State Strikes Back:

The Spanish Moroccan Border Crisis from the Lens of the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies

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Abstract: This article aims to improve our understanding of Morocco's instrumentalization of migration and border management to pressure Spain. The literature on critical security studies and North-South relations is analyzed. This paper's contribution, thanks to the theoretical approach of the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies and the case study of the Spain-Morocco border crisis, is twofold. First, it decenters the study of security and international relations from the dominant concerns with Western interests and policy priorities. Second, it documents a paradigm shift in the study of North-South relations, highlighting the agency of the Global South. This agency, evident in the case of Morocco, indicates that smaller state actors have the capacity to gain leverage over bigger ones and are not mere recipients of the policies of the Global North. Proof of this is Morocco's successful

instrumentalization of the border crisis to obtain Spain's explicit recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Keywords: Borders; State instrumentalization; Beirut School of Critical Security Studies; North-South Relations; Morocco; Spain.

1. Introduction

The recent border crisis between Morocco and Spain gives an insight onto the interplay of border and migration policies in the case of two countries with very unequal socio-economic and legal contexts. In this study, we ask to what extent, with what techniques, and with what consequences Morocco has instrumentalized migration and the management of the borders to pressure its neighbor. In what way is it changing the traditional North-South relations?

Our hypothesis is that Morocco seemed to have effectively instrumentalized migration and the management of the border with a variety of techniques. Morocco's leveraging against Spain exemplifies a different approach to North-South relations, because the smaller state actor has capacity to influence and get concessions from the bigger state actor. This paper builds off the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies (BSCSS) in addressing questions that decenter the security paradigm by showing that in North-South relations, the Southern partner can also be a security actor. The paper looks at literature concerned with critical security studies and North-South relations and inequalities.

We analyze the Morocco-Spain border crisis through the BSCSS. We also look at a series of events in the case study that help us see the power dynamics in North-South relations.

Our case study contributes to the BSCSS because Morocco, a country embedded in the security architecture of the Middle East, provides one of the most developed examples of instrumentalizing borders and the consequent re-balancing of North-South power relations.

2. The Beirut School of Critical Security Studies (BSCSS)

Over the past few decades, mainstream approaches to security have faced significant challenges from critical security studies (CASE 2006). In 2018, the BSCSS emerged as a response to the limitations and biases of traditional Western perspectives. For example, the BSCSS does not reject a neorealist framework entirely; rather, it critiques whose security is prioritized and challenges the epistemic dominance of great-power–centric realism (Hazbun 2017; Pourmokhtari 2025). Its goal was to integrate the voices, experiences, and knowledge of the Middle East, offering an alternative framework and a profound critique of international relations and security studies.

The BSCSS's contribution to critical security studies lies in its postcolonial grounding and its expressed desire to produce situated knowledge. By emphasizing localized understandings, it provides greater analytical rigor and overcomes the Eurocentrism that prevails in security studies. This approach allows international relations and security to be framed within North-South power dynamics, enabling the study of political actors and processes in non-Western contexts and political systems beyond liberal democracies. Bilgin (2011) and Vuori (2008) have critiqued the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory for its inability to address security in non-democratic and non-Western contexts. From the BSCSS perspective, this is due to the theory's reliance on the distinction between ordinary and exceptional politics, a dichotomy that applies only to democratic systems (Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1995). Without the rule of law in non-democratic regimes, this distinction breaks down, as there is no clear boundary between ordinary politics (which respect the rules) and exceptional politics (which transcend them). Thus, the ordinary and exceptional spheres of politics are interconnected, and political dynamics are shaped by global power relations, particularly North-South inequality. The BSCSS challenges the notion of Southern states as passive subjects, mere recipients, or laboratories of Northern policies. It emphasizes the agency of Global South states.

One key aspect of the BSCSS is its focus on individual and group experiences in security, which shifts attention from state-centrism to societal security. This does not entail abandoning the study of the state as a relevant actor in international relations. On the contrary, BSCSS's analysis of the role and agency of the state in the Global South is essential for understanding our object of study. In this regard, it is important to highlight Omar Dahi's (Abboud et al. 2018, 284) observation: "Large and powerful Southern states are increasingly developing their own security frameworks and pursuing an assertive foreign policy accordingly." Dahi notes the recovery of agency in the Global South, both through critiques of the global political economy and through Southern states' ability to shape governance models in both the South and the North. For example, human security policy, with the leadership of Brazil and Egypt, illustrates this shift. In our case, Morocco's contributions to global migration governance serve as another example.

A valuable technique within the BSCSS is the decentering of the security paradigm from dominant actors, particularly Western ones, as seen in the MENA, where the fight against terrorism remains a priority in security policies. Alice Martini effectively employs the BSCSS's decentering technique in her analysis of the Syrian conflict following the 2011 popular uprisings. Martini (2020) shows how the language of the War on Terror (WOT), typically used by Western actors to describe non-state actors' violence, was repurposed by non-Western actors. Specifically, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were more comfortable labeling Syrian state violence as terrorism than their Western counterparts, thus undermining President Asad's legitimacy in the conflict. Martini's study highlights how non-Western actors led the redefining of terrorism, thus challenging and shifting traditional security paradigms.

Another significant contribution of the BSCSS is its emphasis on the intricate link between the security paradigm and the production of violence (Abboud et al. 2018). For instance, Gabriel Garroum Pla uses the BSCSS framework to analyze the impact of Asad's

reconstruction policies, which, in his view, amount to urbicide—not merely a byproduct of those policies but a deliberate tool of the regime (Garroum Pla 2025).

Martini and Garroum Pla make significant contributions to the BSCSS's decentering of the security paradigm in showing that the securitization locus is expansive and that language and narrative provide pertinent methodologies to assess the agency of various security actors, beyond great powers. Similarly, our case study highlights North-South differences and the particularities of security interests in the Global South to still assert sovereignty and territoriality, over liberal cooperation.

3. The Context of the Border between Spain-EU and Morocco: A History of Confrontation and Cooperation

The border disputes between Morocco and Spain are not new and not only related to migration flows, but to sovereignty. Both maritime and land borders between the two countries have experienced conflict dynamics for decades. The most controversial issue is the sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla. These territories are under Spanish sovereignty but they are claimed by Morocco. There are also disputes regarding the territorial waters of the Canary Islands.

Morocco and Spain share territorial borders since the incorporation of Melilla and Ceuta into Spain in 1497 and 1640, respectively. In Ceuta, the border is eight kilometers long. Two fences separate both countries. On the Moroccan side, the fence is two meters high, and on the Spanish side, it is ten meters high.

figure 1

In Melilla, the border is twelve kilometers long. Two fences separate both countries: one on the Moroccan side and another on the Spanish side, each measuring six meters high.

figure 2

Regarding the maritime border, the distance between both countries at the Strait of Gibraltar is only 8 miles. Since 1990, Ceuta, Melilla, the Canary Islands, and the Strait of Gibraltar have been key points for migration flows. The volume and geography of migration flows changes over time due to border surveillance and historical factors.

The recent history of migration from Morocco to Europe has different phases. The first one in the 1960s and the 1970s, when migration flows grew significatively. During the 1960s, Morocco went through a deep economic crisis with high unemployment, inflation and external debt. At that time, Europe had a massive need for workforce. The combination of both factors explained the growth of Moroccan migration flows to Europe. Initially, Moroccan citizens headed to France looking for job opportunities and later to Belgium and the Netherlands. This massive export of workforce was channeled through bilateral agreements between Morocco and European countries (Pennell 2003). Thus, the Moroccan diaspora in Europe was formed.

Migration flows from Morocco to Spain took a turn in the 1990s. The political and economic context changed because European countries didn't need massive foreign labor and began to restrict migration. The Schengen Agreement had a profound impact on migration flows and the situation of the Spanish-Moroccan border. Before the Schengen Agreement circular migration was common and visa-free. But after the Schengen Agreement, migrants didn't know whether, upon returning to Morocco, they would be able to work in Europe again, due to the visa regime. Therefore, many work seekers decided to overstay in Europe and thus irregular migration began.

The volume of migration flows from Morocco to Spain has fluctuated annually since records began. Between 2001 and 2011, the annual average of irregular migrants' arrivals to Spain by sea was 15339. The peak during this period was recorded in 2006, with 39000 arrivals (Ministerio del Interior 2025). In the period 2012-2024, the annual average was 27444

arrivals. This represents significant growth (almost double), with notable peaks in 2018 (57498 arrivals) and 2024 (61323 arrivals). The data is not disaggregated by origin, but the majority came from Morocco (being Moroccans or other nationalities).

The migration framework in Europe became a security framework, with migration policies aimed at stopping migration in origin countries and deporting irregular migrants to their countries (Huysmans 2006). To fulfill these goals, European governments focused on cooperation on migration with countries of origin and transit. This is the so-called externalization of migration control, in reference to the process by which the states transfer their migration policies (specially border control) beyond their own territorial limits (Boswell 2003; Lavenex 2006). One of the consequences is the deterritorialization of borders, as they are transferred to extraterritorial spaces through the delegation or externalization of migration control to third countries (Naranjo Giraldo 2014).

Morocco is probably the most important example of the EU externalization policies. The external dimension of the EU Migration Policy is managed as a transaction, which is based on financial support for Morocco as a reward for border control (Delkáder-Palacios 2024). However, Morocco refuses to be a mere recipient of European migration and security policies, in particular, taking up the role of *police officer* for Europe. Actually, Morocco seeks a balance between two profiles: a *good student* with Europe and a regional hegemon in Africa. The agency of Morocco as a Global South State is noteworthy, specifically in the field of migration with significant diplomatic moves, such as hosting the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018, being designated the "African Champion of Migration" by the African Union and hosting the headquarters of the African Migration observatory (Delkáder-Palacios 2023).

Lastly, in Stéphane Rosière's "World Map of Closed Borders," Morocco is the only territory that has all types of problematic borders, including front lines and closed straits.

figure 3

Although the border situation of Morocco is unique, it has some similarity with the US-Mexico border, given that the two Southern countries are passage points for wider flows of migrants from Africa or Central and South America. Yet, the language of hostility in the case of the US-Mexico border has been particularly stronger from the US side (Alden and Trautman 2025, 38), which stands in contrast with the Spain-Morocco border as we see next.

4. Morocco: State Instrumentalization and Leverage from the Global South

Border policies serve as a distinctive instrument for advancing security objectives. First, since borders are shared, there exists an inherent interdependence among multiple stakeholders. Second, in our case, the European Union and its member states have externalized their border control—delegating strict enforcement to a third country. This move has sparked widespread public debate over migration across Europe and rendered border management highly controversial. Consequently, Europe's image has suffered, giving Morocco an opportunity to leverage the controversy to its advantage.

To understand Morocco's instrumentalization of the border crisis against Spain, it is important to remember the country's two key interests: gaining legitimacy regarding its territorial claim over Western Sahara; and signaling that it is a strong regional actor, like with the controversial tactical move to normalize relations with Israel. To analyze this instrumentalization, the focus here is on three questions: how did the Moroccan state render the border crisis an insecurity? How did it act upon it? And what does this tell us about North-South power dynamics?

4.1. Framing Insecurity: The Economy and Dignity

The Spanish enclaves in Morocco are a logistical challenge to their inhabitants, since they are separated from the mainland. As such, the two enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have tax advantages as an incentive for the inhabitants and visitors[i]. Moroccans in the vicinity of the enclaves, and even beyond, have for decades become avid consumers of smuggled goods from the enclaves, perceived of higher quality than Moroccan goods and selling for cheaper. As such the Spanish enclaves have become a competitive threat to Moroccan goods. In addition, the smuggling of the goods also created an opportunity for smuggling networks, notoriously relying on "mule" women (figure 4), who carry large bags on their back, walk across the border daily, and get paid meager wages for strenuous work.

figure 4

The two elements of economic threat and dehumanizing of poor Moroccan women were the tenets for the framing of the enclaves as sources of insecurity for Morocco. As a Moroccan who, for decades, crossed the Ceuta border, the Moroccan state's framing of such insecurity has been detached from reality, as often, the wait and the complications of the crossing came from the Moroccan side, not the Spanish one. The following section zooms in on a series of events around the time of the border crisis to highlight key actions in the Moroccan state instrumentalization of the border crisis with Spain.

4.2. The Phasing of the Border Crisis

The sophistication of borders can be traced back to the mid-1990s, with the advent of the Schengen space, biometric passports, and other smart border measures. This sophistication of borders aimed to better monitor mobility without disrupting trade and travel (Alden and Trautman 2025). This new era has been particularly marking in increasing the control of the borders between Spain and Morocco, since Spain joined the European Communities, the preceding organization to the European Union, in 1986. The aftermath of 9/11 was another marking episode in terms of enhancing border control, and particularly the screening of

people coming from the MENA. Covid-19 was another marking episode of swift state abilities to quickly seal their borders and freeze entire ecosystems of the borderlands (El Bernoussi et al. 2025). From my own experience as a Moroccan national crossing the border to Spain and applying for visa, I witnessed visa validity dwindle from several years to a few days, when it is given.

The border crisis between Morocco and Spain reached its apex with the pandemic, but there were also important surrounding events. For this paper, we focus on three stages: 2018, 2020, and 2021.

On August 1, 2018, Moroccan authorities took the unilateral decision to close the crossing point to Melilla in a voluntary move to debilitate the economy of the enclave (El Faraa 2021). The permanent action was preceded by a test the day before, to the complete surprise of Spanish authorities.

figure 5

Truck drivers were stuck because of the ordeal for weeks[ii]. The Moroccan customs office provided a flyer in Arabic and French only to announce that customs crossing will only be permitted on maritime ports, i.e. no land crossing, and from the Moroccan ports of Nador and Beni Ensar, to help with the development of the region[iii]. Many speculated that it was a method of economic asphyxiation of the enclave, which highly depended on Moroccan trade, and by that token putting political pressure on Spain, and particularly the new government of Pedro Sánchez, to help with the surge of irregular migration[iv].

On March 13, 2020, Morocco closed the air and maritime borders with Spain, and the land border with Ceuta. Therefore, all land, sea, and air connections between the two countries were suspended. Officially, the stated goal was to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Unofficially, the 2018 border crisis was only intensifying. The closure of maritime borders in 2020 implied the cancellation of all the ships coming from Spanish ports bound for Morocco (particularly affecting those of Tarifa and Algeciras). This extended over time and caused the

cancellation of the Operation Crossing the Strait of 2020 and 2021 between Spain and Morocco, affecting more than 3 million Moroccans in Europe who intended to return to Morocco (some were residents in Europe and others were residents in Morocco). Despite the above, paradoxically, Morocco allowed the arrival of ships from Sète (France) and Genoa (Italy), countries that at times had a worse epidemiological situation than Spain (Peregil 2021). It is important to mention that maritime connections between Spain and Morocco was restored in April 2022 and Operation Crossing the Strait was carried out in the summer of 2022.

During the pandemic stage of the border crisis, in 2021, Brahim Ghali, leader of the Polisario Front, was welcomed in Spain to receive urgent medical attention, despite Morocco's protest and request to extradite the leader who had been charged for a series of crimes. Even before Spain's Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya officially announced the arrival of Ghali to Spain for medical treatment, the Moroccan counterpart ministry already issued a warning (figure 6).

figure 6

The statement posed the following questions:

"
- Why was the man named Brahim Ghali admitted to Spain secretly and with a forged passport?
- Why did Spain find it useful not to notify Morocco?
- Why did it choose to admit him under a false identity?
- And why the Spanish justice has not yet reacted to the many complaints lodged by the victims?"

The self-perception of Morocco regarding its power changed with Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, also in 2021, in exchange for normalization with Israel. From that moment, Morocco increasingly intensified the pressure on Spain and other

EU Member States, such as, Italy and Germany to obtain an explicit recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. There is an expectation that such pressures can resume with Trump's second mandate and expand to the enclaves[v].

Morocco's barely hidden promise of getting back at Spain for supporting the Polisario leader was honored soon enough. Just a few weeks later, in May 2021, over 10000 migrants entered Ceuta from Morocco; around 7000 were deported back to Morocco, including minors (Europa Press 2021). However, the Spanish justice system stopped the expulsions of minors for being against the Spanish Immigration Law (De Vega 2021). Some sources estimate that they were around 2000 minors and that it could have been a deliberate move. Many of the minors spent weeks in Ceuta sleeping on the streets in the cold and were subject to illegal pushback practices by Spanish authorities (Vargas Martin 2021). In response, the European Parliament condemned the instrumental use of children as a political weapon by Morocco (European Parliament 2021). This provoked a response from the Arab Parliament, which rejected the resolution and called it arrogant and interfering. The Arab Parliament also underlined that Ceuta, Melilla, and the Canary Islands are colonial territories (RTVE 2021). Here the BSCSS, in its emphasis on paying attention to the decentering of the security paradigm and repurposing it (Martini 2020), helps understand the Moroccan strategy in the border crisis to extract itself from the framework of third country partner in the fight of African irregular migration to Europe. In the case of Melilla and Ceuta, the insecurity created by the borders becomes not just a burden on Europe but also on Morocco, its economy, and the rights of its people. Even if the EU has attempted to co-opt third countries like Turkey and Morocco into its migration and border management priorities, using funding and specific mobility channels as incentives, the capacity of these countries to respect migrants' rights remains limited and challenges the obligations of EU member states under European and international law (Carrera et al. 2016).

The territorial borders between Morocco and Spain in Ceuta/El Tarjal and Melilla/Beni Ensar remained closed until May 2022, despite excellent data on vaccination against the coronavirus in both countries. The re-opening in 2022 had been just for travelers or frontier workers and didn't include trade activities (González 2022) until January 15, 2025. However, this reopening of the Melilla customs is limited to only one non-articulated truck daily in each direction, operating between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. hours, excluding holidays in either country[vi].

4.3. Complicating North South Relations

The recent border crisis between Morocco and Spain reveals a complex reading of North South relations. This section sets the context of these relations in a postcolonial frame and with the Covid-19 pandemic to explain Morocco's strategy vis-à-vis Spain.

Contemporary North-South relations had been shaped by colonial legacies of hierarchy, despite the attempt to institutionalize equality among supposedly sovereign states (Grovogui 1996). However, the fast pace of neoliberal integration around the world has complicated such hierarchies by distributing pockets of elite power around the world, with effective control over policymaking and material progress (Harvey 2007). Most importantly, those mechanisms of global integration between states (including cooperation on migration and border management) have given countries of the global South, in their foreign policy actions, a leverage to pressure countries of the global North (Grove 2024). Morocco's relation with Spain is such a case as Morocco has been able to reverse the pressure dynamic on its stronger partner in the case of EU external migration policy to advance Morocco's national immigration framework (Tittel-Mosser 2018). Morocco's daring move against Spain is noteworthy. The unilateral decision to close the border in 2018 was particularly hostile. The extreme move to close all borders with Spain in 2020 for a particularly long time was targeted. For example, in March 18, 5 days after the Moroccan action on the Spanish border, Turkey also closed its border with the EU[vii], but only for 20 days.

Despite the abilities of Morocco to pressure its European partners, the North African state has still been casting itself as an underdog, particularly decrying the double standards in restricting mobility South of the Mediterranean as an afront to the dignity of Moroccans (El Qadim 2018). This strategy reacts to a broader context of stigmatization of migration as a source of chaos and turmoil for host countries, which dehumanizes migrants (Diab 2021). As a counterattack, Morocco has been using a language of condemnation and shaming of European partners for championing a human rights discourse while applying rigidity toward Moroccan migrants and constraining mobility from the South, including rejecting visas (El Qadim 2018).

When Covid-19 hit the world in 2020, the extent of global integration was put to test. In many cases, borders were quickly sealed but trade saw little interruption (Alden and Trautman 2025). Those exceptional measures faced social resistance. The pandemic revealed the complexity of finding a balance between public health and civil liberties. Covid-19 was used as an excuse by some governments to limit rights and freedoms, notably the freedom of movement, advancing social control (Alden and Trautman 2025). During the pandemic, Morocco's distinctive rigidity vis-à-vis crossing from Spain to its territory intensified the already built-up tension from the border incidents of 2018. Moroccan nationals in Spain were not allowed to return home for months even after the easing of the lockdown with other European countries. And it is only until earlier this year, meaning 5 years since the pandemic, that the neighbors are slowly getting back to allowing some commercial flows across the borders.

The Moroccan state has been instrumentalizing the border crisis in two ways. First, hurting the fragile economies of the enclaves and limiting their competitive advantage over its own economy, for its national economic interests. Second, by blaming Spain for the security problems in the borderlands that go from management of irregular migration to the spread of informal economies. The goal for Morocco is to beat its geostrategic rival, Spain, as this

latter stands in the way of Morocco's territorial and identity objectives[viii]. Since direct confrontation with Spain would carry high risks for Morocco, given the superior military power[ix] of Spain, Morocco seems to opt for a Gray Zone Strategy based on an anticolonial discourse, weaponization of the Moroccan population in the borderlands, economic warfare, and modernization of its armed forces (Baqués-Quesada 2022). These tactics seem to be working as Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez officially backed the Moroccan plan for the autonomy of the Sahara region in an unprecedented move in 2022, conceding as such to Morocco's territorial claim.

The externalization of the Spanish border in the enclaves has created precarious living conditions for Moroccan residents and even citizens of Moroccan origin as they have limited access to social services (Sahraoui 2024), which fuels antagonistic feelings in these populations toward Spain and advances the claim of Morocco to become a better alternative. Morocco's hostile stances against Spain are a strategy of muscle flexing to signal that it is a strong regional actor. Morocco's territorial ambitions have gone beyond the Sahara and the enclaves to include the so-called Greater Morocco[x].

figure 7

This signaling of expansionism and political strength has also coincided with the controversial tactical move by Morocco to normalize relations with Israel in 2020, despite the unpopularity of the decision among its population. Even with the increasing global condemnation of Israel's utmost violence against Palestinians since October 7, 2023, the Moroccan state has multiplied partnerships with Israel, particularly in the fields of economic and military development.

5. Conclusion

The BSCSS provides a needed decentering of the study of security and international relations from dominant concerns with Western interests and policy priorities. Experiences

of security matters and international affairs in the MENA showcase that the BSCSS is not just a theoretical exercise but a reflection of the studied concepts in the ground. The recent Morocco-Spain border crisis took a turn in 2018, but it needs to be situated in a longer history of border management and migration policies between the two countries, including their colonial histories.

The Morocco-Spain border crisis has been studied in many ways: regarding the livelihoods of people in the borderlands (Sahraoui 2024), regarding the Covid-19 pandemic (Faraa 2021), regarding regional rivalries (Baqués-Quesada 2022), regarding international cooperation (Carrera et al. 2016), regarding security concerns (Delkáder-Palacios 2023), regarding international mobility (El Qadim 2018), and regarding externalization of borders (Naranjo Giraldo 2016; Tittel-Mosser 2018). This paper adds to the discussio the contribution of the BSCSS as a reading of a paradigm shift in security studies and North-South relations.

Our case study of the border crisis from 2018 shows that Morocco managed to frame the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla as an insecurity to its economy and people, and instrumentalized the crisis to obtain an unprecedented recognition of its territorial claim on Western Sahara from its European neighbor.

Our contribution challenges the view that borders exclusively disadvantage Southern countries. We argue that borders can be wielded as an instrument of leverage for the global South. Future research could extend this argument and support the BSCSS project of decentering dominant security paradigms by investigating other North–South border contexts—Turkey–EU being a prime example. Such comparative studies would not only test our claim about the strategic potential of borders but would also enrich the empirical and theoretical foundations of the BSCSS, advancing its commitment to regionally grounded, critical security scholarship (Habash 2025).

The Moroccan instrumentalization of its border crisis with Spain is yet another example documenting agency in the global South. Such examples are important to inform policy makers from either side of the border about accounting for the needs of foreign partners.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

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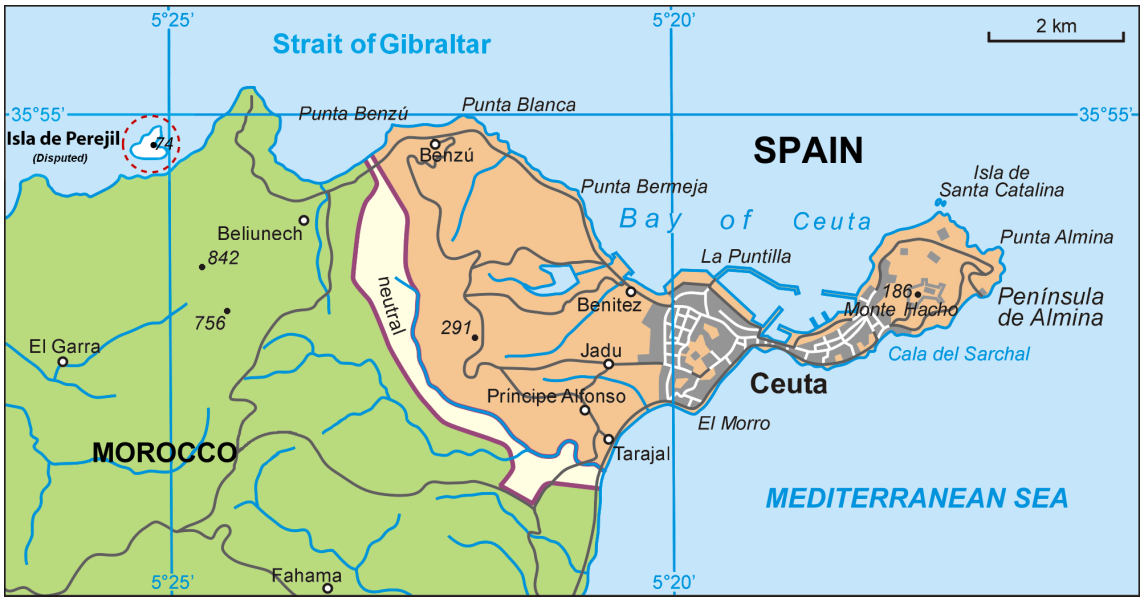


Figure 1
Territorial border between Morocco and Spain in Ceuta.
Gifex, 2025.



Figure 2
Territorial border between Morocco and Spain in Melilla.
Barry's Borderpoints, 2025.

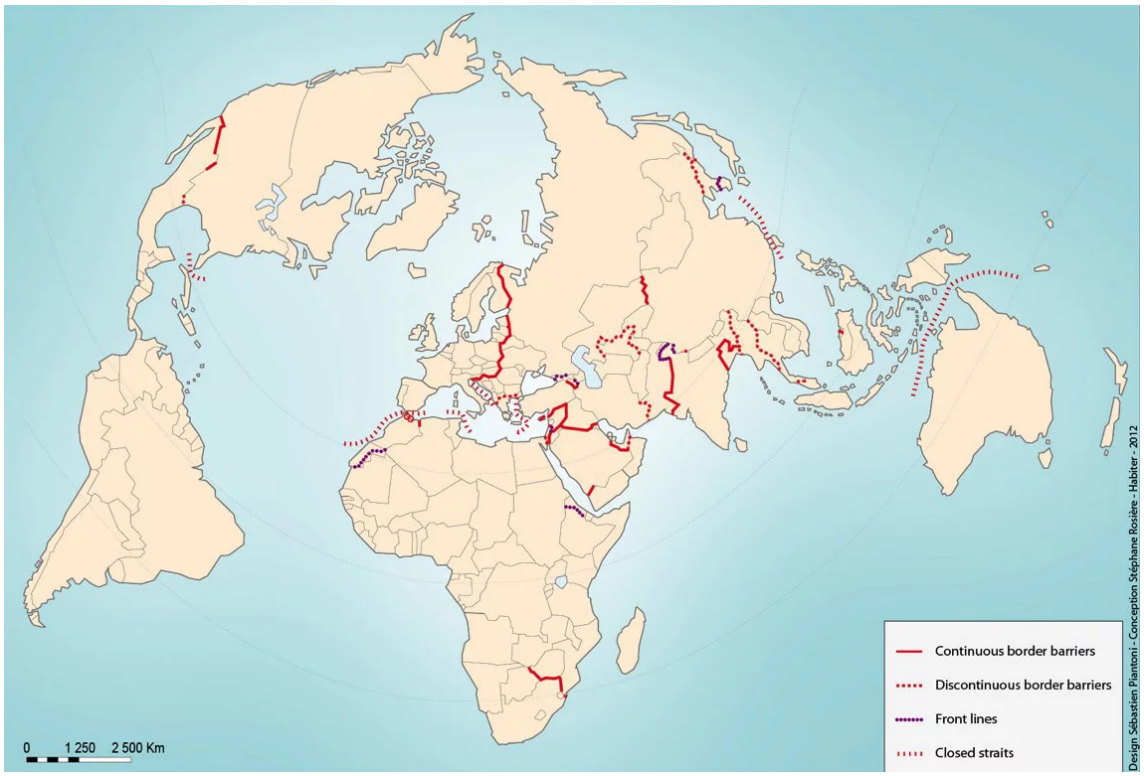
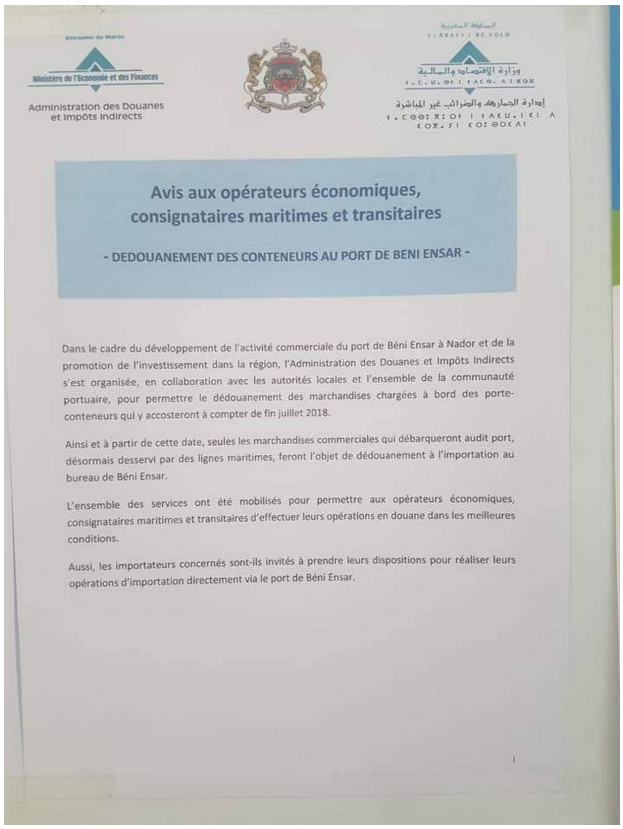


Figure 3
World Map of Close Borders Cartography.
2012.



Figure 4
Female Moroccan porters wait to pass through customs at the El-Tarajal border, Ceuta to Morocco.
AFP, 2017.



Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances

Administration des Douanes et Impôts Indirects

وزارة الاقتصاد والمالية

إدارة الجمارك والضرائب غير المباشرة

Avis aux opérateurs économiques, consignataires maritimes et transitaires

- DEDOUANEMENT DES CONTENEURS AU PORT DE BENI ENSAR -

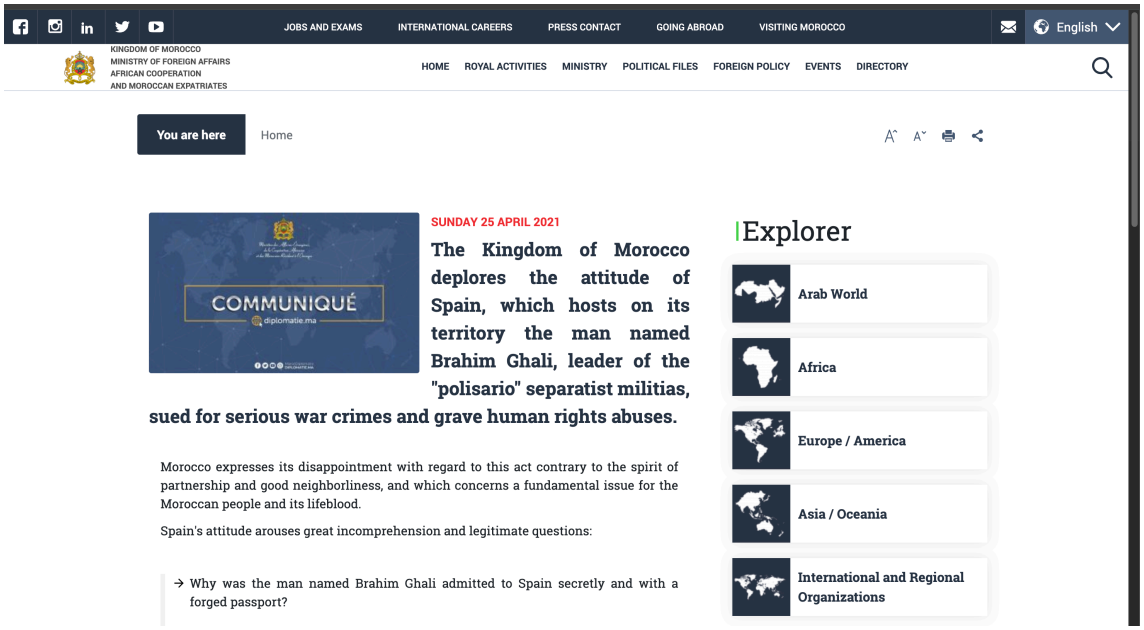
Dans le cadre du développement de l'activité commerciale du port de Béni Ensar à Nador et de la promotion de l'investissement dans la région, l'Administration des Douanes et Impôts Indirects s'est organisée, en collaboration avec les autorités locales et l'ensemble de la communauté portuaire, pour permettre le dédouanement des marchandises chargées à bord des porte-conteneurs qui y accosteront à compter de fin juillet 2018.

Ainsi et à partir de cette date, seules les marchandises commerciales qui débarqueront audit port, désormais desservi par des lignes maritimes, feront l'objet de dédouanement à l'importation au bureau de Béni Ensar.

L'ensemble des services ont été mobilisés pour permettre aux opérateurs économiques, consignataires maritimes et transitaires d'effectuer leurs opérations en douane dans les meilleures conditions.

Aussi, les importateurs concernés sont-ils invités à prendre leurs dispositions pour réaliser leurs opérations d'importation directement via le port de Béni Ensar.

Figure 5
Moroccan Customs' notice on decision to allow imports only from Beni Ensar starting end of July 2018.
Print screen.



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COMMUNIQUÉ
diplomatie.ma

SUNDAY 25 APRIL 2021

The Kingdom of Morocco deplores the attitude of Spain, which hosts on its territory the man named Brahim Ghali, leader of the "polisario" separatist militias, sued for serious war crimes and grave human rights abuses.

Morocco expresses its disappointment with regard to this act contrary to the spirit of partnership and good neighborliness, and which concerns a fundamental issue for the Moroccan people and its lifeblood.

Spain's attitude arouses great incomprehension and legitimate questions:

→ Why was the man named Brahim Ghali admitted to Spain secretly and with a forged passport?

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International and Regional Organizations

Figure 6
Moroccan Foreign Affairs Ministerial Statement on April 21, 2021, 2 days before Spanish announcement.
Print screen from: https://diplomatie.ma/en/morocco-deplores-attitude-spain-and-expresses-its-disappointment-regard-act-contrary-spirit-partnership-and-good-neighborliness



Figure 7
Facebook post by the page "Le Maroc moderne" on June 13, 2021, with the title Greater Morocco.
The map is signed by the Moorish Movement, a far-right movement in Morocco.

[i] Specifically, Melilla and Ceuta are considered Special Tax Zones (STZs) within the European Union, where advantages are granted on direct and/or indirect taxation (See Claudio Cipollini, *Special Tax Zones and EU Law: Theory, Implementations, and Future Challenges*, Wolters Kluwer, 2019), including exemption from customs duties, benefit from EU free trade agreements, and preferentional rules (See European Commission).

[ii] Ignacio Cembrero, August 11, 2018, El Confidential. https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2018-08-11/marruecos-cierra-aduana-comercial-de-melilla_1603536/
[iii] Ibid.
[iv] Ibid.
[v] 'Trump May Recognize Ceuta, Melilla as Moroccan Territory' https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/02/174949/spanish-media-trump-may-recognize-ceuta-melilla-as-moroccan-territory/
[vi] Adil Faouzi, January 18, 2025. https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/01/165692/first-commercial-truck-crosses-morocco-melilla-border-after-6-year-closure/#:~:text=Doha%20%E2%80%93%20A%20truck%20carrying%20approximately,according%20to%20Spanish%20media%20reports
[vii] Emma Wallis. 2020/09/19. "Turkey closes its borders to the EU once again." InfoMigrants. https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/23545/turkey-closes-its-borders-to-the-eu-once-again
[viii] Alejandro del Valle Gálvez, 19 Feb 2025, "New narratives for the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla," Elcano Royal Institute. https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/new-narratives-for-the-spanish-cities-of-ceuta-and-melilla/#_ftn3
[ix] According to SIPRI (2020) Morocco's defense spending is just below 5 billion USD while Spain's exceeds 17 billion and is part of NATO.
[x] Adil Faouzi, 2024, citing Bahija Simou, Director of the Royal Archives, regarding documents proving Morocco's sovereignty over territories in Algeria. https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2024/03/22144/morocco-algeria-tensions-royal-archivist-recalls-moroccos-historical-claims-to-eastern-sahara/