Critical Raw Minerals in Morocco:

An opportunity for industrialisation or a geopolitical battlefield between China and the West?

Author: Ali Amouzai

Written by Ali Amouzai

Reviewed by Hamza Hamouchene, Jawad Moustakbal & Saber Ammar

Translated by Ahlem Selmi

Proofread by Aymen Zouaoui

Edited by Ashley Ingles, Hamza Hamouchene & Saber Ammar

Graphic design by Bas Coenegracht

AUTHOR: Ali Amouzai, activist and researcher from Morocco. He is a member of Al Mounadil-a (a revolutionary socialist labour movement), ATTAC-Morocco and Siyada Network.

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Executive summary

Morocco has become a prime destination for large-scale investments in the refining of strategic and critical minerals that are used in the production of electric vehicle batteries, with Chinese companies taking the lead in this regard. How do we explain the sudden influx of billions of dollars into electric battery production in Morocco? Is it driven by an internal need within the Moroccan economy? Is it in alignment with the state's declared ambition to 'green the economy'? Alternatively, could it be part of a broader and longstanding strategy pursued by Moroccan big capital and the state to take advantage of shifts in global capital strategies to secure a strategic position for itself? How does Morocco fit into the geo-strategic rivalry between China and the imperial West over strategic and critical minerals? And, finally, does this competition create opportunities for Morocco to industrialise its economy and achieve sustainable economic development from a green perspective?

A catalysing global context

The world is witnessing an unprecedented movement towards a green economy, driven by dual movements for climate justice and for a fair environmental transition, on the one hand, and by capitalists' quest to adapt to an environmental crisis they themselves have created, on the other hand. Within this context, a frantic quest is taking place to capitalise on green solutions, while integrating them into the existing economic model.

This feverish movement is also being fuelled by the rivalry between traditional hegemonic powers (the US, the European Union (EU), and Japan) and so-called 'rising' powers (mainly China). In this process, it is evident that the latter are using the same mechanisms as have been used by the former since the late 1970s, under the rubric of 'neoliberal globalisation': free trade, free export zones, free industrial zones, outsourcing, investment liberalisation, corporate takeovers and mergers, etc.

A frantic quest for dominance over the strategic and critical minerals value chain

In the midst of this frantic race, intense competition is taking place over who will dominate the global manufacturing and supply chain for strategic and critical minerals, which form the backbone of the electric vehicle batteries sector. In the face of China's dominance of these minerals, the US and the EU are working to break their dependence and to advance their national production capabilities. The US is currently reinforcing its strategic partnerships with its allies on critical metals, and, as part of its trade war with China, Joe Biden enacted the Inflation Reduction Act (2022). After Trump's inauguration, he launched his promised trade war, imposing 25 % trade tariffs on $34 billion worth of Chinese-made equipment, electronics, and advanced devices, including cars. China responded with countermeasures, imposing 25 % tariffs on 128 items of US imports to the Chinese market.On 4 April 2025, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced restrictions on the export of seven rare metal elements to the United States, namely Samarium, Gadolinium, Terbium, Dysprosium, Lutetium, Scandium and Yttrium. In the EU, the European Commission introduced the Critical Raw Materials Act and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in 2023.

These mechanisms vary, but they share two main points. Firstly, they rely on public policies and state intervention to support companies' investments in the electric vehicle batteries sector. This has brought to the fore debates regarding countries' industrial policies and has also stimulated discussion of green industrial policies at the global level. Secondly, they point to a general trend where the US and the EU (on the one hand) and China (on the other) are competing on the same playing field for domination of the supply chain for critical and strategic minerals and electric vehicles in the global market. This rivalry is fuelling an age-old debate about the nature of China's rise: is China still a country that is seeking to disengage from imperialism, or has its rise been the result of its imperialist character?

The paper argues that China has itself become an imperialist power that is seeking to secure its share of global hegemony, using the same mechanisms as other imperial powers (free trade, free export zones, industrial free zones, subcontracting, investment liberalisation, corporate takeovers and mergers, etc.)

Morocco: seeking to take advantage of this rivalry

Amid this competition, countries of the Global South are scrambling to join the ongoing, frenzied efforts to commercialise green solutions and to compete for resources. Like other such countries, Morocco is seeking to exploit the opportunities presented by global crises to improve its position in the international division of labour, by taking advantage of this competition and offering itself as a safe country for investment, as well as applying the solutions advanced by global capital to solve its own crises.

Since the early 1980s, Morocco has applied a structural adjustment programme that has resulted in the complete opening of its economy to global capital. This has led to the maintenance of the nation's long-established role within the international division of labour, which dates back to the colonial period (from 1912 to 1956), even as Morocco has sought to enhance its position within that division. In the area of green energy, Morocco presents itself as a promising location for the development of plants for such energies (wind, solar, and green hydrogen). Similarly, it is seeking to attract massive foreign investment to monetise strategic and critical minerals found within its territories, for the manufacture of batteries for electric cars. All of this is taking place within the framework of what is termed a 'green industrial policy' and the pursuit of 'green growth'.

Morocco's green growth ambitions are primarily directed towards the EU. Given that the EU has long been the primary market for Moroccan capital (exports and imports), Morocco is required to adapt, both temporarily and structurally, to changes in the EU market. Thus, after the EU announced its Green Deal, with its ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, Morocco quickly sought to attract investments in wind, solar, and green hydrogen farms within the country, with the aim of supplying renewable energy to European markets. This strategy was further reinforced in the aftermath of the Russian gas crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. When the EU announced CBAM, Morocco announced a Green Growth Programme to greenify its industry, under which it asked Moroccan exporters to adapt to CBAM so as to ensure continued access to the European market.

Morocco: A gateway for China to the West

It is within this context that Morocco is seeking to attract investments in critical and strategic minerals for the manufacture of electric batteries. The US–China trade war and the resulting geopolitical tensions, especially after Joe Biden's announcement of the Inflation Reduction Act, have left China in need of countries with open access to the US market, which means countries that have a free trade agreement with the US. One such country is Morocco. China is thus using 'friends-shoring': taking advantage of free trade agreements between the US and other countries (including Morocco) and establishing partnerships at various levels of the supply chain with companies in nations allied with the US. It is in this context that several Chinese companies have set up electric car battery projects in Morocco. These include CNGR, Gotion High-Tech, Shinzoom, Youshan, and Huayou Cobalt.

This participation in Chinese friend-shoring is what the Moroccan state and capital refer to as 'seizing opportunities' to better position themselves within the international division of labour, which – it is claimed – will power the long-awaited industrial take-off. As far as Morocco is concerned, China's investment in the critical minerals sector in Morocco is a historic opportunity to secure its long-awaited industrial leap.

Obstacles to Morocco's achievement of its ambitions

Moroccan capital and the Moroccan state have set themselves ambitious goals, but the achievement of these goals faces obstacles in the form of major structural issues. The most significant of these are the country's political economy (i.e. the monarchy's undemocratic control over economic decision-making), the issue of financing (a reliance on public finances and debt due to the lack of private sector initiative), and lastly, the issue of technology transfer, particularly the Moroccan economy's dependence on imperial centres, hence the tiresome repetition of the word "sovereignty" in recent state documents: "economic sovereignty", "energy sovereignty", "food sovereignty", etc.

The state (and large capital) relies on foreign investments to overcome the second and third obstacles, while the first obstacle (Morocco's political economy) is accepted by large Moroccan and foreign capital and international financial institutions, as the monarchy is the guarantor of political stability and social peace in a country located in a tense region. Nevertheless, the Moroccan monarchy is doing its best to mitigate any risks by reducing Morocco's dependency, through diversifying the country's so-called 'partners' – hence the country's openness to China.

It can thus be concluded that Morocco's strategy of positioning itself within the global strategies of various capitalist groupings and capitalising on the competition among the major powers will merely improve the country's position within the existing international division of labour. This contrasts with the bold claims made in state documents and propaganda, according to which Morocco is a rising power and will achieve industrialisation. The reality is that Morocco's large (globalised) capital, which relies on the monarchy, has already a guaranteed share in the investments in critical and strategic minerals, and thus it has no interest in imposing conditions on them (e.g. technology transfer) that could yield increased industrialisation, especially in the context of intense competition among the Global South countries to attract such investments. As such, Moroccan capital remains a 'subcontractor', and the most it can hope to achieve through current policies is to become a 'joint contractor'.

The mirage of social development

The social benefits of these investments (and of this strategy of positioning itself at the centre of the strategies of global capital and of exploiting the rivalries between its forces in general) are questionable. Permanent employment is one of the conditions for a fair green transition, but Morocco's experience thus far (including in its free industrial zones, in which cars, aircraft, and electrical wiring are assembled/produced) has shown that recent job creation in the country has largely been based on outsourcing/subcontracting. The jobs that are created are precarious, under flexible labour laws that were first introduced 20 years ago (not to mention the context of fierce repression of union activities in Morocco). Furthermore, most major projects, such as renewable energy plants, are capital-intensive and so mainly offer job opportunities during the construction and development phases. Once these stages are completed, most of these positions vanish, leaving behind only a limited number of high-skilled jobs.

The same applies to the impact of these investments on local communities, particularly in areas that are rich in underground resources (especially minerals). Practical experience has confirmed that these investments are harmful to local communities, as they deplete their resources (minerals, water, forests), while in return they offer only a very small number of jobs and a few crumbs of what is referred to as 'social development'. This explains why numerous protests have taken place involving the residents of affected communities, such as Imider and Bou-Azzer in the Ouarzazate region, and Taghighacht and Akanouanin in the Midelt region.

The illusion of a green transformation

Economic and social development and environmental sustainability only figure on the agenda of the monarchy and Morocco's big capital for propaganda and publicity purposes. All these actors care about is securing their share of the pie. The primary objective of Moroccan capital and of the Moroccan state in adopting green discourse is to obtain internationally pledged green funds, to signal its adaptation to the transformations taking place in its northern neighbour (especially after the EU's adoption of CBAM) and to avoid any obstacles that may hinder Moroccan companies' ability to enter the European market.

Recommendations

The paper concludes with a set of recommendations, acknowledging a volatile global context that is far from favourable, including the rise of the far right in Europe and Trump's victory in the US elections. It underscores that while energy (regardless of the source of that energy) can contribute to building a greener and more socially just future for Morocco, energy is not independent of the world's economic structure, its social framework, its state institutions, and the various forms of oppression that permeate them – class, racial, gender-based, and so on. Therefore, a sustainable green world cannot be dreamed of as long as capitalism persists.

In its recommendations, the paper emphasises the need for a green industrial policy that is based on local demand and that ends the prevailing export-based strategy and the country's dependence on imperialist centres (old and new). This is not a call for nationalist isolationism. We believe in ever greater cooperation among peoples, but this does not mean that the peoples of the southern shore of the Mediterranean should continue to bear the financial, environmental, and social costs of sustaining the northern shore, as they have done throughout history. The paper emphasises that the recommended green industrial policy necessitates cooperation among the countries of the Maghreb to leverage the integration of their natural resources as well as their financial and institutional potential. This regional cooperation must serve as a bridge between national policies, with the ultimate goal being ecological socialism, which can only be realised on a global scale. To support this green industrial policy, the paper's recommendations focus on the energy sector, transportation, the financial and banking sector, and employment policy. The paper emphasises that only a public policy that is subject to the oversight and supervision of citizens (including labour and popular communities) can transform these sectors into effective instruments for achieving a green industrialisation policy that ensures a just economic, environmental, and social transition.

Introduction

The world is witnessing an unprecedented movement towards a green economy, driven by dual movements for climate justice and for a fair environmental transition, on the one hand, and by capitalists' quest to adapt to an environmental crisis they themselves have created, on the other. Within this context, a frantic quest is taking place to capitalise on green solutions, while integrating them into the existing economic model.

This feverish movement is also being fuelled by the rivalry between traditional hegemonic powers (the United States, the European Union (EU) and Japan) and so-called 'rising' powers (mainly China). In this process, it is evident that the latter are applying the same mechanisms as have been used by the former since the late 1970s, under the rubric of 'neoliberal globalisation': free trade, free export zones, free industrial zones, outsourcing, investment liberalisation, corporate takeovers and mergers, etc.

Amid this competition between global predators, emerging powers are looking for a share in the spoils of the frenzied quest to exploit green solutions. Morocco is one such country that is seeking to exploit the opportunities presented by global crises to improve its position in the international division of labour – by taking advantage of this competition, offering itself as a safe country for investment, and by cultivating global capital solutions to its own crises.

Since the early 1980s, Morocco has been subject to a structural adjustment programme that has resulted in the complete opening of its economy to global capital. This programme has aimed to solidify the nation's already well-established role within the international division of labour, which was formally established during the colonial period (1912), while at the same time enhancing its position within that division of labour. In the area of green energy, Morocco presents itself as a promising location for the development of plants for such energies (wind, solar and green hydrogen).[1] Similarly, Morocco is seeking to attract massive foreign investment to monetise the strategic and critical minerals found within its territory, for the manufacture of electric cars batteries. All of this is taking place within the framework of what is termed a 'green industrial policy' and the pursuit of 'green growth'.

Morocco's green growth aspirations are primarily directed towards the EU. According to the European Commission's 9 April 2019 report on the implementation of the bloc's Strategic Action Plan on Batteries, cobalt, graphite and lithium production will be five times larger in 2050 than in 2018, as the EU seeks to meet the demand for electric batteries, particularly as regards the lithium used in such batteries. According to the International Energy Agency, demand for electric batteries will need to increase by 42 times to achieve the transition to carbon neutrality.[2]

The US market is also a significant player in this area. On 5 August 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order at the White House establishing the target of 50% of all vehicles sold in the US being electric by 2030.[3]

In the face of this urgent need for strategic and critical minerals and rare earth elements, China has emerged as a hegemonic power. In less than two decades, since 2005, China has bought strategic mineral mines around the planet and developed modern industries to enable it to export high-tech products. In 2021, its foreign direct investment (FDI) in the mining sector reached $125 billion. This is roughly comparable to the inflation-adjusted value of the US's Marshall Plan[4] that supported Europe after World War II.[5]

Against this background, this paper explores the competition among the Western powers (i.e. the US and the EU) and China over strategic and critical minerals, from the perspective of Morocco. The paper considers whether these resources, and the electric car batteries they are used in, genuinely contribute to a 'greener' economy, or merely reinforce the existing capitalist framework of extractivism, relentless production, land exploitation, and human labour abuses.[6] At the same time, the paper presents Morocco's position as a minor economic power with ambitions that exceed its capabilities within this intense global competition, highlighting the limits of the economic benefits that will accrue to it if it pursues its current policies, along with the repercussions for social development and the environment in the country. The paper concludes with recommendations on green industrial policies in Morocco.

1. What are strategic and critical minerals?

Despite the significance of the topic, discussions of Morocco's strategic and critical minerals remain scarce in the country itself. (This is a typical pattern for strategic sectors of the Moroccan economy that are enticing for private investors.) Thus, although the country claims it is set to receive substantial investments in the strategic and critical minerals sector, the website of the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development[7] makes no mention of the subject. All we were able to obtain was a study published in 2023 by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (a constitutional consultative institution established by the King in 2011), entitled 'Strategic and Critical Minerals: A Sector in the Service of Morocco's Industrial Sovereignty'. In this study, the Council defines these minerals as follows: 'According to internationally recognized classifications, a mineral is considered strategic when it is indispensable to a State's economic policy, security, energy strategy, or technological paradigm shift. Critical minerals, in addition to these criteria, are characterized by the fragility of their supply chain. These are therefore two interconnected concepts that are characterized by a dynamic and evolving nature.'[8]

One of the rare discussions of strategic and critical minerals that have taken place in Morocco was a panel discussion organised by the Policy Centre for the New South in June 2023. During this event, Abdellah Mouttaqi, a research professor at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University and a member of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, described strategic minerals as follows: 'The concept of strategic minerals is not new; it emerged between the two world wars when the U.S. Department of Defence identified a potential risk to the supply of these essential minerals (15 to 20 types) and consequently classified them as strategic. The concept gained renewed importance in the early 2000s, as several minerals became central to energy transition strategies and modern technologies. One defining characteristic of both strategic and critical minerals is that their value chain is dispersed globally. The regions where they are produced are not the same as those where they are consumed or processed. China remains the world's leading country in processing and refining these minerals.'[9]

A study by the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council reveals that Morocco harbours seven out of the 24 minerals recognised globally as strategic and critical. These are highlighted in red in the table below.[10]

TABLE 1:

Strategic and critical minerals (those found in Morocco in red)

Aluminium	Lithium	Rare earths	Phosphate
Borates	Magnesium	Tungsten	Copper
Chromium (Ferrochromium)	Molybdenum	Barite	Nickel
Tin	Niobium (Niobium Ferrochrome)	Cobalt	Potash
Germanium	Selenium	Fluorine	Sulphur
Graphite	Silicon	Manganese	Titanium

Morocco ranks ninth in cobalt production globally, and 11th in cobalt reserves. It is the second-largest producer of cobalt in Africa, after the Democratic Republic of Congo.[11] The strategic importance of cobalt lies in the fact that it is produced by only 17 countries. In Morocco it is mainly extracted from the Bou-Azzer mine (Ouarzazate) and is also extracted in the Taouz region (Errachidia town),[12] both located in the southeast of the country. Morocco's cobalt production is monopolised by a company that is owned by the Royal Holding Managem. This company is one of the world's top five producers of high-purity cathode cobalt, which it markets under the label CMBA.[13]

In addition to the aforementioned minerals, Morocco holds 70% of the world's phosphate reserves. Phosphate is one of the components in cheap low-range batteries, global production of which is dominated by China.[14] The Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP Group),a public company wholly owned by the Moroccan state, holds a monopoly over phosphate extraction, processing, and export in the country. In addition to its dominant market role, OCP presents itself as a pioneer in green industrial policies in Morocco. It introduced the '2023–2027 Green Investment Program' in December 2022.[15]

2. Morocco: A pawn in a game of giants

Russia's war in Ukraine increased discussion of the green energy transition, especially in Europe, which has historically been dependent on Russian gas. The war, and the ensuing ban on Russian gas, added to the debate about a carbon-free Europe.

In this context, it is relevant to note that any shift in global capital strategies when it comes to energy security and transition, is seen by Morocco's monarchy and its economic elites as an opportunity to expand their share of the global market, especially in terms of producing renewable energies for export to Europe.

Morocco has positioned itself as a platform for global capital investment in Africa, a fact reflected in the joint statement issued following the summit held between US President Barack Obama and King Mohammed VI on 22 November 2013 at the White House, which (in the section on Africa) noted: 'The two countries agreed to explore joint initiatives to promote human development and stability by ensuring food security, access to energy, and promoting trade on the basis of the Free Trade Agreement.'[16]

Morocco's position vis-à-vis global capital investment in Africa was further underlined in December 2013, when French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine (and others) published a document entitled '*Partnership for the Future*' at the request of the French Ministry of Economy and Finance, which included 15 proposals for a new economic dynamic between Africa and France, along with a set of extreme liberal ideas. The document urged the EU to double the number of economic partnership agreements between the EU and African countries, and expressed the hope that Morocco would act as an intermediary/subcontractor in regard to French trade policies in Africa.[17]

China took note of these two events and responded accordingly. The following year (2014), the King of Morocco received Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, at the Royal Palace in Fez. According to an official announcement the visit served to reaffirm the ties of friendship, solidarity and cooperation between Morocco and the People's Republic of China.[18] During a visit to China that same year, the president of Morocco's House of Councillors (the upper chamber of parliament) hinted at 'the attractive opportunities and available potential for major Chinese companies to invest in our country across all sectors, in a highly favourable economic climate, as well as to invest in Africa, given our country's strong economic presence on the continent and the solid political trust it enjoys among African countries on the continent.'[19]

As these events and statements make clear, the ultimate objective of Moroccan capitalists, and of the country's monarchy, is to serve as intermediaries for foreign capital, whether Western or Chinese, in its expansion into Africa – a role that officials dub 'brokerage'.

3. Morocco: Everyone's ally but favouring US imperialism

The competition currently taking place between major capitalist powers enables Morocco to manoeuvre strategically to maximise its gains, though it has so far always maintained a strong preference for American imperialism. As one observer has stated: 'The US-China rivalry serves Morocco's economic interests and boosts Chinese investment within the country.'[20]

A paper issued by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (a think tank that provides consultancy services to the state and to private actors) uses the phrase 'pragmatic partnership' to describe this posture. It explains: 'while most of Morocco's economic interests are still tied to Western countries, King Mohammed VI sought to diversify Morocco's international economic partnerships, with China as the ideal partner. The King emphasized the economic disparities inherent in the EU-Morocco trade relationship. Given the desire for economic diversification and a better negotiating status with the EU, the Chinese Belt and Road initiative came at an ideal time for Morocco.'[21]

In April 2021, a committee appointed by the King released a document entitled 'The New Development Model', outlining the major strategic directions of Morocco's development model. The document discusses the country's relations with major global powers, which it characterises as taking place within the framework of 'a strategy that reinforces our country's regional and international positioning.'[22]

In regard to the US, the document recognises the need 'to strengthen the Atlantic dimension of the Kingdom's foreign policy by deepening partnership ties with the United States of America, through the full mobilization of the potential of the Free Trade Agreement and the available trade and investment opportunities.'

As for China, the document states as follows: 'partnerships with emerging countries, especially those with which Morocco has strategic partnerships, such as China, India and Russia, should be strengthened, given their position in the current and future geopolitical and geo-economic balances of the post-COVID-19 world. In this context, recent steps have been taken to strengthen Morocco's ties with China, including the Kingdom's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and the launch of the Mohammed VI Tangier Tech project.[23] Further deepening these relations is essential to establishing them as a strategic lever for enhancing Morocco's regional and international positioning.'

Morocco was the first African country to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2017 with China, Morocco has been able to forge partnerships with Chinese investors in important sectors, such as infrastructure, advanced industries, and technology. Between 2011 and 2015 there was a significant increase in Chinese investments in Morocco, of almost 195%, with a 93% increase from 2014 to 2015 alone.[24]

In any capitalist economy, competition is self-evident, and this is even more the case in an imperialist global economy that is marked by sharp geopolitical tensions. It is therefore to be expected that the US is reluctant to see its most significant competitor, China, making substantial investments, or establishing industries, in a country (like Morocco) that it deems to be an ally. In view of this understanding, Morocco's strategy of favouring the US as a geopolitical and economic partner is likely intended to reassure the latter. This is especially necessary, from Morocco's point of view, because it depends on support from the US regarding the hottest political issue for the Moroccan regime, Western Sahara. Morocco is very keen to maintain balanced relations and to attract diversified investments that do not affect key political decisions. Such political decisions are what matter most to Washington in its relations with Morocco, being of greater significance for it than economic ties.

The EU is also unlikely to view China's growing economic presence in Morocco favourably, especially as Morocco's strategic choices are increasingly aimed at reducing its dependence on the EU. Indeed, the EU has become increasingly alarmed by Morocco's demonstrated autonomy. An article published on the European Council on Foreign Relations' website and republished by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis states: 'Morocco's diverse alliance base and its role as a key regional security player make it less likely to accept EU criticism of its domestic policies – although it will likely continue to heed recommendations on its economy for so long as it receives EU funding.'[25]

The issue of migration is an example of Morocco's displeasure with this EU criticism, with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita stating that "Morocco is neither Europe's gendarme nor its guardian" and stressing that the management of migration should be based on 'partnership'. But partnership according to him is not selective: "partnership means first and foremost understanding the strategic interests of the partners".[26]

Morocco is aware of the importance of its strategic and critical minerals in the ongoing conflict between the US and China. This is clear from a paper published by the Ecole de Guerre Economique,[27] which states that 'a merciless economic war is being waged for control of strategic minerals, including lithium [...] Welcome to the epic multi-billion-dollar battle between powers vying for control of the global lithium market.' The paper notes that the US Department of Energy has 'provided billions of dollars in funding for the establishment of domestic value chains for lithium batteries, which is critical to the country's transition to clean energy. The American government's goal is to ensure that more than half of the vehicles sold on its territory are electric and to ensure the country's independence by fighting against Chinese dominance in this sector.'[28]

Morocco seeks to take advantage of this competition to increase its share of the share of the investments currently being made by private and government investors searching for rare and strategic minerals. In this highly fraught context, some of these investments, including Chinese ones, are being made in Morocco.

4. Strategies of international capitalist powers in regard to strategic and critical minerals

a. The American strategy

The US strategy regarding strategic and critical minerals aims to secure America's supply of these minerals and to reduce its dependence on China for them, while working to enhance the US's domestic production capabilities, particularly in the fields of mineral refining and processing. In pursuit of this strategy, in recent years the US has worked on strengthening strategic partnerships with its allies concerning critical minerals. In 2022 it established the Mineral Security Partnership with several foreign partners. The goals of this partnership are to diversify minerals supply chains, reduce the US economy's reliance on China, develop investment along the minerals value chain, and promote adherence to the best standards in social and environmental regulations in the minerals sector.[29] The context for this partnership is succinctly underlined in a report published by OneCharge, a California-based US manufacturer of lithium-ion batteries, which states: 'it is estimated that the United States alone will need 500,000 tons of unrefined lithium annually by 2034, just to operate electric vehicles. The USA is producing only a small portion of that quantity today.'[30]

b. The EU strategy

The EU strategy regarding strategic and critical minerals is based on trading in global minerals markets and establishing a framework to promote the sustainability of minerals' supply chains. The EU strategy also puts more emphasis on the development of recycling, as compared to the US. It focuses on 30 minerals. For 21 of these, 50% or more of the EU's supply comes from outside the continent.[31]

A Transnational Institute (TNI) document outlines how the REPowerEU plan will lead to an increase in demand for critical raw materials. In order to minimise the risk of supply disruptions, the European Commission introduced the Critical Raw Materials Directive (CRMA) in March 2023.[32] The TNI document says that "unlike other EU policies, the legislative proposal went through the EU Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament in less than a year, with final adoption on 12 December 2023. The CRMA establishes a framework to ensure access to "secure and sustainable supplies of critical raw materials and to protect the economic resilience of the Union", defines a list of critical and strategic raw materials and sets targets for their supply and processing to be achieved by 2030.[33]

c. The Chinese strategy

In regard to strategic and critical minerals, China is pursuing a government-driven commercial and industrial approach that simultaneously focuses on civil and security objectives. It seeks to secure a strong position across all stages of the minerals value chain, up to the final products. China is pursuing a policy of building strategic reserves of minerals that are of great importance to the country, based on public investments and state-backed support and funding mechanisms.[34]

China's focus on these minerals is not new. As the so-called 'new world order' emerged following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, China became fully aware of the global importance that strategic and critical minerals would assume in the future. Indeed, in 1992, Deng Xiaoping, former Chinese premier, stated: 'The Middle East has the oil, China has the rare earths.'[35]

China has come a very long way since 1992, and the journey has been greatly rewarding for the country, yet its ambitions remain high: as one commentator has pointed out, under its ten-year plan, Made in China 2025, 'China aims to become a global leader in all future technologies (batteries, electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, and more) by 2049 – the centennial anniversary of the People's Republic of China's foundation.'[36] Indeed, according to a report published by OneCharge, China holds 'the lion's share of the global lithium-ion battery supply chain and has increased its market share by another 12% over the past two years [2020 and 2021]. There is a real risk that China's role in lithium could become equivalent to what OPEC was for oil – except that, at least in the case of oil, the United States was itself a major producer.'[37]

China dominates 65% of the world's refined lithium production, through its two industry giants, Jiangxi Ganfeng and Tianqi Lithium, which have climbed to first and third position in the market.[38] Moreover, 80% of the minerals required for manufacturing electric vehicle batteries are processed in China, giving its economy a massive competitive advantage, given that it owns half of the world's electric vehicle fleet and exports a significant share of its production, particularly to Europe.[39] The Ecole de Guerre Economique reports that 'China's dominant position in this future energy market is not at all pleasing to the West, especially the United States and the European Union, which explains the ongoing geostrategic rivalries between these economic powers.'[40]

China's current capabilities reinforce fears among the Western imperialist powers of a potential supply chokehold by China. This concern has an historical precedent: in September 2010, 'China's sudden reduction of its rare earth export quotas—as a major retaliation measure against Japan—caused the prices of these secondary minerals to soar by 400% to 800% of their initial value.'[41]

In conclusion, the Western (US/European) and Chinese strategies make these powers rivals in the battle over strategic and critical minerals. The rivalry centres on who can dominate the supply chain for these minerals, and the global market for electric cars. The US has taken an aggressively 'defensive' position, while China adopts an equally aggressive 'offensive' position. This rivalry is discussed further below, in the section titled 'The limits of the contrast between China and the West'.

d. Does Morocco have an independent economic strategy?

At first glance, official discourse in Morocco suggests that the country has an independent economic strategy. However, reality suggests the opposite may be the case. Morocco remains a very small economy, ranking sixth in Africa in terms of GDP, behind Ethiopia, Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt. Moreover, its productive economy is predominantly based on agriculture and the extraction of raw materials.[42] Against this background, Morocco's primary aspiration is simply to be chosen as a target location for investment by competing international corporations. The Economic, Social and Environmental Council's 2023 report (referred to earlier) summarises this 'strategy' as follows: 'The post-COVID-19 world will bring profound changes, signalling the emergence of a new global order with operational and regulatory patterns different from those seen so far. This new world requires **foresight and flexibility – not only to mitigate risks but also to seize available opportunities**. It also requires a high degree of flexibility to continuously adapt to new international dynamics, whether economic, financial, technological, health-related, or environmental'.[43] In this quote, the words 'adaptation', 'flexibility', and 'seizing opportunities' conceal the reality of Morocco's dependence on global capital, and the fact that it is now attempting to diversify the poles of that dependence.

This modest ambition, which is being amplified in domestic propaganda, was highlighted by *The Independent* (UK) in an article entitled 'Chinese firms eye Morocco as way to cash in on US electric vehicle subsidies'. The article states: 'As the world transitions to electric vehicles, Morocco may appear to be a surprising beneficiary as China, the United States and Europe compete for market share.'[44]

Morocco is therefore striving to create favourable conditions for foreign investment. One example of this, in the field of mining, was the amendment to Law No. 33.13 on Mines in July 2015,[45] which lifted obstacles to mining investment, chief among them being land ownership issues. The law now allows mines to be established even if the holder of the mining licence has not reached an agreement with the original landowner. For example, in the summer of 2024, residents of the village of Taghighacht/Akanouanin in the High Atlas protested against the activities of the Chinese-Moroccan company Sino-Maroc Mining Investment Management. The state intervened in favour of the company, which filed a lawsuit against the protesting residents for obstructing its work, to which the local authorities responded by summoning ten activists for questioning.[46]

Another example of Morocco's strategy of attracting foreign investment is the Investment Charter, issued on 2 December 2022, which has introduced mouthwatering incentives that are highly attractive to foreign investors. These include the unrestricted transfer of net profits (without limits on the amount or duration) and the development of industrial, logistics, commercial, touristic, and service zones that respond to investors' needs. Morocco's approach is a form of tendering, whereby, as a developing country, it competes with other developing countries to offer the most enticing privileges and incentives, while reaping lesser economic, social and environmental benefits – except for the commissions secured for political elites and ruling classes. While such facilitation measures may succeed in attracting foreign investment, they ultimately serve as channels for wealth extraction, funnelling locally generated resources to imperialist centres and perpetuating neocolonial dependency in new forms.

5. Morocco: A gateway for China to the West

Mohcine Jazouli, the Moroccan Minister Delegate to the Head of Government, responsible for Investment, Convergence and the Evaluation of Public Policies, has listed some of the reasons why Chinese groups should choose Morocco as a location for investment. One reason he cites is the more than 50 free trade agreements Morocco has entered into.[47] These agreements offer substantial advantages for Chinese firms, especially as regards accessing the US market. As Morocco is a free trade partner of the US, its raw materials qualify for the sourcing targets required for electric vehicles sold in the US, which makes it eligible to receive subsidies of up to $7,500 under President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act.[48] In this way, as Abdelmonim Amachraa, a supply chain expert who formerly worked in the Moroccan Ministry of Industry and Trade, has said, Morocco is taking advantage of its 'ability to coexist when a link can't be found between China and the United States.'[49] By taking advantage of free trade agreements between the US and other countries, and partnerships (at various levels of the supply chain) with companies from nations allied with the US, Chinese firms have found a way to maintain access not only to the US market but also to the European market. They are now seeking to take advantage of 'friends shoring'[50] to circumvent increasing constraints imposed on them by Western markets.

China's efforts to benefit from the trade advantages provided by friendly countries of the US, including Morocco, are one way in which it is benefitting from the free-market mechanisms created by the US to secure its global dominance (as discussed later in this paper). They demonstrates China's remarkable adaptability – a quality that has been alluded to by Thorsten Lahrs, President of Europe for Chinese electric vehicle battery manufacturer CNGR, one of the largest battery cathode producers[51] in China: 'To ride the wave of the IRA [Inflation Reduction Act], you have to execute fast and comply with its regulations [...] We have flexibility to be able to comply with all the changes in interpretation or rules.'[52]

6. Chinese investments in the electric vehicle battery industry in Morocco

On 3 July 2024, *The Independent* (UK) reported that 'After the United States passed new subsidies designed to boost domestic electric vehicle production and cut into Beijing's supply chain dominance, Chinese manufacturers began investing in an unlikely place: Morocco.'[53] In September of the same year, CNGR announced a $2 billion plan to build what it called a 'base in the world and pan-Atlantic region' in Jorf Lasfar (southwest of Casablanca), in a joint venture with the Moroccan royal family's investment group Al Mada,[54] whose products are exported to the American and European markets. In 2023, the Chinese-German battery-maker Gotion High-Tech signed a deal with Morocco for a $6.4 billion investment to build Africa's first electric vehicle battery factory in BouKnadel (near Rabat),[55] which is expected to have an annual production capacity of 'about 100 gigawatt-hours of electric vehicle batteries.'[56]

Other investments in the electric vehicle battery industry in Morocco include investment by Youshan Company, a joint venture backed by the Korean giant LG Chem and China's Huayou Cobalt.[57] According to a 2023 press release, this company intends to 'expand its business to include lithium-manganese-phosphate-iron (LMFP) cathode materials, a blend of manganese and LFP that offers greater capacity and better production than LFP cathode materials.'[58] According to the *le Desk* website,[59] the project's proposed location is Tarfaya and Laayoune, in the Western Sahara – the disputed region claimed by the Moroccan regime and the Polisario Front. Furthermore, in March 2024, the Moroccan Ministry of Economy and Finance signed an investment agreement with China's BTR New Material Group, worth more than $3 billion, under which the group aims to build a new battery factory in Morocco.[60] The factory, expected to have an annual production capacity of 50,000 tons of cathodes, will be located in the industrial zone of the Tangier Automotive City.[61] BTR New Material Group has announced that its investments in Morocco are intended to service the European and US markets.[62]

Another Chinese company, Shinzoom, plans to invest nearly $500 million in building an anode factory in Tangier Tech.[63] Shinzoom is a leading Chinese manufacturer of electromagnetic metal equipment and has established itself as the third largest Chinese producer of anodes. This agreement was signed on 14 May 2024 at the Bank of Africa headquarters in Casablanca, between Bei Tao, President of Shinzoom, and Othman Benjelloun, president of the Tanger Tech Development Company (SATT).[64]

As for the Chinese giant CATL, there is no evidence that it has made any investments in Morocco. Reports that circulated in the Moroccan press – while carefully avoiding mentioning CATL by name – had suggested that the company was planning to establish the largest electric battery manufacturing plant in Morocco. During the US-Africa Business Summit in Marrakech in July 2022. information about CATL's intensions were leaked by Ryad Mezzour, Morocco's Minister of Industry and Trade, and nearly caused a government crisis between him and Mohcine Jazouli, the Minister Delegate to the Head of Government, responsible for Investment, Convergence, and Evaluation of Public Policies. Jazouli accused Mezzour of 'undermining negotiations with the foreign industrialist behind the battery factory project', which led CATL to decide to establish its plant in Hungary.[65]

7. Do these investments have any economic and social implications for Morocco?

The propaganda regarding Chinese investments in Morocco's strategic and critical minerals sector tends to drown out any rational discussion. (This is also the case with other investments – green hydrogen, for instance.) For example, after the agreement between the Moroccan government and the Chinese-German company Gotion High-Tech was signed, Mohcine Jazouli (the Minister responsible for Investment, Convergence, and the Evaluation of Public Policies) announced that the company would create 30,000 jobs over 10 years.[66] Similarly, during the signing of the investment agreement with the Chinese group BTR, the government declared that this would boost the country's industrial take-off, especially since the Kingdom aspires to become the continent's automotive industry leader within the next two decades.[67] However, it is an important question whether this propaganda is merely wishful thinking, or if these ambitions are grounded in reality. An interesting study entitled 'Deindustrialization in the Middle East and North Africa', by Colin Powers, provides a critical analysis that challenges these dreams and aspirations by offering a more grounded perspective. Colin Powers links early deindustrialisation in the MENA region to the global economic recession that began in the late 1960s and the neoliberalism that clouded the region's prospects for industrialisation.[68]

a. Precarious jobs rather than sustainable ones

In a valuable study titled 'Survival of the Greenest: Economic Transformation in a Climate-conscious World', Amir Lebdioui examines the quality of jobs created in the renewable energy sector. He writes: 'Besides the quantity of jobs created, there is also the matter of the quality of job gains that arise from the energy transition, where we can observe further unevenness. Decent jobs, that is, with good wages and safe work conditions, are necessary to ensure a just transition. However, most of the jobs created in Brazil, for instance, are in sugarcane plantations for biofuel production and in construction, operations, and maintenance activities, which tend to be temporary, low-paid, and low-skilled.'[69] The same applies to large-scale investments in clean energy in Morocco, which are capital-intensive projects that generate thousands of jobs only in the initial construction phase. Most of these jobs (according to the Moroccan Labour Code) are temporary and are managed through subcontracting and intermediary firms. At a later stage, only a handful of technical posts remain, and these often go to foreign workers.

This pattern mirrors the findings of a report issued in 2023 by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (The report is funded by the EU) on the southern Mediterranean region, which states: 'FDIs [foreign direct investments] in the region are not yielding the expected results, with most investments concentrated in capital-intensive sectors. Hence, the impact of FDIs in job creation, labour productivity and structural change might not be to the level expected by policymakers in the region.'[70]

In line with this report, promises regarding job opportunities arising from foreign investment in Morocco have often proven empty. First, the Moroccan Labour Law of 2003 dismantled stable employment, replacing it with various forms of flexibility and precariousness, primarily through outsourcing and subcontracting. Second, while it was touted that 100,000 jobs would be created in the free economic zones (established in partnership with China) where electric battery companies are located, particularly the 'smart model city' in Tangier, and which are home to 200 Chinese companies that specialise in the manufacture of automotive and aircraft equipment and parts, these zones have in fact become hubs for precarious employment.[71]

In 2018, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council issued a report titled 'Subcontracting and Employment Relations: Promoting Decent Work and Sustainability.' This report critically examines employment conditions in the free zones, stating that 'compliance with the Labor Code and social protection is not necessarily a conclusive indicator of decent work, especially when considering certain forms of precariousness resulting from subcontracted employment and non-standard contracts. This can also be observed in outsourcing practices.'

Morocco often leverages the appeal of its 'human resources' to attract foreign investments, pointing to low labour costs, flexible labour laws, and an education system tailored to produce a skilled and disciplined workforce. This makes clear that discussions about the benefits for employment from foreign investment, including in the country's electric vehicle battery industry, serve merely as a smokescreen, concealing who are the true beneficiaries of these investments: foreign corporations and their local partners.

Chief among these local partners is Al Mada, a company owned by the royal family, which controls Managem, Morocco's largest mining investor. A significant part of Managem's workforce at the Bou-Azzer cobalt mine in Ouarzazate is employed on fixed-term contracts. In the summer of 2024, these workers staged a strike after Top Forage company – the subcontracting company that hired them on behalf of Managem – failed to pay their wages and sought to lay them off.[72]

b. The illusion that foreign investment contributes to the country's industrial take-off

In 1989, *Le Monde* published an article with a striking headline: 'Morocco, A New "Dragon" at the Gates of Europe.' However, the article itself highlighted what it saw as the greatest obstacle to achieving this ambition: 'the concentration of Moroccan private capital in real estate speculation rather than industry'. It offered a solution to this dilemma: 'liberalizing private initiatives.'[73] More than 30 years later, and despite Moroccan capital and the state being obsessed during this period with the dream of industrial take-off, the stated dilemma has not been solved. According to a 2019 report by the Central Bank of Morocco, 'private investment remains weak, despite the many incentives granted.'[74] In fact, the main investor in the country today is not the private sector but the state and its dominant public sector.[75]

The magic solution to this lack of private investment that the Moroccan elites have come up with is foreign investment. In 2019, the King appointed a committee to develop a 'new development model', after acknowledging the failure of the old one. In April 2021, the committee issued its general report, which states that 'implementing the proposed transformational projects of the New Development Model requires mobilizing international partnerships—whether to boost investments or to support technology and skills transfer—within a framework of technical and strategic cooperation, guided by a shared development approach.' In support of this perspective, the State has presented in its documents (in particular the report on the new development model mentioned above) previous experiences, such as those of China and the countries of South-East Asia, which began their industrial development by relying on foreign investment.

But what will make the world's major capitalist poles (including China) play their envisioned role of international partners in this new model?

The benchmark methodology adopted by this Committee, and the invocation of China in the late 1970s as an example, are simply unrealistic. China, where the Communist Party came to power in 1949, had undergone a national and social revolution that removed the obstacles to industrial take-off inherited from its feudal and colonial past. By contrast, Morocco's political independence (in 1956) was the result of the defeat of a national liberation movement, led by a bourgeois party, the Istiqlal Party, which consented to a bargain whereby full power was transferred to the monarchy – and which counted on cooperating with that monarchy to modernise the country. The result was, in fact, the opposite: the monarchy ensured Morocco's continued economic dependency on its former coloniser, France. Many decades later, Morocco is now seeking to diversify its dependence in order to expand its range of manoeuvre. It is clear that both the monarchy and big capital around it have been instrumental in hindering the country's actual industrialisation. This capital is highly internationalised and deeply integrated with global capital and thus occupies a particular position within the international division of labour. As a result, it has little interest in the structural transformation of the economy, as long as its share of the pie is guaranteed.

Temptations, such as Morocco's geographical proximity to the EU, its political stability, and its cheap labour, all tend to lead the country to being a mere 'subcontractor', rather than a future 'dragon'. At best, large private Moroccan capital currently aspires to 'move from its current role as subcontractor to that of joint contractor, in anticipation of international markets' needs.'[76]

This issue is not specific to Morocco: it is, rather, the logic of global capital everywhere, which seeks to monopolise technology. For example, in Hungary (which competed with Morocco for investment from the Chinese giant CATL), the aforementioned TNI paper notes that 'this cooperation [between China and Hungary] does not include the sharing of technology that would allow the development of domestic industrial capital.'[77]

In a 2023 paper titled 'Driving the Dream: Morocco's Rise in the Global Automotive Industry', the Policy Centre for the New South lists constraints on this rise. It states: 'the lack of upstream integration capacities in the automotive sector at the national level reinforces Morocco's dependence on Asian equipment manufacturers. Moreover, there are many examples around the world of what can happen if a country becomes too dependent on one other country or a few MNEs. Therefore, foreign participation, with such a large share, in clean energy and electric vehicle infrastructure new investments would be a risky bet.'[78]

Morocco's bet on foreign investment in the transfer of technology is indeed a risky one, since foreign capital monopolises that technology. Competition among other countries to attract foreign investment in the clean energy and electric vehicles sectors also pushes Moroccan capital (including the royal family) to accelerate the completion of projects and, consequently, to prefer to buy off-the-shelf projects (pre-packaged).[79] Foreign companies have a monopoly on studies, designs, equipment and machinery, civil engineering, and construction and installation work, while the host country (Morocco in this case) is left in the role of subcontractor or, at best, a joint contractor. The costs of this arrangement are very high for Morocco, as exemplified by the massive solar energy project Noor Ouarzazate, which relies on expensive and complex technology imported from Germany. Since it was launched in 2016, this project has resulted in an annual shortfall of around €80 million, which is covered by the public purse.[80]

One of the mechanisms of industrial policy deployed by the Moroccan state is 'industrial compensation'[81], which is included in the public procurement reform plan presented by the Moroccan government in 2014 and covers the defence and security, industrial, energy and high-tech sectors, with the aim of increasing the local content of investments.[82]On this mechanism, a 2014 document from the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies stated: 'Given the importance of industrial compensation for any country's economic development policy, the use of this practice has increased significantly since 1980 and has become more widespread'. Since 2014, In line with this view, the Moroccan state has made industrial compensation a general requirement for all public procurement exceeding a certain threshold. A first concrete example of this was the contracts launched by the Moroccan solar energy agency (Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy – MASEN), which provide for 30% local integration[83]. As observers have reported: 'The second case is that of Alstom, which has pledged to develop its purchases from Moroccan railway companies at up to 6 billion dirhams/$600 million out of a total cost of 20 billion dirhams/$2 billion (33% local integration), but the same document acknowledges that this mechanism is rarely implemented.'[84]

To sum up, Morocco's competitive advantages are the country's political stability, its modern infrastructure, its skilled and young workforce, and its readiness to welcome foreign capital to 'strengthen the country's industrial transformation.'[85]

c. The automotive industry: A driving force behind industrial take-off?

As mentioned above, Morocco seeks to be 'the continental leader in the automobile industry.'[86] In successive industrialisation plans since the beginning of the third millennium (the Industrial Take-off Plan 2005–2009, the National Charter for Industrial Take-off 2009–2015, and the Industrial Acceleration Plan 2014–2020), the automotive industry has been given the most prominent position. The state's strategy in the sector has been to attract major car manufacturers to Morocco. The extensive use of public finances to establish related infrastructure has made this possible. This is alluded to in a 2023 Bank of Morocco report, which states 'in 2014–2023, exports from the automobile sector registered an average annual increase of 14.1% to 148.2 billion dirhams. This development reflects tangible growth in production thanks to capacity building both at the Stellantis plant in Kénitra and at the Renault Group. According to the statistics of the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA), the number of cars produced at the national level increased by 9.7% on average per annum to approximately 536,000 in 2023, a level that is higher than in countries such as Romania (513,000), Hungary (507,000) or even Portugal (318,000).'

Yet lurking behind these figures is the reality that Moroccan industrialisation is structurally weak, since it is wholly reliant on foreign investment. This reliance dates back decades: for example, under the Import Substitution Policy and the Moroccanisation Policy adopted in the five-year plan of 1973–1977, Morocco relied on a partnership with foreign capital to establish the Moroccan Automotive Industry Company (SOMACA).[87]

Ten years after it positioned foreign, capital-driven auto industry (and other so-called 'global professions') as the engine of development, Morocco's progress is disappointing. According to the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies: 'The fact that some industrial sectors have benefited from this dynamic (automobiles, aviation, etc.) at the expense of others (agro-industry, textiles, etc.) has made the overall result somewhat disparate and even below expectations.'[88] Morocco remains dependent on an export-led growth strategy that makes the automobile sector subject to cyclical fluctuations in the global market, and that curbs any structural transformation of Moroccan industry.

d. On Morocco's green industrial policy

The Moroccan state is a master at riding the waves of global capital's strategies. Whenever something new comes along, it is quick to issue regulations and laws to keep up.

This is part of what the Moroccan Ministry of Industry and Trade calls 'the development of green growth', launched by the National Agency for the Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (ANPME) and the Moroccan Agency for Energy Efficiency. This program is one part of the Industrial Recovery Plan 2021–2023, which includes as a theme enhancing the Kingdom's position as a circular, carbon-free industrial base. The plan aims to 'assist small, micro and medium-sized industrial enterprises in developing carbon-free processes and products, support the emergence of new green industrial sectors and reduce the level of industrial pollution.'

This, in turn, is part of Morocco's response to the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)[89] which was introduced by the EU as it seeks to strengthen its transition to a green economy after the COVID-19 pandemic, by setting the goal of achieving carbon neutrality under the Green Deal by 2050. CBAM went into effect in 2023. To avoid any obstacles the mechanism may pose to Moroccan companies, the Ministry of Economy and Finance recommended that 'Moroccan exporters should coordinate with their European partners to register [with EU customs authorities] to avoid any possible restrictions on access to the European market.'[90]

The phosphate giant OCP is at the forefront of Morocco's pursuit of so-called 'green growth'. In 2023, OCP launched a Green Investment Programme for the period 2023–2027. According to the OCP website, this programme aims to 'increase the OCP Group's mining and fertilizer production capabilities'. The website states that OCP is 'also committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2040', for which a total of $12 billion in funding has been allocated.[91] The OCP Group's green investment efforts were highlighted by the World Bank in its 'Climate and Development in Morocco' report, published in October 2022, which states: 'The state-owned phosphate company [...] has significantly reduced its carbon footprint and has set a goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040'. The report recognises that this is a response to CBAM, stating: 'Chemical exports to the EU (mostly fertilizers) could fall by between 2% and 3% under the EU's expanded CBAM. Morocco has taken decisive steps to green its energy- and water-intensive phosphate industry'.

Of course, these aspirations regarding 'green growth' are just that: aspirations. OCP remains the country's largest polluter and has rejected all forms of accountability – even parliamentary accountability – for its pollution. In March 2019, an 11-page summary of a lengthy report by the judges of the Court of Accounts was made public, but many details were withheld due to 'the sensitivity of the aspects addressed by the task and the nature of the data used, the publication of which could harm the interests of the Group.'[92] This brings to mind the famous bailout of US banks during the 2008–2009 crisis: OCP is considered 'too big to fail.'

e. Perpetuating the debt trap

The 1989 article in *Le Monde* referred to above pointed to the constraints that weighed on the Kingdom's economy at that time, the foremost of which was debt. Now, in the mid-2020s, Morocco continues to have large public debt. In order to attract foreign capital, the state has allocated huge public funds to developing infrastructure. In 2024, the country increased the size of its infrastructure projects by 42% on an annual basis to $6.3 billion, covering water, ports, roads and government buildings.[93] This is financed by heavy borrowing. The sustainability of the country's debt was questioned in a 2024 research paper by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, titled 'The Belt and Road Initiative and Morocco: Opportunities and Challenges for Strengthening Economic Relations with China'. The paper states: 'One of the primary concerns is debt sustainability, as BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] projects are typically financed through substantial loans from Chinese banks. Unless managed prudently, Morocco will struggle with a crippling debt.'[94] Just like Western creditor institutions and public and private lenders, China is not known for its leniency when it comes to debt and interest payments. This is in an article by John Shaul entitled 'China's economic ascendancy in Africa threatens US imperialism.'[95] It is an assertion that cannot be ignored by an institution such as the Bank of Morocco, which in a report published in June 2024 states that 'for several years, China has been providing bailout loans as a last resort to finance debt servicing and since 2015 it has become the main creditor of emerging and developing economies. The latter's external public debt, owned by Chinese public creditors, which was only $1 billion in 2000, reached $355 billion in 2017.'[96]

The beneficiaries of these loans, for which payment and interest are funded by the Moroccan taxpayer, are Chinese companies, along with large Moroccan capital, including entities owned by the ruling family.

f. Al Mada: A royal octopus determined to carve out its own slice of the pie

The company Managem, which is a part of Al Mada (which is owned by the Moroccan royal family), has a foothold in all major investments that come into Morocco.[97] This includes, for example, the planned investment by CNGR Advanced Materials in building a battery component production and recycling complex in Jorf Lasfar, in partnership with the Mada Royal Investment Fund.[98] The complex aims to produce enough components for the production of one million electric vehicles per year.[99] The primary and ultimate beneficiary of these types of investments (aside from the Chinese company in this case) is Morocco's large private capital, with the royal family's company at the forefront. This trend is not limited to the battery production sector: it extends to all sectors, especially green energy (wind, solar, and green hydrogen energy), and also mining[100] – a sector which Managem dominates.

Managem’s mining operations have a history of provoking social conflict and labour unrest. A decade ago, the residents of Imider, in the southeast of the country, organised a sit-in that lasted for years against the company's seizure of their land and water resources.[101] In the summer of 2024, workers employed by Top Forage, an intermediary company working on behalf of Managem at the Bou-Azzer (Ouarzazat) and Koudiat Aicha mines in the Draa Sfar Mine area (near Marrakech), went on strike as well. [102]

g. Diplomatic gains

The relationship between the Moroccan monarchy and major global economic powers (including China) is not limited to the accumulation of material profits. The monarchy reaps political benefits from its partnerships with foreign capital, especially concerning the Western Sahara issue. An example of this was the 31 October 2024 vote at the UN Security Council on Resolution 2756 on the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).[103] Algeria had proposed an amendment to the resolution text drafted by the US, calling for expanding MINURSO's mandate to include human rights issues. The proposal was rejected, and the text put forward by the US was adopted with the support of 12 countries. China was one of the 12.

This is just one example of the Moroccan monarchy's use of what it calls ‘economic diplomacy’: opening the country's doors to the companies of major world powers, in order to garner their support for its claims to sovereignty over Western Sahara.

In addition to this economic diplomacy, the Moroccan regime exploits political tensions to its advantage, and while it has always favoured American imperialism, it does not put all of its diplomatic eggs in one basket. For example, on the Taiwan issue, the Moroccan regime has repeatedly affirmed its adherence to the One China policy. In 2022 it issued a statement reiterating Morocco's position in support of China on this issue and highlighting its principled stance of respecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other UN members.[104]

8. The mysterious Tropic Seamount

At the end of 2016, the British research vessel *James Cook* was sailing 500 kilometres off the northern coast of Western Sahara. On board were a team of scientists. *Medias24* published rapt coverage of the event: '…submerged a kilometre beneath the ship, in permanent darkness and crippling pressure, lies a dead volcano: the Tropic Seamount. A treasure trove flourishes on its flanks: a multi-coloured underwater forest. […] This crust, some 12 cm thick, is the other treasure – rich in rare minerals that help drive the modern economy. The Tropic Seamount alone may contain enough cobalt to power 277 million electric cars, which, at present, represents 54 times the world's fleet of such vehicles, and enough tellurium to build solar panels that could generate more than half the UK's electricity.'[105]

Immediately thereafter, Spain sent exploratory expeditions to the Tropic Seamount area to document its request to the United Nations to extend its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The request was based on the continuity of the continental shelf, which extends to the Canary Islands. The Moroccan regime reacted swiftly, deciding in February 2019 to definitively establish its maritime boundaries in accordance with international maritime law. This process was completed in 2019 with the Parliament's (urgent) approval of two laws relating to Morocco's maritime borders, defining the Kingdom's EEZ as extending 200 nautical miles into the sea, including along the coast of Western Sahara.

A paper issued by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis commented on this delimitation, stating that 'although it initially appears to be a sovereign decision reflecting Morocco's commitment to protecting its interests and ensuring respect for its sovereignty over its territories and national waters, a deeper look at the decision to delimit maritime borders reveals other geopolitical dimensions in the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, primarily linked to the potential presence of rich natural resources.'[106]

Less than a year later, Morocco signed the Abraham Accords, following which it officially normalised relations with the Zionist entity (Israel). In exchange, it received Trump's recognition of the Moroccan monarchy's sovereignty over Western Sahara. The discovery of the Tropic Seamount's wealth was another motivation for the US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. As made clear by *Medias24*, the US had decided that it would be better to give the Tropic Seamount to a small, weak but authoritarian state, Morocco, which is subject to constant blackmail over the Western Sahara issue, than to allow Spain to claim it: 'The Americans were certainly not going to let a manna of cobalt and lithium belonging to a friendly country, with reciprocal common interests, drift towards a European community or perhaps to the side of the rising sun (China), which would once again threaten the development of its industrial sectors.'[107] The US, always proclaiming 'America First' and keen on its global monopoly, would not prioritise turning a small, dependent country into an industrial power.

9. The green illusion

The conclusions of global climate conferences have repeatedly made clear how these conferences are dominated by fossil fuel companies. At the same time, the superpowers and other big polluters have so far shown a complete lack of seriousness about actually implementing even the smallest commitments made at these conferences. 'Green' talk is just an illusion: or, rather, just another way to ensure the flow of profits and to capitalise on proposed solutions to the environmental crisis in a way that is in accordance with the interests of these powers and their companies.

One example of this trend is investment in the electric vehicle sector. To prove that they are indeed moving towards a green economy[108], major countries and their companies point to their large investment in strategic and critical minerals as inputs for this sector. But the question arises: are these investments actually green? This point is underlined in a controversial article by Michael Löwy, titled 'Discussing the Climate Crisis: Dubious Notions and False Paths.'[109] In the article, Löwy outlines the illusions and falsities behind discussions of green investment. For example, on the topic of electric vehicles, he states:

'This is yet another example of a half-truth. Yes, electric cars are less polluting than thermal cars (gasoline or diesel), and therefore less ruinous for the health of city residents. However, from a climate change perspective, their record is much more mixed. They emit less CO2 but contribute to a disastrous "everything with electricity"'. He goes on: 'Electricity is produced in most countries using fossil fuels (coal, gas, or oil). Low emissions from electric vehicles are being "offset" by increased emissions from increased electricity consumption.'[110] As outlined by Löwy, widespread use of electric motor vehicles leads to more intensive mining of the minerals used in their manufacture, as well as more extensive use of fossil energies. This, in turn, involves creating 'green' sacrifice zones to 'sustain' those who make and become the end users of these vehicles – especially in the manufacturing centres.

A major reason why China has chosen Morocco, among other countries, as a target for its investment in the electric vehicle sector is in order to circumvent the environmental costs imposed by the EU. For example, Thorsten Lahrs, CEO of CNGR Europe, has declared that obtaining environmental permits in Europe would take 'several years', involving court proceedings and appeals. By contrast, in Morocco, '[CNGR Europe has] made significant progress in a month', according to Lahrs. This is one form of 'cost externalisation', and of shifting costs onto weaker peoples, workforces and environments. This has been a key feature of colonialism and imperialism since their earliest days.

China's stance on environmental issues shows the extent to which it too acts in accordance with the global imperialist logic and reveals that it is not fundamentally different from other imperialist powers. As Ulrich Brand and Markus Wesen so aptly point out in their book *The Imperial Mode of Living*, China's middle and upper classes have adopted '"northern ideas and practices of a good life." Their need for resources and the externalization of the consequences associated with carbon dioxide is increasing. As a result, they are progressing to compete with the North, not only economically, but also environmentally. The result is imperialist environmental tensions, as reflected in global climate and energy policy.'[111]

10. China's rise: In the footsteps of the US

The competition over strategic and critical minerals and rare earths has revived an old debate about whether China is imperialist in nature, or if it instead continues to embody an alternative to imperialist hegemony/delinking. China is emerging on the global competitive landscape as a pupil that is following in the footsteps of, and even surpassing, the master. According to Marxist economist David Harvey, China's relations with the US remain 'in most cases more complicated' than such an either/or dichotomy. Nevertheless, Harvey recognises the transformation/coup in the Chinese economy that took place at the end of the 1970s: 'We must not forget that it was the upper classes in China who sought help from the United States to carry out their coup, and it was they who accepted neo-liberal restructuring as the path to progress and prosperity.'[112] At this time, the Chinese state opened the borders of its 'territorial empire' to foreign capital and technology, to contribute to a kind of 'primitive accumulation' of capital, after a quarter century of a 'socialist' experiment (which had coincided with the quarter century of booming Western capitalism known as the Glorious Thirty Years). This primitive accumulation involved the exploitation of the working classes (especially millions of rural workers)[113] in the country, and the destruction of China's environment. As outlined by Harvey, China took advantage of the global restructuring of the capitalist economy, initiated by Western imperial powers to overcome the long-term recession that began in the early 1970s, and, as Harvey puts it, 'China's spectacular emergence as a global economic power after 1980 was partly an unintended consequence of the neoliberal transformation of the developed capitalist world.'[114]

Now that its (Chinese) student has gained the upper hand, the US is seeking to review the rules it established in the last quarter of the twentieth century, commonly called 'neoliberal globalisation'. The trade war and emphasis on spheres of influence, which started at the end of Barack Obama's presidency and intensified during the first presidential term of Donald Trump, did not stop under Joe

Biden, and it looks set to be even fiercer now that Donald Trump has returned to the White House. In November 2024 during his election campaign, Trump announced his intention to impose a hefty 60% tariff on goods made in China in order to force US and foreign companies that make their products in China to quickly move their supply chains to the US.'[115] Indeed, Donald Trump launched his promised trade war by announcing an immediate increase in US tariffs on Chinese imports to 125 %, on top of the 20 % the US president had previously imposed on China - bringing the total tariff to 145%. China's Ministry of Finance raised tariffs on US goods to 84 %.[116]On 4 April 2025, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced restrictions on the export of seven rare metal elements to the United States, namely samarium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, lutetium, scandium and yttrium.[117]

In fact, the global market started to get crowded with the arrival to the scene of this new major player, China, which began to seek not only its share of the global market, but also a reconfiguration of power relations globally. This new situation has come about in part as a result of the US being consumed by a prolonged economic crisis since 2008 and by costly foreign wars (Iraq and Afghanistan). The US is looking at China ascending by the same rules that it (the US) had established and is realising that those rules are now detrimental to its interests. Therefore, the US has initiated what is being called 'de-globalisation'. In this regard, the US seems to be operating under an idea put forward by Immanuel Wallerstein, who has stated: 'This created a first elementary contradiction in the system. While the interest of all capitalists, taken as a class, seemed to be to reduce all costs of production, these reductions in fact frequently favoured particular capitalists against others, and some therefore preferred to increased their share of a smaller global margin rather than accept a smaller share of a larger global margin.'[118] Thus, the neoliberal rules of globalisation, devised by the US to reduce production costs in response to the economic recession of the late 1970s, have benefited China without requiring that it subject its own economy to those same rules.

Dissatisfaction with this situation is evident in an IMF paper published in February 2024, which expresses concern about the reliance of China's industrial policy on 'state-owned enterprises' and the mechanisms used (large-scale support for priority sectors, preferential credit, research funding, cooperation between state entities, tax exemptions for innovation, as well as incentives for strategic manufacturing and science and technology companies and sectors). The paper recommends China adopt 'pro-market reforms' and 'further market liberalization, particularly in services, and [ensure] that competition policy is applied equally to state- and privately-owned firms. In addition, [China should adopt] policies that would allow greater firm entry and exit could boost business dynamism and foster innovation, within both manufacturing and services.'[119]

The US response to China's economic rise has been a defensive countermove against the international market and its principles – free trade, protectionism, and customs tariffs – which it had championed for decades. We now seem to be witnessing a historical paradox: China, once described by theorists of Third-Worldism as the leader of disengagement from the global market, has become increasingly committed to accessing it, while the US, the longtime leader of that market, has grown fearful of its own rules.

Regarding strategic and critical minerals, and electric vehicles, the US Inflation Reduction Act introduced by Joe Biden in 2022 seeks to decarbonise the US economy, re-shore critical mineral supply chains, and break the US's dependence on China. Meanwhile, in September 2023, the EU launched an investigation into subsidies for Chinese electric vehicles[120] and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (2023).[121] However, to bypass this law, China is taking advantage of one of the mechanisms of globalisation established by the US decades ago: free trade agreements. Like the US, China is now engaging in 'friends shoring': sourcing minerals from mines and supply chains developed in friendly countries or those with which it has free trade agreements. So, to circumvent the Mechanism and the US Inflation Reduction Act, China is investing in electric battery production in countries that have free trade agreements with both the US and the EU, such as Morocco, Hungary and Canada.

11. The limits of the contrast between China and the West

Whether China is imperialist in nature is an issue that is subject to intense debate. Some observers like Pierre Rousset categorically assert that China is indeed imperialist,[122] while others like Caludio Katz confine imperialism to the US and its allied bloc.[123] Others such as Gilbert Achcar argue that the debate remains unresolved,[124] and still others like Samir Amin claim that China is still on the path of delinking, and is working to protect its national project.[125] The most realistic definition of 'imperialist' remains that of Walter Rodney, in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*: 'imperialism means capitalist expansion.'[126] Unlike those who limit imperialism to its unilateral military aspect, Rodney emphasises that 'imperialism is primarily an economic phenomenon that does not necessarily lead to direct political dominance or colonization. 'This aligns with Lenin's view that 'modern imperialism will persist beyond the end of colonialism associated with empires. Moreover, it can be argued that imperialism, as a fully developed global capitalist economy, can only be completed by independence from colonialism in Asia and Africa, thereby making room for the dull compulsion of economic forces, both internationally and locally, as mechanisms replacing the political and legal coercion of colonial rule.'[127] Colonisation-free imperialism is the 'purest/intelligent stage of imperialism', to paraphrase Lenin's old concept of 'imperialism [as] the highest stage of capitalism'. This is precisely why those who ally themselves with China and deny it is an imperialist power are mistaken.

Let us remember that the rise of American imperialism and its global hegemony coincided with the biggest ever wave of decolonisation. This included the decolonisation of China, which became 'communist' after a national revolution against Japanese imperialist occupation. But contemporary China is simply not the China of 1949. As Chris Hann and Keith Hart explain in their book *Economic Anthropology*, there has been a 'taming of the socialist revolution in China [...] the post-1979 reforms [...] stripped it of its socialist character.'[128]

These inter-imperialist conflicts and rivalries take place in a highly interconnected global economy. Geostrategic conflicts between global powers can muddle people's perceptions and obscure the intertwined economic interests of capitalists within these powers. This can lead to political conclusions that do not help promote the global struggle against imperialism, by fostering alignment with one pole or the other. Indeed, a simple reality is often overlooked: China is no longer fighting to free itself from imperialist domination (as was the case in the first half of the twentieth century) but rather to impose its own global hegemony – using the same imperialist hegemonic mechanisms that peoples across the world have struggled, and are continuing to struggle, to rid themselves of.

As far back as 2007, Robyn Meredith wrote that 'the planetary economy has indeed become so interconnected that a hit on China and a scapegoating of India could do serious damage to the U.S. economy.'[129] Capitalists from all countries understand the depth of the ties between countries and sometimes oppose their rulers' policies to isolate or restrict trade with other nations (particularly China). For example, in the face of the US Inflation Reduction Act, the objections of sections of the US private sector have been evident. A study of the act by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies[130] states that 'the success of these governmental initiatives[131] depends heavily on the willingness of their private sectors to align behind their respective government's geopolitical priorities to decouple from China. So far, however, the opposite seems true. New partnerships between Chinese private or state-owned companies and Western private companies reveal some reluctance of the Western private sector to back their governments. [...] The legal restrictions and economic incentives seem not efficient enough to deter cooperation with Chinese entities, and some go as far as to delocalize their headquarters just to be able to deal with Chinese companies.'[132]

Adam Tooze underlines this point, in an article titled 'Can Western carmakers derisk in China?', in which he discusses the strength of the link between German capital and China's car production sector. In the face of German geostrategic concerns, Tooze comments that 'China is not a basket you do or don't put your eggs into. China is not a market that you can derisk from, or balance with other markets. It is the market, it is the country where both in terms of trends of consumption and production, the future of the global industry is likely to be decided. [...] You can certainly leave. You fight to stay because you fear losing touch with the direction of the global industry. Exiting or deprioritizing China would be a defeat with strategic consequences.'[133]

The interconnectedness of the global economy, including the central role of China in that economy, does not mean that the contradiction between the two great powers (China and the US) cannot escalate towards a catastrophic explosion. World War I broke out within a highly interconnected global economy. While the forces of capitalist production have long surpassed the limits of national borders, they periodically find themselves constrained by them due to national government policies. Imperial warfare is one mechanism by which global capitalism periodically re-adapts to those borders. The economic tensions that have emerged since the Great Recession of 2008–2009, which have deepened due to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, Russia's war on Ukraine, and the trade war between the US and China, among other factors, are fuel for a global political fire that could explode due to an unforeseen spark.

Being part of this global imperialist system, China does not offer an economic, social and environmental alternative to the hegemony of Western imperialism. Both are two sides of the same imperial coin.[134] Alignment-driven narratives side with one side of that coin without considering the coin as a whole. Focusing on geopolitics serves to obscure the destructive model China is applying, and to conceal its internal contradictions as a capitalist state that is built on the repressive exploitation of its working class, and that is also causing severe environmental destruction. China is applying the same practices as the traditional colonial powers applied in the global South, especially in Africa.[135] China's dominance of the strategic and critical mineral chain, for example, is based on 'the environmental costs that China has agreed to bear.'[136] For example, benefitting from less restrictive environmental standards than those applied in Western countries, and bearing significant environmental costs, China has secured for itself a key place in the lithium refining sector, allowing it to meet the massive needs of the electric vehicle industry.[137]

Of course, this does not deny the intensity of geopolitical conflicts. However, an analysis that focuses on these conflicts while ignoring class logic, capital interests, the degree of integration of these interests, and the contradictions of capitalism at the global level, will fail to recognise the complexity our world, and can also lead to misleading analogies, such as those contained in a research paper issued by TNI entitled 'The "new Darwinian world" of the energy transition: CATL, capitalist strategies and emerging state-capital alliances.'[138] This paper projects one of the most significant achievements in the natural sciences (Darwin's theory of natural selection) onto the realm of social sciences (economics and politics). However, there is no need to borrow from the 'animal' world to describe the 'bloodshed on the ground', as the TNI study puts it, caused by conflicts and competition among humans being – or, more precisely, among capitalists and capitalist states.

Perhaps a more accurate analysis would be one that draws on Thomas Hobbes – an early theorist of the bourgeoisie – and that extend his ideas to the global level. Hobbes drew on Biblical traditions to develop the concept of the Leviathan as a framework for analysing the structure of the state. He portrayed the state as a coercive political system in which the rule of law and individual rights are preserved. Seen from this perspective, in the post-World War II global order, the US assumed the role of the 'global Leviathan', a coercive system based on control of the international order and a monopoly on the use of force, which is deployed to uphold the rights of other capitalist states against the then Soviet Union. China may now be seeking – should its economic influence prove sufficient – to become the new global Leviathan, replacing the former holder of that role.

However, there is another prospect that is perhaps closer to realisation than this replacement of one Leviathan by another. This is the vision sketched by Franz Leopold Neumann (also based on the Biblical tradition) in his study of Nazism: 'The Behemoth and the Leviathan in the apocalyptic Biblical vision, of Babylonian origin, represent two monstrous beings of enormous size. The Behemoth rules the land (the desert), and the Leviathan rules the sea; the former is male, and the latter is female. The animals of the land revere the Behemoth, and the animals of the sea glorify the Leviathan as their masters. The two monsters represent the chaos. According to apocalyptic writings, both the Behemoth and the Leviathan will reappear before the end of the world. They will extend the rule of terror, and then God will destroy them.'[139] This grim, apocalyptic vision of the world may help illustrate the current global alignment around the world's two poles: the Leviathan is the US/Atlantic Axis; the Behemoth is China/the Silk Road. Seen in this way, only the power of the working classes and the oppressed peoples can overcome the impending catastrophe predicted by the Torah: chaos, the rule of terror and the destruction of human civilisation. This opposition brings to mind the old slogan coined by the German revolutionary Rosa Luxembourg: 'socialism or barbarism'. Updated to 2025, the choice is now ecological socialism or barbarism.

Today's China is far from the socialist utopia envisioned by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century, or by the communists who took up arms in China in the late 1920s. The Chinese Marxists' utopia of a communist China seems to be giving way to a bourgeois dystopia, just as Adam Smith foresaw a pluralist world in which China could once again outcompete Europe's fragmented national markets, rather than a unified global economy.[140]

The current situation does indeed look grim. In the EU, the far-right has made electoral gains; in the US, Donald Trump is now President; and in China, the authoritarian 'Communist' Party reigns supreme. All over the world, there are either climate change deniers in power, or those who claim to address the climate crisis but who are doing so within the same economic and social model that has caused it.

Attempts to persuade capitalists and their governments to adopt environmentally friendly policies will only lead to solutions that preserve the very capitalism that destroys the environment: i.e. solutions based on the commodification of nature. In the past, there were attempts to persuade capitalists to be compassionate (utopian socialism), or to humanise capitalism (by infiltrating the World Social Forums -WSF through its NGO-isation). Now we are witnessing an attempt to greenify capitalism. These are all efforts to convince capitalism to stop being capitalist, and to convince imperialism to stop being imperialist.

Energy (regardless of the sources of that energy) may well contribute to building a future that is greener and more socially just, but energy is not independent of the world's economic structure, its social framework, its state institutions, and the various forms of oppression that permeate them: class, racial, gender-based, and so on. Therefore, a sustainable green world cannot be dreamed of as long as capitalism exists.

The fact that this perspective is not currently dominant is due to the ongoing crisis of the labour movement, the fragmentation of working peoples' resistance, and that resistance's wariness of any political radicalisation, sometimes to the electoral advantage of the extreme right. However, this does not mean we should abandon the effort to connect struggles on the ground and partial solutions to that broader historical anti-capitalist horizon, as it is the only one capable of saving the planet. This calls for bringing together labour and popular struggles on a global scale, rather than siding with one imperialist bloc or another. One recent example of what this will involve comes from China, and specifically from the Chinese working class.[141] In 2018, at the height of the Trump-led trade war against China, workers at Jasic Technology launched a union campaign with the support of student union activists, under the slogan: 'Workers are not fighting a trade war, but a war for their rights'. These Chinese workers' class instinct was stronger and more intense than the insights of the sharpest geopoliticians. Moreover, although they were reacting in a semi-conscious, instinctive manner, these workers' actions recall the left wing of the early twentieth-century labour movement (the Zimmerwald Left), who refused to align with bourgeois governments during World War I and called instead for turning the imperialist war into a revolution against those governments.

12. Recommendations for Morocco

Before turning to some recommendations for Morocco (in terms of a green just transition and sovereign industrialisation), it is worth bearing in mind the words of Ulrich Brand and Markus Wesen, in *The Imperial Mode of Living*: 'There is a wealth of experience, as well as starting points, for developing alternatives to the dominant ways of thinking and to our current social relations. These are reflected in the myriad practices of solidarity, intellectual interventions, and current and historical experiences that can be viewed as the ferment of a solidary mode of living. The future can never arise through a master plan. It must develop gradually with the prospect of another, better world. This move towards alternatives requires courage in thinking and acting, a certain optimism and productive self-criticism.'[142]

We begin our set of recommendations with the issue of land. Land everywhere in Morocco must be returned to its rightful owners: small farmers and pastoralists. The country has witnessed a massive process of land dispossession through legal means (such as through the classification of state-owned and forest domain lands), coupled with the massive commodification of these lands. A significant portion of large-scale mining and green energy projects is located on lands belonging to ancestral communities, which are being displaced after having been dispossessed of their land. By contrast to this prevailing practice, to ensure balanced economic development that creates jobs and preserves the ecological balance; while also responding to national development needs, the exploitation of minerals and other resources must only take place with the consent of local communities

The second recommendation relates to Morocco's industrial policy, which, despite the claims regarding 'green growth' programmes, continues to be based on the needs of the global market rather than the needs of the domestic market and the population. The 'green investment' policy adopted by the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP) hides the reality of the country's extractive strategy. OCP aims to conquer global markets by exporting phosphate products or providing fertilisers for Morocco's own export-oriented, capitalist agricultural sector.

In fact, the state's industrial policy, including the so-called green industrial policy one, is based on the same old logic: incentivising the private sector/private capital and harnessing public funds to jumpstart it. By contrast, there needs to be a revival of public industrial programmes that act as pillars of the green transformation, that are not a burden on local communities and workers, and that are monitored by citizens (workers and the public). These must be funded by mechanisms that do not increase the country's dependence on imperial centres. Such mechanisms could include the cancellation of foreign debts; compensation for historical debt (colonial and climate) for which the imperialist core nations are responsible; and progressive taxes on wealth, etc.

Thirdly, we propose a genuinely green industrial policy that encourages the development of green technologies. This, in turn, requires a categorical break with the logic of the current export-led growth strategy, which is imposing adaptation to the EU's environmental policy (CBAM) in order to preserve the position of Moroccan exporters in the European market, rather than a genuine policy to preserve the environment.

Fourthly, we call for an industrialisation policy that will establish an industrial structure that breaks Morocco's dependence on the major capital centres. Since the 2008–2009 crisis, there have been repeated calls for replacing Morocco's export-led growth strategy with a growth strategy geared to domestic demand. A 2013 UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report sets out a valuable argument in favour of such an approach.[143]

This recommendation is not a call for nationalist isolationism, since cooperation between peoples is of paramount importance. However, such cooperation should not mean that the peoples of the southern shore of the Mediterranean bear the financial, environmental and social costs of maintaining the northern shore (i.e. continuing the pattern of recent centuries). Moreover, the resolution of the major issues that underpin any industrial policy (such as climate change, debt and global trade rules) lies at the global rather than the local level. The intermediate link between these levels is the Maghreb framework, referring to greater regional cooperation among Maghreb countries. (see the tenth recommendation, below). Ultimately, it is impossible to imagine eco-socialism in a single country, as the national level can only be a starting point for the struggle: an internationalist perspective must remain both the guiding principle and the ultimate goal.

Fifth, Morocco's energy policy should prioritise the provision of clean energy to the domestic market, especially since Morocco continues to rely on imported fossil fuels for its energy and electricity needs, while the large renewable energy projects in the country target European markets. The energy sector has been liberalised for many years, with private importers given free rein to supply gas and oil, and with the door now opening for private companies to produce and distribute electricity from renewable sources. By contrast to this private sector-led approach, bringing energy production and distribution back into the public sector would make it possible to enact a green energy policy that contributes to the country's industrialisation and reduces its energy dependency.

The sixth recommendation relates to urban policy and city planning. Much of Morocco's capital is invested in massive urban expansion, with a focus on securing profits for major real estate groups. This has led to the expansion of cities and their boundaries, with an accompanying huge expansion in the use of private cars (of Morocco's 4.5 million cars, 68% are in private ownership),[144] in parallel with the state's privatisation of urban transport lines. A green manufacturing policy will not be effective without the efficient expansion of public transportation that uses clean energy, as well as the implementation of heavy tax policies on private cars and high interest rates on loans for purchasing them. There have been many suggestions on this subject. For instance, the 2021 Economic, Social and Environmental Council report includes the following recommendations for public mass transit: 'Promote eco-friendly alternatives to personal vehicles and internal combustion engines, such as urban buses/BHNS, mini-buses, intercity buses, and trams (small, light, and agile), while increasing intermodal and multimodal transportation modes ranging from mobility-parking spaces to station-based car sharing and park-and-ride lots.'[145] The powerful interests of car companies and banks that finance car loans will be an obstacle to enacting Wthis recommendation.

Seventh, there is a need for real food sovereignty in Morocco – not the sort referred to in state documents, which is merely the application of the same big export-oriented capitalist perspective under the guise of food sovereignty. Export capitalist agriculture is the biggest source of greenhouse gases in Morocco and is the main polluter of the country's water and soil. Breaking away from this pattern and redirecting agriculture to meet primarily domestic market needs would be a significant contribution to greening the economy. Efforts to green the industrial sector should therefore go hand in hand with similar efforts in the agricultural sector (i.e. the agri-food industry).

Eighth, it is recommended to break with the current fiscal policy, which favours large borrowers, while avoiding any external borrowing policy linked to debt conditionality. This means putting the banking and financial sector into the public sector, under the supervision of institutions that are subject to popular and civic oversight. This is in contrast to what is happening now, with the central bank being independent and not even subject to parliamentary oversight. The current fiscal policy includes financing through loans and also so-called official development assistance (ODA), both of which contain conditionalities that require countries of the South to enter into the international financial market. By contrast, we suggest that Morocco should receive compensation for colonial and ecological debts, which would allow for the recovery of what was looted by former colonial powers (and which is still being exploited by new ones).

Ninth, we recommend a policy of sustainable full employment that takes into account those who will be the victims of the green transition. A large segment of the working class is afraid they will lose their jobs if the state gives up its nature-destroying and polluting policies. The capitalist private sector will not address this issue, so a public employment policy that puts a social and green industrialisation policy at its centre is necessary. Cooperation with labour unions can bring this perspective to environmental issues – something that is currently lacking in Morocco.

Tenth, the aforementioned proposals and recommendations must take into account a Maghreb-wide perspective on the green transition. The fragmented Maghreb market further deepens the dependence of its countries on traditional capitalist centres (the EU and the US), as well as emerging ones (China). At the same time, this fragmentation prevents these countries from taking advantage of the complementarity of their natural resources, in order to fulfil their economic potential. It is impossible for small markets (like Morocco) to implement a green transition based on their individual potential alone. The Moroccan monarchy and capital are currently responding to this dilemma by seeking to gain a foothold in the (geographically close) European market and the American market. However, this approach to industrialisation collides with historical structural obstacles, mainly the country's dependency and the dominance of these global centres over industrialisation and green manufacturing (technology and financing). In light of this reality, there is a pressing need for a Maghreb-wide approach to the green transition. As Amir Lebdioui emphasises, 'in smaller economies, where domestic market demand is often insufficient to achieve economies of scale, green economic transformation necessitates access to larger markets in other countries, as well as multilateral coordination toward regional development.'[146]

These recommendations need social forces to carry them forward, primarily the labour movement and rural communities whose social struggles have swept Morocco for the last three decades. The purpose of this study is to therefore contribute to these struggles by offering perspectives on a just environmental, economic, and social transition in Morocco, the wider Maghreb region, the global South and beyond.

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