

The Role of Dakar – N'Djamena- Port Sudan Rail Road in Reviving Traditional Hajj Routes

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INTRODUCTION

This paper makes a survey of this railroad network with the view to analyze the tremendous potentials that cut across the regions in question (West Africa and The Middle East) with the view to propose the benefits accruable from this great endeavor whenever it is harnessed.

It is our belief, the importance of this railroad network cannot be overemphasized. Bearing in mind the region it covers, the volume of trade it is envisaged to attract and the human cargo it will carry, and the magnitude of its importance. It is the belief of the two authors of this paper to quote extensively from the proposal as represented by the architect commissioned to make an architectural design of the entire project. And we quote.

HISTORICAL HAJJ ROUTES FROM WEST AFRICA TO SAUDI ARABIA THROUGH SUDAN

Pilgrimage routes from West Africa provided channels for cultural, economic and spiritual exchange between West African and Middle Eastern Muslims, and facilitated religious exchanges in both the sending and the receiving societies. While some of these religious exchanges were orthodox in nature, others were more popular in their orientation and involved a variety of beliefs, practices, and organizations.

The long-standing pilgrimage highway known as the “Sudan route” ran from the cities of Katsina and Kano in what is now Nigeria through the Maghreb–toAïr (Agades), the Fezzan, and Aujila – into Egypt or else across the Nile.¹

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¹Umar Al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972, 104. For the broader context of the history of the hajj, see F.E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

In the travelers' literature, Arab and European alike, West African pilgrims who took this route were called Takurina (or Takari), as mentioned, for example, in Burckhardt's *Travels in Nubia*, published in 1819:

The greater part of the Takruris who visited Mecca come from the school of Darfur, the principal of which are the Konjara, in the neighborhood of Kobba. All the black Hajjis from the west of Bagarma, from Burno as far as Timbuctu, either travel with the Fezzan, or great Maghribi pilgrim Caravan, or proceed by sea from the coast of Barbary. The motives for undertaking the journey are partly a sincere desire to fulfil the precepts of their religion, and partly the ambition of enjoying afterwards the credit which the Hajj confers in their own country upon those who have performed it, and which of course is in proportion to the difficulty of the journey.¹

The pilgrim traveler prepares himself for this arduous journey and takes stock of his needs for a trip that will take him several years and in some cases his entire life and after bidding farewell to his family he sets out traversing on roads that cut across various regions and climates.

These routes are three in number, but we are primarily concerned with the Western axis which comprises of the road that people from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso follow through Maiduguri, N'Djamena, Massena (Bagirmi), Waddai (Abbassha) up to Port Sudan via such Sudanese cities as Jina, Niyala, Fashir, Zalinje, Ubayit, Khartoum, Gaddarif, Kasala and Port Sudan.

The pilgrims in the ancient time used to be under the protection of the For, Daju, Tunjur and Masalit kingdoms, where they are treated well and given special consideration when they arrive.

Afterwards, the pilgrims who wish to proceed to Makkah follow the moving caravan via the populace road "Darb Al'arba'in". Others on the other hand, used that opportunity and stayed to continue with their lives in Sudan especially the Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri and other tribes from West Africa.

¹John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1819), 406–08. As Burckhardt mentions, this term was first used to describe Africans coming from Darfur and Sudan, even though many of them were West African in origin.

THE DAKAR-PORT SUDAN RAILROAD PROJECT

The realization of a Dakar-Port Sudan Railroad connection is a project sponsored by the OIC, with the aim of providing an important transportation link between the OIC Sub-Saharan countries, crossing the whole of Africa from West to East, with the aim of fostering multi-lateral economic development and expanding global prosperity. The project was launched by Sudan in 2005, presenting it to that year's OIC summit. Subsequently, at the 11th session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held on 13-14th March, 2008 in Dakar, Senegal, the resolution was taken from the promotion of the new Dakar-Port Sudan railway infrastructures, crossing the territories of **Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Sudan**. The Summit also decided to include the Republic of **Djibouti** in the Feasibility Study of this project.

The following 35th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers held in Kampala, Uganda on 18-20th June, 2008, decided to extend the links to the Republic of **Guinea, Cameroon, Uganda and Gambia**, thus creating a real transportation corridor that, besides providing the uninterrupted connection between the Atlantic and the Red Sea (and, thereafter, the Indian Ocean), would increase traffic facilities through the main ports of the Gulf of Guinea, such as Lagos, Conakry and Yaounde. Given the position of Port Sudan in relation to the facing Saudi Arabia region, a future step for a fast connection to **Jeddah** (and therefrom to Makkah and proceeding eastward crossing the Arabian peninsula), can be considered as a subsequent objective.

The project was then inserted in the Ten-Year program of Action (TYPOA), under the plan of action as intra-OIC trade, social and environment development among the Africans OIC countries.

Finally, the 32nd Session of the Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs (4-6th April, 2009) welcomed the request of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to be a member of the Committee for implementing the project.

Further steps were the Meeting of the Stakeholders on the Project, convened by the General Secretary in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (26th May, 2010) to explore the modalities for the implementation of the Road Map approved by the Ministerial Conference, which was held in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan. On 8-10th December, 2009.

Finally, a meeting in Addis Ababa on 23-24th March, 2011 between an OIC Team comprising the Representatives of the General Secretary and IDB and Senior Officials of the AU (African Union) and NEPAD (which already had a plan for a highway corridor from Dakar to

Djibouti) was dedicated to discussing the modalities for an OIC/AU joint action.

The main outcome of this meeting was the agreement by the AU to partner with OIC on the Dakar-Port Sudan Railway in all areas, including its studies, financing and implementation.

RATIONALE

The identification of the Project is based mainly on the following two considerations.

- Transport volumes and traffic in the OIC Member States, especially in African countries, remain far less than those in the developed countries. The OIC African member States still have to go a long way in strengthening their transportation network, in particular the railway systems. The globalization of the economic process has made the role of railway transport more crucial for the national economic growth of these countries. Moreover, the OIC African countries are aware of the vital role that transport could play in strengthening economic and social ties of the Continent. The movement of goods and services is considered an essential factor to consolidate bilateral relations among the countries, thus reinforcing and enhancing their mutual economic cooperation. Therefore, the governments of these countries have to come to a common agreement to further improve these ties by the development of a regional railway link on agreed routes.
- Transportation is one of the most important infrastructure requirements that are essential for economic opportunities growth. It plays an important role in making or breaking the comparative advantage of an economy. In light of the recent international economic trends, such as globalization of markets, international economic integration and removal of barriers to business and trade and increased competition, the role of transportation has become even more crucial. Moreover, the benefits of the creation of an efficient transport corridor infrastructure goes beyond the improvement of trade competitiveness, access to international markets and economic growth and also includes other social benefits, such as poverty reduction or access to health and education facilities.

On the other hand, the dependence on the development of a road network in the concerned Members States and the subsequent requirements for road vehicles, have not been able to meet the demand for moving bulk loads over a long distance.

In point of fact, the main requirements for the countries cross by the new corridor concern the transport of agricultural and mining products, which require appropriate means to haul bulk loads over a long distance; and the import-export commodity movement requires the availability of a transportation system suited for bulk consignment with minimum time and cost. These needs for efficiency cannot be assured by a transport based on a road network only, but would also require, apart from the use of a relatively large fleet of vehicles, the availability of resources devoted to assuring a satisfactory maintenance of their safe conditions, as well as the running conditions of the vehicles.

These characteristics can better be represented by an efficient railway transport system that, although characterized by its high cost to construct and equip, as well as requiring a higher degree of management capabilities than roads, in the long run, it would provide a realistic transport cost, particularly for long haul transportation (and given a reasonable density of traffic) several times lower than road transport.

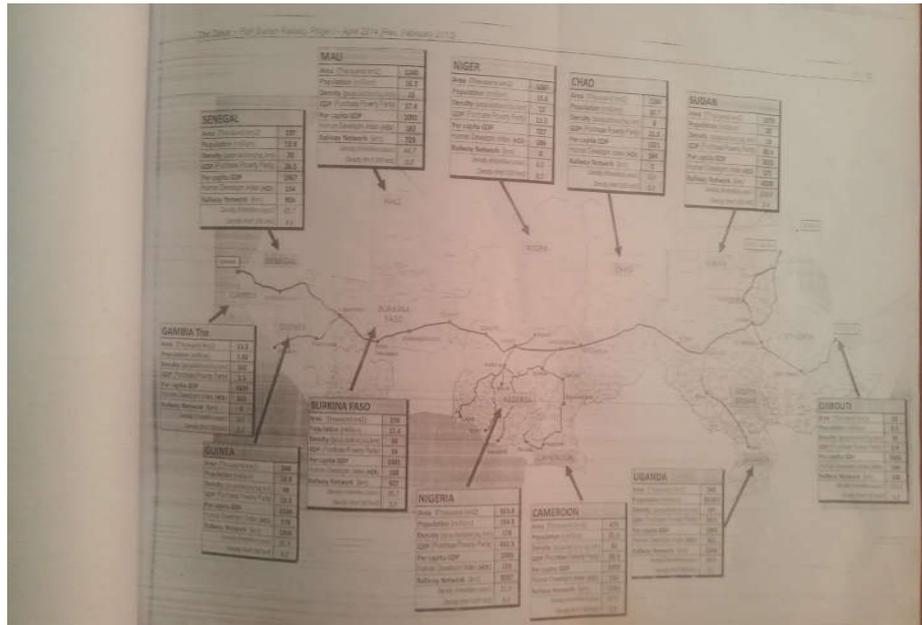
To this, the following advantages and prospected benefits may be added.

- ❖ Environmental: railway transport has a much lower impact on the environment (CO₂ and noxious gasses emission, incidency, etc.);
- ❖ Contribution to the Country's economic development: in fact, it is pertinent to note that there is no country, specifically a developed country, in the world, where intensive and extensive economic development was attained without the proper support from railway development.

It must, therefore, also be said that the major investment required in developing railways has to be measured in the framework of the benefits provided, directly or indirectly, to other sectors; thus the railway mode of transport shall be considered complementary, rather than competitive to road transport.

THE PROPOSED RAILWAY CORRIDOR

The proposed **DAKAR – PORT SUDAN** Railway line should link the capital cities of the member states crossed by the main route, namely Dakar (Senegal), Bamako (Mali), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Niamey (Niger), N'Djamena (Chad), Khartoum (Sudan); **whereas, regarding Nigeria, the line would pass in the Northern Area** and, thus, connect Kano (from where the capital Abuja could then be reached though the foreseen Kano-Abuja connection, as part of the major Lagos-Kano SG Project currently under implementation).



However, the main line, running from West to East, will be integrated with North-South spurs connecting the other capitals: Conakry (Republic of Guinea), Yaounde (Cameroon), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), on its way to the other end at Djibouti. Regarding Uganda, the connection to Kampala would indirectly be realized through the link to the northern town of Gulu, which is part of the project. Thus, rather than a Railway Line, the project assumes the features and role of a Transport (Trade) **CORRIDOR**, this being described according to WB Study, as a system of one or more routes that connect centres of economic activities and composed of **links** over which the transport services travel and the **nodes** that interconnect the transport services.

The end points of the corridor are **gateways** that allow the traffic with sources or destinations outside the corridor, to enter or exit the corridor.

International transport/trade corridors have some, or all, of these objectives:

- ✓ To promote economic activity along the corridor;
- ✓ To increase activity at the international gateways;
- ✓ Provide an international gateway for landlocked countries;
- ✓ Promote and expand an economic union;
- ✓ Facilitate bi-lateral and multi-country trade.

Whereas the strategies for the successful development of the corridors will call for, besides the necessary investments and regulatory reforms to assure the common objective of moving goods (and passengers) efficiently throughout the corridor, the following objectives:

- Ensure interoperability through the harmonization of technical standards for infrastructures and rules applied to transport service providers;
- Improve interconnections of national networks that have been designed primarily to meet domestic needs;

- Introduce regulatory reforms to improve cross-border movements, which are a main cause of unnecessary delays and inforced payments.

THE POSSIBLE ITINERARIES THROUGH THE CROSSED COUNTRIES

(a) MAIN ROUTE

Country	SECTIONS		Total Length (km)	
	From	to	Existing	New
SENEGAL		Tambakounda Senegal/Mali Border	464	
	DAKAR		181	
	Tambakounda			
MALI	Senegal/Mali Border	<u>BAMA</u> KO	585	
MALI- BURKINA FASO	<u>BAMA</u> KO	Bobo Dioulasso <u>OUAGADOUGOU</u>	-	500
	Bobo Dioulasso		349	
BURKINA FASO- NIGER	<u>OUAGADOUGOU</u>	<u>NIAMEY</u>		400
NIGER- NIGERIA	<u>NIAMEY</u> -Dosso-Sokoto			330
NIGERIA				
	Sokoto	Gusau		205
	Gusau	Funtua		105
	Funtua	<u>KANO</u>		160
	<u>KANO</u>	Dutse		109
	Dutse	Damaturu		325
	Damaturu	Maiduguri		132
NIGERIA- CHAD	Maiduguri	<u>N'DJAMENA</u>		230
CHAD	<u>N'DJAMENA</u>	Chad/Sudan Border		980
SUDAN				
	Chad/Sudan Border	Nyala		410
	Nyala	Babanousa	335	
	Babanousa	Sennar	713	
	Sennar	<u>KHARTOUM</u>	270	
	<u>KHARTOUM</u>	Atbara	313	
	Atbara	Port Sudan	474	
Total (a) Length km			3684	3886

According to the above tables, and taking into account the possible alternative presented and described above, as well as a margin of uncertainties, the overall length of the new **DAKAR-PORT SUDAN** railway infrastructure, including its North-South spurs, is expected to be in the order of 14,500km (of which, approx. 7200 km of new lines).

As far as the estimate of the relevant cost is concerned, careful attention shall be given to the fact that the use of the sections corresponding to already existing railways is substantially affected by the fact that these are all Narrow Gauge lines (mainly 1000 and 1067 mm), whereas the new project, according to the recent trends by now established in the new railway programmes throughout Africa, is to be designed at Standard Gauge (1435 mm).

Therefore, the cost forecast of the whole operation can only be established by an accurate Feasibility Study in which the eventual total or partial reuse of existing sections, by its conversion to SG, is fully analyzed (also in connection with their actual status), with the involvement of the Railway Authorities of the various countries.

HINTS FOR A FUTURE CONNECTION TO JEDDAH

Connection to Jeddah can be realized with a regular service of Ferries. However, the theory of a future direct connection between Port Sudan and Jeddah is definitely very attractive.

The relevant study should define the most suitable crossing point in function of the width of the water to be crossed and the relevant bathymetry (e.g. to reduce the width, the crossing point could be shifted some 130 km north of Port Sudan, e.g. in correspondence of Mukawwar Island); however given the very considerable length to be crossed (4 to 5 times the length of the underwater tunnels realized so far) as well as the huge depth of the water at approx. mid span, it is expected that the possible project would be the result of a very challenging engineering study and extremely innovative technology, such as a "submerged floating tunnel".

THE DAKAR-N'DJAMENA-PORT SUDAN RAIL ROUTE: Studies in regional integration, economic development and cheaper pilgrimage

The proposed railroad that would commence from Dakar to Bamako, linking up Ouagadougou, Niamey, Dosso, Sokoto, Gusau, Kano, Maiduguri, N'djamena to Port Sudan will link up a substantial part of the West African Sub-region; and make possible free flow of goods and services not only in the region under discussion but possibly a large part of the Middle East. The railroad will equally boost up

trade, economic activities and ensure free flow of goods (import and export) involving many countries and connecting enormous population spread across regional divide.

The railroad has the capacity to haulage goods as well as human cargo. This region enjoys a wealth of human population and it will resuscitate old caravan route to Makkah. If in the past the ancient pilgrims used conventional means of transportation – horses, camels and donkeys, these beasts of burden by and large have their own limitations in moving goods and human cargo from one location to another.

Today the proposed railroad would not only move those with the intention to perform pilgrimage to Makkah plus whatever cargo they may wish to bring in but also make possible the passage to the Middle East of many exportable and importable commodities both from West Africa and indeed the Middle Eastern region.

What we are trying to say here is that, if in the past the ancient route could ferry only a handful of pilgrims to the holy land, today an unquantifiable number for both human cargo as well as import and export commodities could enjoy successive exchange along the said route.

In other words, in addition to pilgrimage within the shortest possible time there is also the possibility of large volume of trading activity and other viable commercial context along the route which could reach their destinations, West Africa or Middle East in less than twenty four hours.

Another important high value is regional integration of the countries in the sub-region. Given the current world recession and the aftermath of the economic meltdown of 2008/2009 and of course the sizzling economic cripples it created all over the world; these and all have seriously dampened viable economic activities in the West African Sub-region. It is no gain saying that the proposed railroad from Dakar to Port Sudan would go a long way in paving the way for a be-hive economic activity across the entire sub-region, goods and services will move smoothly with relative ease; so also a large network of human cargo from varying parts of the sub-region.

The distance from Dakar to Port Sudan is 7495 kilometers; this distance could be covered within a spell of less than twenty hours. In other words, whatever is haulage from whichever part of the region, eatable or drinkable with minimum preservation could be delivered to its destination (in the Middle East) fresh. Conversely, goods purchased

from any part of Asia, Middle East and even Europe could come down to the sub-region via the same railroad.

The railroad network will not only make possible the revival of the ancient pilgrimage route but also ensure the spread of a network of trading activities that will impact on a substantial percentage of mankind in both Africa and the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the two authors first mentioned the ancient routes of Hajj from West Africa to Port Sudan and the contributions of the old kingdoms to the pilgrims.

In the second part of the paper, the railroad project, its technical and strategic process were also mentioned.

Lastly, the way to regional integration, economic development and cheaper pilgrimage was showcased.

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