community continues to grow in size and influence.

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