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Mauritania – Senegal Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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MAURITANIA - SENEGAL BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Mauritania - Senegal boundary is about 505 miles in length. Inland from the North Atlantic Ocean, the boundary crosses a sandy spit approximately one-quarter mile in width, passes through several marigots or water channels for two and a quarter miles, and then follows the right or north bank of the Senegal (river) for the remainder of the distance. In the case of the Ile aux Bois, the boundary follows the right bank of the main channel of the Senegal rather than that of the Petit Bras, and the island is included in Mauritania.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

French trade was conducted with the people of what are now Mauritania and Senegal as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Important factories or trading posts were located at Ile d'Arguin and Portendick in Mauritania and at Saint-Louis, Ile de Goree, Rufisque, Joal, and Portudal in Senegal. In 1845 French spheres in West Africa were divided between the government of Saint-Louis in Senegal and the government of Les Rivières du Sud (Southern Rivers),¹ headed by an admiral with headquarters on the Ile de Goree. French administration in Senegal prior to 1854 was confined mainly to trade centers on or near the coast. During the two terms of General Faidherbe as governor of Senegal in 1854 - 61 and 1863 - 65, the state was expanded eastward and southward to close to its present limits.

Inland the territory of Haut Fleuve (Upper River), which extended eastward to the headwaters of the Senegal, was administered as an integral part of Senegal until 1880. A decree of September 6, 1880 created the territory of Haut Senegal (Upper Senegal) from the Haut Fleuve, and the new entity was placed under a military officer subordinate to the Governor of Senegal. Located east of the Faleme, the territory had its headquarters first at Medine and the following year at Kayes. Eastward the boundaries of Haut Senegal were defined by the extent of French penetration. On August 18, 1890, a decree changed the name of Haut Senegal to the Soudan Français (French Sudan), and administratively it came under the general direction of the Governor of Senegal. Two years later a decree gave French Sudan complete autonomy under the home government, and in 1893 civil administration replaced military.

On June 16, 1895, a decree was issued, which established a central government for French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française). It placed Senegal, French Sudan, Ivory Coast, and French Guinea under the Governor of Senegal, who was designated also

¹ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the name "Les Rivières du Sud" was applied rather vaguely to the coastlands between Cape Roxo and Cape Palmas. From 1845 to 1893 the term was used officially to indicate various French coastal areas from Senegal southward as far as Gabon. During this period the areas were designated by several different territorial administrations. Beginning in 1893 the name was applied only to the coastlands of French Guinea.

the Governor-General of French West Africa. Lieutenant-Governors stationed at Kayes, Grand Bassam, and Conakry, were responsible for the French Sudan, Ivory Coast, and French Guinea, respectively. French Sudan lost the internal divisions of Bakel and part of Bambouk to Senegal, and Faranah to French Guinea. In 1896 Ivory Coast was detached from the federation of French West Africa. A decree of October 17, 1899 restored the Ivory Coast to the federation, included Dahomey as a member of the federation, and broke up French Sudan. In the dissolution of French Sudan, the divisions of Koala and Say were incorporated into Dahomey (though they were re-transferred in 1900 to newly organized military territories); Odienne, Kong, and Bouna became part of the Ivory Coast; and Beyla, Kissidougou, Kankan, Kouroussa, Sigouri, and Dinguiraye were transferred to French Guinea. The remainder of French Sudan was divided into 1) initially two and later three (after December 20, 1900) military territories with headquarters at Tombouctou, Bobo Dioulasso, and Zinder, respectively; and 2) the territories of Haut Senegal et Moyan Niger (Upper Senegal and Middle Niger). Commanders in charge of military territories were responsible directly to the Governor-General on military matters, but on civil matters they dealt with the Governor-General's civil delegate. Haut Senegal et Moyen Niger became a dependency of the colony of Senegal and was administered by a civil delegate of the Governor-General.

The Governor of Senegal ceased to be Governor-General of French West Africa in accordance with a decree of October 1, 1902. The office of the Governor-General was moved from Saint-Louis² to Dakar; a Lieutenant-Governor for Senegal remained in Saint-Louis. By the same decree, the territories of Senegambie et Niger (Senegambia and Niger) were created, incorporating the Senegal protectorate or hinterland formerly dependent on the colony of Senegal, Haut Senegal and Moyen Niger, and the military territories.

Prior to the establishment of a civil division of 1904, the territory of Mauritania was recognized generally to be within the French sphere of influence. The French had signed numerous treaties mainly to secure the gum trade with the people north of the Valee du Senegal, some of which dated back to the early part of the nineteenth century. On June 27, 1900, a treaty between France and Spain delimited a boundary between the French sphere of influence and the Spanish possession of Rio de Oro,³ presently known as Spanish Sahara. Under the leadership of Xavier Coppolani, who was appointed by the Governor-General, the French started and by World War I had effectively completed the process of establishing control over the land. By 1903 a formal protectorate was proclaimed by France over the Trarza and Brakna people of the Pays Maures (Moors Country).

² Saint-Louis was founded in 1658 and served as the capital of French West Africa from 1895 to 1902. It also served as the capital of Mauritania (until administrative functions were transferred to Nouakchott in 1957) and for Senegal (until 1958 when Dakar was named the capital).

³ Previously in January 1885, a Spanish notification had declared a protectorate over the coastal area between Cape Bojadar and Cap Blanc. A Franco - Spanish treaty delimited an additional part of the boundary between Mauritania and Rio de Oro on October 3, 1904.

A decree of February 13, 1904, delimited a boundary between Senegal and the territories of Senegambie et Niger. (See Appendix, Part I, Articles II and III). The decree enlarged the environs of Saint-Louis and areas surrounding stopping places on the Dakar - St.-Louis railroad and it also extended the area served by the Dakar - Saint-Louis line to the benefit of Senegal. In return Senegal ceded certain portions of its second district to the territories of Senegambie et Niger. Later the same year, a decree of October 18 further reorganized French West Africa; Senegambie and Niger were formally separated, the Senegal protectorate⁴ was re-integrated with Senegal, and the remainder of the territory was formed into a colony called Haut Senegal - Niger (Upper Senegal - Niger). At the same time Mauritania was made a civil territory.

A boundary was established between Senegal and the territory of Mauritania by the decree of February 25, 1905 as follows:

Article 1: The outskirts of St. Louis, as fixed by Article 2 of the decree of February 13, 1904, and that portion of the Senegal River running from the marigot of Kassack to the marigot of Karakoro shall form the boundary between the Civil Territory of Mauritania and the Colony of Senegal.

Article I of the decree of February 25, 1905, delimited the Maruitania - Senegal boundary as the Senegal eastward to the confluence of that stream with the Karakoro. Later the territory south of the Senegal between the Faleme and the Karakoro was removed from Senegalese administration and added to the colony of Haut Senegal - Niger. The decree of 1905 continues to serve as the basis for the Mali - Mauritania boundary on the Senegal between the Faleme and Karakoro and apparently has not been challenged by either state. This sector was not included in the Kayes treaty of 1963, which delimited the remainder of the boundary between Mali and Mauritania.

Immediately before and after World War I, a number of administrative changes were made in French West Africa. About 1910 Niger was enlarged by the Gao cercle, but the following year the cercle was returned to Haut Senegal. Also in 1911 the Territoire Militaire du Niger was separated for administrative purposes from Haut Senegal and was placed directly under the Governor-General. The colony of Niger was organized in 1922 and its capital moved from Zinder to Niamey in 1926. In 1919 the colony of Upper Volta⁵ was constituted from the colony of Haut Senegal - Niger. During 1920 Mauritania was made a colony, and the name of French Sudan was restored to the territory of Haut Senegal.

⁴ Until 1920 the four communes of Dakar, Goree, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis were considered to be under the direct administration of the Lieutenant-Governor and the remainder of the colony was considered to be a protectorate. During this year the distinction was formally abolished. From 1924 to 1946, Dakar, Ile de Goree, Rufisque, and adjacent area formed an autonomous circumscription.

⁵ Upper Volta was partitioned in 1932 between Ivory Coast, French Sudan, and Niger. On September 4, 1947, Upper Volta was re-established, comprising the territory of the old colony of Upper Volta as of September 5, 1932.

A decree of December 8, 1933 determines the present alignment of the Mauritania - Senegal boundary. The 1933 decree is more exact than the decree of February 25, 1905, in that it specifies the right bank of the Senegal to be the boundary and then terminates the boundary at the mouth of the Faleme rather than the Karakoro.

Following World War II both the former colonies of Mauritania and Senegal became overseas territories in French West Africa with membership in the French Union. Likewise, both states became republics and autonomous members of the French Community in November 1958. The Republic of Senegal and the Republic of Sudan formed the Federation of Mali on April 4, 1959. Both Senegal and Mali as part of the Federation of Mali became independent from French administration on June 20, 1960. Senegal seceded from the federation and inaugurated an independent republic on August 20, 1960. Following the break up of the Federation of Mali, the former Republic of Sudan became the Republic of Mali on September 22, 1960. After agreement with France, Mauritania became an independent republic on October 19, 1960.

III. GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The right bank of the Senegal forms the Mauritania - Senegal boundary for about 503 miles between the Mali tripoint, at the confluence of the Senegal and Faleme, and the Marigot de Mambatio 1-1/4 miles north of Saint-Louis. Typical of the Senegal are numerous meanders, divergent channels, and poorly drained areas. The Senegal is formed by the junction of the Bafing and Bakoy at Bafoulabe in Mali, and flows approximately 650 miles to reach the ocean 12 miles south of Saint-Louis. Vessels of 10-foot draft navigate to Podor throughout the year and to Kayes in Mali during the high-water period from July to October. The maximum flow of the river occurs in late August or early September.

The Senegal flows northwestwards from Bafoulabe, forms the Mali-Mauritania boundary for 13 miles from the Karakoro to the Faleme, and passes through 27 narrows between Kayes and Bakel. Downstream from Bakel, the river has numerous islands, and in places natural dams accumulate large reservoirs of waters. From Bogue the river flows westward and continues to within about 12 miles of the coast before turning southward 50 miles north of its mouth. At the point where the Senegal turns southward, the river during flood periods sometimes discharges vast quantities of water to the ocean through an ancient river course known as the Ndiadier. Between Rosso and Saint-Louis, large areas along the river are poorly drained, particularly during the high-water period, due to a number of adjacent channels and low-lying land. Immediately north of Saint-Louis, the boundary is formed by a series of channels, including the Marigot de Mambatio, for 2-1/4 miles, then by a straight line for 1/4 mile across the Langue de Barbarie. A sandy spit with numerous dunes, the Langue de Barbarie was formed by the actions of the Canary Current and the Senegal, and extends for approximately 27 miles along the coast.

Climatically the boundary is located mainly in a low-latitude steppe (sometimes referred to as the Sahel) and barely reaches the low-latitude desert on the north. Maximum

precipitation falls in the summer season, and annual amounts decrease gradually northward from about 32 inches near the Mali tripoint to less than 10 inches. Temperatures average close to 80° F. with a range of between 5 and 15 Fahrenheit degrees in the western sector and between 15 and 30 Fahrenheit degrees in the eastern sector. The vegetation consists mainly of acacia savanna, except westward of Rosso where it consists of marsh or swamps.

Except for limited areas of less than 25 persons per square mile north of both Bakel and Kaedi, most of the Vallee du Senegal has a population density of between 25 and 130 persons per square mile. Although Saint-Louis has a population of about 50,000, all other towns along the boundary have a population of less than 10,000 persons. The Vallee du Senegal serves as a relatively definitive division between the Moors (admixture of Arabs and Berbers) to the north and Negroid peoples or peoples of strong Negroid admixture to the south. Immediately adjacent to both sides of the river for most of the boundary are the Tukulor, a mixed Negroid people, engaged mainly in agriculture. Other ethnic groups of importance near the boundary are the Wolof and Fulani (Peuhl) in Senegal and the Trarza and Brakna in Mauritania.

Economic activity along the boundary consists mainly of livestock raising, subsistence cropping, and the production of rice by the Richard-Toll scheme for domestic consumption in Senegal. Started in 1947 the Richard-Toll scheme is dependent on a barrage on the Senegal and the Lac de Guiers which serves as a reservoir to irrigate an area along the river. Of particular importance to Mauritania and Senegal are cooperation on the future use of the waters of the Senegal. Thus plans are being made for additional projects by the Committee for the Development of the Senegal River Basin (Comite Inter-Etats pour l'Amenagement du Bassin du Fleuve Senegal). Members of the committee include not only Mauritania and Senegal but also Guinea and Mali. Initial tentative plans are for a large regulatory dam, possibly near Gouina, and three submersion dams near Bakel, Cascas, and Dagana for use in local irrigation and transport. The dam would permit the navigation of the Senegal by 10-foot draft vessels upstream to Matam throughout the year. A number of roads extend to the river from both Mauritania and Senegal and crossings are commonly made at Rosso, Kaedi, and Bakel. An international airport is located at Saint-Louis.

IV. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The Decree of December 8, 1933 issued by the President of the French Republic affords the alignment of the Mauritania - Senegal boundary as follows:

Article 1: The boundaries between the colony of Senegal and the Colony of Mauritania are, and shall continue to be, delimited as follows:

By a boundary marker to be constructed on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean near the ruined building known as "Maison Gardette" [Gardette house] about one kilometer south of the pumping section of the Salsal plant. By the shortest line running from

that boundary marker to the confluence of the marigot southwest of the village of Thiong [Tiong] and the Marigot de Temedas, leaving the Ile de Salsal to Senegal.⁶ By a line from that confluence back to the source of the Marigot de Mambatio and along the right bank of that marigot to the Senegal river (map of St. Louis on a scale of 1:100,000), along the bank of the main branch of that river to a point north of the mouth of the Faleme river, leaving the Ile aux Bois in possession of the Colony of Mauritania (map of St. Louis on a scale of 1:100,000 and map of Bakel on a scale of 1:500,000).

The precise location of the Mali tripoint is somewhat indefinite, although the decree of December 8, 1933 indicates that the Mauritania - Senegal boundary on the right bank of the Senegal terminates at a point north of the mouth of the Faleme. The decree of February 25, 1905, which determines the 13-mile segment of the Mali - Mauritania boundary formed by the Senegal immediately to the east of the Faleme - Senegal confluence, does not specify whether the bank or a line in the river will form the boundary between the entities north and south of the river. Likewise, the northern part of the Mali - Senegal boundary is shown in the Faleme by most maps, but the exact location of the line relative to the thalweg or median of the river is not indicated.

V. PRESENT SITUATION

There are no known disputes relative to the alignment of the Mauritania - Senegal boundary. Because the boundary throughout most of its length follows the right bank of the Senegal, Mauritania desires guarantees that it will continue to have navigation and water utilization rights on the river.

⁶ The "shortest line running from that boundary marker to the confluence of the marigot southwest of the village of Thiong and the Marigot de Temedas" could be interpreted to mean a straight line starting from the boundary marker on the coast, extending northeastward diagonally across the Langue de Barbarie and through the channel north of the Ile de Salsal, to the confluence of the marigots. Most maps indicate the boundary as on the enclosed map, extending in a straight line from west to east across the Langue de Barbarie and then northeastward through the channel north of the Ile de Salsal to the confluence of the marigots.

APPENDIX

I. Decree of February 13, 1904: Altering the Boundaries between Senegal and the Senegambia and Niger Territories

Article 1: The boundaries between the colony of Senegal and the Senegambia and Niger Territories shall be altered as specified in Articles 2 and 3 and will thereby confirm the Arrete of the Government-General of French West Africa, dated November 15, 1903.

Article 2: The areas under protectorate specified below shall be placed under the direct administration of the Colony of Senegal and shall be dependencies thereof: 1. St. Louis and its environs comprising an area bounded by the northern part, the marigot of N'Diayo, the marigot of Mainbatio, the marigot of Kassack as far as longitude 18° 40' W., this meridian to its intersection with the railway, the railway to its intersection with the telegraph line at Laybar, the telegraph line as far as the village of Mouit and the sea, the village and post of Mouit remaining outside of the perimeter; 2. Rufisque and its environs, bounded by a line following the coast for a distance of about 11 kilometers and extending inland for about six kilometers in such manner as to include the city water works and the villages of Bargny; 3. Dakar and its environs as far as a conventional straight line cutting across the Cap Vert peninsula at its narrowest part; 4. A strip of land one kilometer wide on each side of the axis of the track of the railway between Dakar and St. Louis. The Touaouane stopping-place, however, is to retain its present boundaries as stated in the arrete of June 7, 1902; 5. A rectangle two kilometers long, following the river bed and one kilometer wide inland, the military post being taken as the center, around the stopping-places of Richard-Toll, Dagana, Podor, Salde, Matam, and Bakel on the Senegal [River]; Koolack and Fatick in the Sine-Saloum Region; Sedhiou and Ziguinoho on the Casamance [River]; 6. A rectangle 2 kilometers long beside the coast and one kilometer wide around the stopping-places of Portendal, Nianing, and Joal, the center of this quadrilateral to be determined by the commission established in Article 3.

7. The small islands on which the stopping-places of Foundiougne and Carabane are established.

Article 3: The posts of Aere, N'Diaiou, and Merinaghen, the N'Diogo camp, and the other areas located in the second district, which are now under the jurisdiction of the Government of Senegal, shall henceforth form part of Senegal.

II. DOCUMENTS

1. Decree of February 13, 1904: Altering the boundaries between Senegal and the Senegambia and Niger Territories. Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise, February 21, 1904.

2. Decree of February 25, 1905: Delimiting the territory of Mauritania and of Senegal (Journal Officiel of March 3, 1905, as corrected by an erratum in the Journal Officiel of

March 30, 1905). Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise, March 30, 1905, p. 155.

3. Decree of December 8, 1933: Report to the President of the French Republic, followed by a decree delimiting the boundary between Senegal and Mauritania. Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise, 1934, p. 70.

III. MAPS

1. Mauritania, Senegal, and Gambia: scale 1:50,000; series G721; printed 1953 by United States Army Map Service; sheets 1343 III, 1343 IV, 1344 III, 1344 IV, 1344 I, 1344 II, 1444 III, 1444 IV, 1444 II, and 1444 I.

2. West Africa: scale 1:250,000; series G504; printed 1955 - 64 by United States Army Map Service; sheets NE 28-14, NE 28-15, ND 28-4, and ND 28-8.

3. Carte de L'A.O.F. (esquisse planimetrique avant completement sur le terrian): scale 1:200,000; published 1956 by Service Geographique de l'A.O.F. (Dakar); series Mauritanie-Senegal; sheet NE-28-V (Kaedi).