



International Boundary Study

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Mali – Mauritania Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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MALI - MAURITANIA BOUNDARY

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MALI - MAURITANIA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Mali - Mauritania boundary extends for approximately 1390 miles eastward from the Senegal River across the semi-arid Sahel to 15° 30' N. 5° 30' W. and thence northward into the Sahara. In the west where the permanent water courses of the Senegal, Karakoro, and Kolimbine (Kolinbine) rivers form the boundary, it may be considered demarcated. Elsewhere the boundary is delimited only. Since the signing of the Kayes Treaty, all boundary disputes have presumably been resolved.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Geographical

With the possible exception of the southwestern segment, the frontier area traversed by the Mali - Mauritania boundary is distinctly marginal for human occupation. In the southwestern sector, bordering on Senegal, the population density averages between 10 and 25 persons per square mile while elsewhere it is generally less than one inhabitant per square mile.

Primarily the region is the transitional dry sub-Saharan Sudan, known locally as the Sahel. Rainfall normally does not exceed 10 inches per annum in the southwest and the total decreases rapidly to less than 4 inches per annum to the east while the northward extension is virtually rainless. The effectiveness of the rainfall is further reduced by prevailing high temperatures with summer mean temperatures (July) between 80° and 90° F. and winter means between 70° and 80° F.

The vegetation pattern mirrors that of climate. In the west the dominant form is the short grass savannah, representing the transition between the true, tall grass "Sudan" and the Sahara. As aridity increases eastward and northward, the vegetation becomes sparser until the scrub desert vegetation dominates. In general, these phytoclimatic belts are arranged along a WNW - ESE axis with the Sahel dominating the southern third and the Sahara the northern two-thirds.

Elevations are insufficient to produce local diversity in the phytoclimatic landscape. However, the presence of subsurface sources of water is of major importance.

Human occupation is primarily based on nomadic herding of cattle, sheep, and goats although some camels are raised in the extremely dry areas. The limited agriculture is concentrated in the southwest, based on permanent streams or available ground water. Oasis agriculture dots the landscape to the east.

B. Historical

European contact in the West African interior dates from the 19th century when French explorers penetrated from the Senegal valley. Effective occupation, however, was accomplished only in the period preceding World War I although the area of Mali and Mauritania was incorporated into French West Africa when the territory was organized in 1904. A Decree of April 23, 1913 fixed the limits of Mauritania and of the French Soudan (Mali). While this boundary approximated the present line in the southwest, it varied considerably, in Mali's favor, in the east.

A Decree (of the Governor General of French West Africa), dated July 5, 1944, radically altered the boundary by specifically transferring the eastern Hodh region to Mauritania. In the south, the Ouadou (River) was the accepted limit between the western Hodh (Mauritania) and the then French Sudan. However, on October 28, 1944 an Order of the Governor-General defined the southern limits of the Mauritania cercle of Aïoun el Atrouss as an east - west line from Djel Mael (Djeli-Mahe) to Oueneibe (Gueneibe). This action, in effect, transferred roughly 5,000 sq. kilometers of French Soudanese territory to Mauritanian administration (i.e., the area enclosed in the big bend of the Ouadou and the aforementioned east - west line). While the Decree should have taken precedence over the Order, in fact, the latter prevailed, creating the basis for the boundary dispute.

III. TREATY

In effect, only one international treaty on the Mali - Mauritania boundary has been signed. The remaining acts, while valid until superceded, represented decrees and orders of the government of the federation of French West Africa. The specific language of these latter acts has become available only recently.

A. Treaty of Delimitation of the Frontiers between the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the Republic of Mali signed at Kayes on February 16, 1963.

The treaty, which resulted from prolonged negotiations, is divided into five articles:

1. delimiting of the boundary;
2. maintains in force the Convention of April 1, 1958 on the utilization of waters in the Tilemsi Region;
3. provides for the treatment of litigations resulting from the treaty;
4. provides for an unlimited duration for the treaty;
5. enters into force on or before July 1, 1963 with the exchange of ratifications at Bamako.

The delimitation specified in Article 1, for the most part, combines the features of the Decree and the Order previously discussed. According to Par. 1 of Article 1 the frontier is

the course of the Karakoro River from its mouth to the latitude of Bilikouate (in Mali).¹

The Karakoro, according to official large-scale maps, is a permanent stream for the entire 101 miles it is utilized as the boundary. The stream meanders through a featureless valley averaging 60 - 70 meters above sea level. The surrounding landscape is composed of steep escarpments averaging 100 - 300 meters in elevation which are heavily dissected by wadies of intermittent drainage. Small scattered rural settlements abound in the valleys.

The frontier area becomes successively drier eastward with elevations rising to approximately 275 meters. Settlements virtually disappear and wells become more widely dispersed.

The boundary definition in Paragraph 6 and 7 allocates, virtually equally, nearly a dozen important wells in the area. Bouszibe, Bou Cheribe, Medala, and several unnamed wells remain in Mauritania while Bouszibe Aneyda, Tassel Radiz, Dar Salam, and Bouresike pass to Malian control.

The boundary is further delimited as a line from the previously defined point "A" northeastward to "B", the intersection of 16° 20' N. and 5° 20' W., and then northwestward to "C". "C" is defined as the intersection of the parallel of 16° 30' N. and a line drawn from the previously-defined point "A" through the well of Aguerakdem. The two segments AB and BC measure 57 and 17 miles, respectively.

Paragraph 8 continues the delimitation as a straight line from point "C" through Aguerakdem to the intersection with 25° N. at point "D". This line, in effect, is a continuation of the line used to determine point C. Line CD measures 595 miles on the 1:1,000,000 maps. The region traversed is the true desert of the Sahara. Shifting dunes, aligned SW - NE, and open hamada dominate the landscape. Isolated and extinct volcanic peaks break the general monotony of relief. Due to the extreme aridity, no permanent drainage exists.

The final paragraph concludes the delimitation from point "D" along the 25th parallel to its intersection with the limits of Algeria, a distance of approximately 114 miles.

IV. SUMMARY

The Treaty of Kayes, in effect, has settled the disputed Mali - Mauritania boundary to the

¹ It is strange that while all French topographic maps as well as locally-attributable maps include a 13-mile stretch of the boundary along the Senegal River, this particular portion of the boundary is not mentioned in the Kayes Treaty. No reason for the omission has been found other than it was ignored also in the 1944 Decree and Order. Notwithstanding, U.S. maps should continue to show the boundary along the right (north) bank of the Senegal from the mouth of the Karakoro to the Senegalese tripoint at the confluence of the Faleme River with the Senegal.

advantage of both states. Mauritania has obtained full title to the western Hodh area which it has administered since 1944. Mali has not only retained the villages of Diandioume, Gourdian, Gouguel, and Boulouli, but has also obtained important wells in the southeastern sector of the frontier. However, the vagueness of the treaty language in the Djel Mael-Gueneibe sector may require future clarification.

For compilation purposes, the attached maps or the official French maps (1:200,000 and 1:1,000,000) in conjunction with the treaty text should be utilized pending the receipt of official Mauritanian or Malian maps.

Paragraph 2 describes the boundary "departing from this point (Bilikouate), a line passing by Tafara, Taskai (Taskaye), El Oueleita (El Gueleita), Davo, Kabra (El Kabara) (villages belonging to Mali), Borella, and Chelgra (villages belonging to Mauritania) up to the confluence of the Terekole and the Kolimbine (Kolinbine).

The French 1:200,000 topographic map series depicts this 81-mile stretch of the boundary as ascending the Oued el Manguela to the vicinity of Hamoud before turning southeastward across country. The frontier has not been defined in this area by any particular physical feature. At times the boundary comprises a series of straight lines joining various isolated elevations and at other times wadies are utilized. Since the referenced villages are allocated properly according to the treaty, this line appears valid for this sector.

Paragraph 3 of Article 1 continues the delimitation - "then the course of the Kolimbine (Kolinbine) to Djel Mael (Djeli-Mahe)." The Kolimbine, which flows from the northeast, passes through a complex series of lakes. In between these, the river, according to the 1:200,000 maps, is intermittent. In the absence of information to the contrary in the delimitation, the boundary should follow the median line of the lakes and of the river bed. This stretch measures approximately 38 miles on the French 1:200,000 maps.

Paragraph 4 describes the boundary from Djel Mael to Oueneibe (Gueneibe) as "a straight line with a generally east - west orientation." A subsection charges frontier administrative authorities with materializing this portion of the frontier and maintaining in each of the states those villages close to the frontier which were under their respective jurisdictions on the date of signing of the treaty.

Obviously, the language of the treaty has not established precise limits in this sector. However, on the appropriate sheets of the French 1:200,000 topographic series, the Oct. 28, 1944 Order boundary is shown which the treaty duplicates to follow an east - west oriented series of wadies extending from Djel Mael through Kirane and Kersiniane to Oueneibe and eventually to a point north of Diandioume. A more generalized representation of this line of wadies can also be found on the French 1:1,000,000 aeronautical charts (ICAO) with a similar allocation of places. Furthermore, these series confirm with the available small-scale map representation and must reflect the intent of the treaty pending a final "sorting out" of villages.

Paragraph 5 of the treaty states that, from Oueneibe (Gueneibe), the boundary follows a line passing by Diandioume, Gourdian, Gouguel, and Boulouli (all appertaining to Mali), before passing southward to join the parallel of 15° 30' North latitude.

All official maps show this sector as a pentagonal intrusion of Malian territory into Mauritania. The consistency of representation at all scales indicates strongly that, although the language of the treaty is very general, there is no doubt of where the boundary was intended to be.

The concluding section of paragraph 5 continues the delimitation along the parallel of 15° 30' N. [for 253 miles] to its intersection with the meridian of 5° 30' (West longitude). This point is referred to as "A". The point also served in the 1944 delimitation.

Annex 1

TRAITE

de delimitation de frontieres entre la Republique Islamique
de Mauritanie et la Republique du Mali

LE PRESIDENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE,

Et

LE PRESIDENT DU GOUVERNEMENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU MALI, Chef de
l'ETAT,

Conscients des liens traditionnels qui unissent le Peuple Malien et
le Peuple Mauritanien,

Desireux de sauvegarder ces liens,

Ferment decides a instaurer une ero de paix durable entre le Mali
et la Mauritanie sur la base de la confiance reciproque,

Desireux de favoriser la cooperation entre leurs Etats, conformement
a l'esprit de solidarite africaine et aux principes de la charte des
Nations Unies,

Convainous que l'amitie, la cooperation entre leurs pays
contribueront a faciliter la realisation de l'Unite africaine,

Soucieux dans ce sens, de mettre un terme definitif aux conflits
frontaliers conformement aux dispositions des Accords signes a
Nouakchott le 15 Janvier 1960, a Kiffa le 3 Aout 1962 et a Bamako le
24 Novembre 1962.

ONT CONCLU LE PRESENT TRAITE,

CHAPITRE I

ARTICLE PREMIER - La limite entre les Etats de la Republique du Mali
et de la Republique Islamique de Mauritanie est determinee comme
suit:

- 1°) Le cours du Karakoro depuis son embouchure jusqu'a la hauteur de
Bilikouate (village relevant de la Republique du Mali);
- 2°) A partir de ce point, une ligne passant par TAFARA, TASKAI, EL
OUELEITA, DAVO, KABRA (villages relevant de la Republique du
Mali), BORELLA, CHELGRA (villages relevant de la Republique
Islamique de Mauritanie) jusqu'au confluent du TEREKOLE et du
KOLIMBINE:

- 3°) Puis le cours de KOLIMBINE jusqu'a DJEL MAEL,
- 4°) De DJEL MAEL a OUENEIBE, une ligne droite d'orientation generale Est-Ouest.

Les autorites administratives frontalierees seront chargees de materialiser d'accord parties, cette portion de la frontiere en maintenant dans chacun des Etats, les villages proches de la frontiere et relevant de leur administration respective a la date de la signature de present Traite.

- 5°) A partir de OUENEIBE, une ligne passant par DIANDOUNE, GOURDIAN, GOUGUEL et BOULOULI (tous ces villages relevant de la Republique du Mali) et se dirigeant vers le sud jusqu'a intersection avec le parallele 15° 30 et, suivant ce parallele, jusqu'a son intersection en A avec le meridien 5° 30.
- 6°) Du point A, la frontiere suit une ligne droite jusqu'au point B, intersection du parallele 16° 20 et du meridien 5° 20.
- 7°) Du point B, la frontiere suit une ligne droite BC, le point B etant defini comme ci-dessus et le point C etant l'intersection du parallele 16° 30 avec la droite joignant le point A deja defini au lieudit AGUERAKTEM.
- 8°) A partir du point C, la frontiere suit une ligne droite passant par le lieudit AGUERAKTEM jusqu'a son intersection en D avec le 25e parallele.
- 9°) Enfin de ce point D, la frontiere suit le 25e parallele jusqu'a son intersection avec la limite de l'ALGERIE.

ARTICLE 2 - La Convention du 1er Avril 1958 reste en vigueur en ce qui concerne l'utilisation des puits dans la region du TILEMSI.

ARTICLE 3 - Les litiges nes de l'application du present Traite seront regles par la voie diplomatique.

ARTICLE 4 - Le present Traite est conclu pour une duree illimitee.

ARTICLE 5 - Il est applicable a partir du jour de sa signature et entrera en vigueur apres l'echange des instruments de ratification que devra intevenir au plus tard le 1er Juillet 1963 a Bamako.

FAIT A KAYES, le 16 FEVRIER 1963, en double original,
en langue francaise, chacun des deux textes faisant egalement foi.

LE PRESIDENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE
ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE

LE PRESIDENT DU GOUVERNEMENT DE
LA REPUBLIQUE DU MALI
CHEF DE L'ETAT

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