

# THE NEWSPAPER THE KEY

**Mauritania  
Commemorates  
its 62<sup>nd</sup> National  
Independence Day**



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## Feeling at Home:

# An Interview with the Palestinian Ambassador to Mauritania

**M**ohammed Qassem Alasaad served as the president of the Palestinian Cultural Centres in Moscow, Tashkent, and Baku from 1990 to 1995. He later served the First Secretary of the Palestinian Embassy in the Russian Federation between 1995 and 2000. From 2010 to 2019, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Palestine to Kyiv. He presented his credentials to the Mauritanian government on April 1, 2021.

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## A Special Congratulations



**O**n behalf of the Government of the United States and the American people, I send my best wishes to the Government and people of Mauritania as you celebrate 62 years of independence. Mauritania has shown an active commitment to improving governance, addressing human rights concerns, and spurring economic development, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the United States appreciates our strong partnership in the fight against regional terrorism, which is essential to the wellbeing of both the Mauritanian and the American people. As you celebrate your Independence Day, please know that the United States greatly values our bilateral relationship with Mauritania and looks forward to our partnership in the years ahead.

## Exclusive Interview



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## Editor's Note

**T**his month's issue is special one. The 28th of November marks the 62nd anniversary of Mauritania's independence from France. For years before 1960, our nomadic forefathers fought with great vigor and determination against the French colonizers, despite the strength and sophistication of their weaponry.

In honor of this occasion, and on behalf of *The Key* Newspaper staff, I would like to congratulate all Mauritians. May our country live forever free, safe, and united.



## Could you tell us about the American House & Senate elections in general and the 2022 midterms in particular?

The legislative branch in the United States is split into two chambers: the House of Representatives, “the House,” and the Senate. The House is the lower chamber and is made up of 435 voting members representing their respective congressional districts. The number of districts within a state is based on population. The Senate is the upper chamber and is made up of one hundred members, two from each state. House representatives are elected every two years and senators are elected every six years. Senators are divided into three classes so that 1/3 of the chamber is up for election every two years. This difference in election cycles was a deliberate choice by the nation’s founders. House representatives are expected to be closely in touch with the needs of voters, and can, therefore, be held closer to account through frequent elections. Senators are intended to be more senior leaders and take a longer-term approach to politics. By only having to be reelected every six years, senators can focus more on lawmaking than on campaigning for reelection. At the national level in the United States, midterm elections are those that take place halfway through a presidential term. The national elections that took place on November 8th were midterm elections because they occurred halfway through President Joe Biden’s first term in office. These elections are sometimes viewed as being of lesser importance because it is not presidential election. Nevertheless, midterms can have a significant impact on a presidential administration’s ability



### Ask an American

Send your questions of less than 100 words to [thekeynewspaper21@gmail.com](mailto:thekeynewspaper21@gmail.com)

to govern and create new laws.

#### Q2- How is Halloween celebrated in American culture?

Halloween is a secular American holiday that occurs each year on October 31st and celebrates all things supernatural and spooky. It is celebrated in several different ways, usually according to one’s age. That said, the most ubiquitous aspect of Halloween celebrations, regardless of age, is dressing up in costume. People celebrating Halloween dress up as celebrities, historical figures, fictional characters, animals, objects, or anything else that can be made into a costume. For young children, the main event on Halloween is “trick-or-treating,” in which they walk through the streets knocking on the doors

of houses. At each house, upon the door being opened, the children yell “trick or treat!!” The homeowner then gives each child a piece of candy. For older children, especially boys, Halloween can be a night of mischief. A particularly popular activity is “Tee-Peeing,” in which rolls of toilet paper are hurled and unfurled over neighbors’ yards. For adults, Halloween usually involves distributing candy to neighborhood children or chaperoning their children for trick-or-treating. Later in the night, many attend costume parties and socialize with friends.

#### Q3. What do Americans often think of when they hear «Black Friday»?

“Black Friday” refers to an unofficial holiday that takes place the day after Thanksgiving, when retailers, often ma-

for national chains, heavily discount their products. People often line up outside of large stores for hours before they open in order to be the first ones in and get the best products before they sell out. Black Friday is considered “peak consumerism,” as the day is solely dedicated to buying things. Some people are therefore opposed to the idea of Black Friday and either does not buy anything that day or do something else. The national outdoor-goods retailer REI, for example, closes all of its stores and encourages customers to instead spend time outdoors.

#### Q4. Given that the United States is the most federalized country in the world, why are there just 2 major political parties (Republican and Democratic)?

There are a variety of reasons for the presence of a two-party system in the United States. The most important reason, however, is the overwhelming power of the Republican and Democratic parties. Third parties rarely win seats in the legislature or other political offices. As a result, anyone seeking to effect political change is essentially required to join one of the major parties, which further reinforces the two-party system.

#### Q5. What is the dress code in the US?

There is no dress code in the United States. You can wear whatever you want, even a dara’a.

By Alex DiCenso

## A Cradle of Peace

A panel of international outsiders have historically described Mauritania as «a cradle of peace lying in the North African Sahara.» Mauritania is a place where people live a friendly and collective way of life. It is a place where violence and hatred is regarded as an evil that should be rooted out. The typical Mauritanian is an honest person obsessed with self-esteem, struggling to live honourably (mostly away from the pressure of the city).

The country was known one hundred ago as «the land of one million poets», which implies a high degree of peace of mind that dominates the general behaviour. Poetry is as sacred as the tea habit which is ingrained in souls and hearts. Therefore, poetry maintains a sense of popular culture through describing and moulding social memory.

Citizens are hospitable and humanitarian, despite the harsh deserted nature. Once upon a time, a French pilot, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, was obliged to make an emergency landing in the North Saharan part of Mauritania. He was rescued in a no-man’s-land by a nomad who was tending cattle. Later Exupéry wrote books about the Mauritanian generosity and hospitality that saved his life when he was between the devil and high water. One of such books is «la Terre des Hommes» (the land of men). Such work deals with the



Photo Credit: Britannica.com

challenging life circumstances that nomads live in and the writer describes them as heroes who struggle to compete against the forces of nature.

The modesty of Islam backed by the peaceful traditions have prevented the cradle of peace from experiencing the civil wars that most African countries are still seething under. The society comprises different races and components in harmony with one another under the umbrella of brotherhood and social coexistence. Mostly, ordinary people are not involved in politics since it is not appealing to their daily life. Customs are changing

though, in the big cities where citizens from different backgrounds meet each other; but the countryside still very authentic.

The landscape is as secure as the city; people go everywhere North to South, East to West without fear. The pure hospitality sets the stage for a general attitude of peacefulness. This has made the country a destination for hundreds of foreign sun-worshippers who are chasing the sunbeams, especially during the two seasons - winter and summer. No offensive acts against foreigners have ever been registered in the country since citizens appreciate and respect them as their guests.

The tent, the palace of the desert, represents the most comfortable shelter. So, some families actually have to build tent-like rooms above their villas, unconsciously imitating their forefathers. The tent also symbolizes community and solidarity where guests, neighbours and servants sit together to share cups of tea, as well as milk, on equal footing. Tents are shelter for both the poor and the rich, powerless and powerful, leader and led.....

It is true that such a cradle of peace is not well known to many Westerners, particularly Americans and British, due to a failure of the country’s diplomacy in the last decades. A former ambassadors of the country in Washington D.C. once told an acquaintance that only few educated people in America can identify the country on a map, and at the back of their minds they see Mauritania as a stronghold of desert traders. However, in recent times this negative image has began to change, particularly in the last years, coinciding with the discovery of oil. Verifiable statistics show that more than 9000 tourists from all over the world visited the country last winter, which can be seen as a new dawn of broadening the reputation of this cradle of peace.

by Mohamed Yahya Abdel Wedoud, Ph.D (2008)

## LAUNCH OF TOURIST COMPLEX "COMATOUR"



On Tuesday, November 22, First Lady, Mariam Mohamed Fadel -Dah launched «Dream Land», a tourist complex created by the Mauritanian Tourism Complex (COMATOUR) in Tevragh Zeïna. The official launch of the «Dream Land» city was one of the events commemorating the 62nd anniversary of National Independence Day. COMATOUR is a project that includes 140 Mauritanian women coming from different so-

cial, educational, and professional backgrounds. It aims to improve women's financial situation and contribute to the national economy and construction. The launch event was attended by the Minister of Social Affairs, Children, and Family, Ms. Safiya Mint N'Tahah. Mint N'Tahah expressed, in a speech, that women empowerment is a priority to the Ministry as a part of the social project pledged by President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani.

Nouakchott Region president Ms. Fatimatou Abdel Malick, was also present at the event and praised the construction of such a project and emphasized the importance of such projects. Ms. Ghalia Mint El Vil, the president of COMATOUR, stated that she and her colleagues count on the support of the government to promote and encourage the project. The complex consists of a mosque, a multipurpose hall, an amusement park, a hotel, a mall, and villas.

## President Ghazouani Promises Increases Salaries in Honor of Independence Day



Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Sheikh al-Ghazouani announced a salary increase of 2000 MRU for the benefit of all civil and military servants and agents of the State. Ghazouani's announcement came during a speech on the occasion of

the 62nd anniversary of national independence. He also announced a 50% increase in the minimum wage. Ould al-Ghazouani stated that this increase will take effect in January 2023, stressing that, for 40% of Mauritanians, this increase represents a salary increase of 20%.

## US Ambassador Cynthia Kierscht Promises Support until Mauritania Becomes "A Leader in Regional Stability and Security"



On November 17, US Ambassador Cynthia Kierscht gave a speech at the closing ceremony of the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET). In the speech, her Excellency praised the US and Mauritania's long

partnership since Mauritania's independence and the latter's role in securing the Sahel region. "We recognize the important role that Mauritania plays, and we will continue to stand with Mauritania and support it becoming a leader in

regional stability and security," she promised. The ceremony that was attended by both local and American military personnel, as well as the Minister of National Defense, Hanana Ould Sidi, the governor of Adrar, Mr. Abdellahi Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, the President of the Regional Council of Adrar, Mr. Abd Abdellahi Yahya, and the Mayor of Atar, Mr. Sid'Ahmed Ould Hemeïmed. At the end of her speech, her Excellency thanked both the US trainers and the Mauritanian trainees for their efforts and participation. Moreover, she expressed her hope that the training will enable our soldiers "to become better soldiers and enable you to fulfill your mission to provide a safe and secure Mauritania for all."



## BP Signs MoU with Government to Explore Green Hydrogen Project Potential



On November 8, BP and the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) allowing the British oil company to explore the potential of the country's green hydrogen production. BP will be joining companies Chariot Ltd., CWP Global, and Total Eren (a subsidiary of the French oil company TotalEnergies) in their quest to explore and develop the country's two large-scale

green hydrogen projects. As a first step, BP will conduct a data gathering campaign with studies evaluating the viability of the wind and solar resources in particular places for the large-scale production of green hydrogen. The agreement was signed at COP27 as the company's chief executive Bernard Looney, and four other BP employees were invited and registered as Mauritania's delegate.



## Feeling at Home:

# An Interview with the Palestinian Ambassador to Mauritania

**M**ohammed Qasem Alasaad served as the president of the Palestinian Cultural Centres in Moscow, Tashkent, and Baku from 1990 to 1995. He later served the First Secretary of the Palestinian Embassy in the Russian Federation between 1995 and 2000. From 2010 to 2019, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Palestine to Kyiv. He presented his credentials to the Mauritanian government on April 1, 2021.

**THE KEY :** *The media have described Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's latest speech to the UN as "vitriol." To what extent do you think it has affected the current conflict in the occupied territories and what is your Excellency's opinion about it?*

In his speech before the UN's General Assembly in its 77th session, President Mahmoud Abbas expressed the hopes, expectations, and concerns of our people. The speech was not a critique, it mapped out the future. It has forced the world to fulfill its international responsibilities towards Palestine.

This speech represents guidelines to Palestinian diplomats and presents global media with Palestinian demands and Israeli violations that the world has chosen to turn a blind eye to. The President has made a clear and sincere demand that the international community adopt UN Resolutions 181 and 194. He also emphasized Palestinian political principles and the double standards through which the world deals with the Palestinian cause.

The President's speech is a legal and constitutional document that must be adopted in the law of the UN and it is a message to the entire world. It brings the Palestinian cause back to the attention of the international community.

**THE KEY :** *According to the Palestinian Journalist's Syndicate, The Israel Defense Forces have killed around 46 journalists since 2000, the latest of which was Shireen Abu Akleh on 11 April. What are the procedures carried out by the Palestinian Authorities to hold the Israeli Forces accountable, and what measures are being taken by the authorities to protect journalists from similar assaults?*

The journalists imprisoned by the Israeli occupation are suffering from direct and indirect torture, inspections, solitary confinements for prolonged times,



crowded cells filled with insects, poor food quality, denying their right to education through banning books, and the deprivation of medical care. This targeting of Palestinian journalists is the result of Israelis' fight against the spread of the truth and the Palestinian narrative which tracks the violations and the daily oppressive Israeli practices.

Currently, nine journalists who have been sentenced are experiencing harsh and dire conditions. Seven are under administrative detention with no charges, and five are under constant interrogation under torture and humiliation.

It is necessary to emphasize that the United Nations has responded to France's suggestion of making November 2 the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. More than a hundred Palestinian, Arab, and foreign journalists, including the now-famous Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, Ahmed Abu Hussein, Abdullah Murtaja, Simone Camilli, Cevdet Kılıçlar, Vittorio Arrigoni, Adel Wasfi, and many more have been killed by Israel.

The Palestinian authority demands, alongside the families of the victims, that the International Court of Justice legally pursue the perpetrators who have committed these assassinations of Palestinian talents, with the iconic Shireen Abu Akleh being the most notable of these.

**THE KEY :** *We are witnessing ten-*

*sions rise between countries, some of which have moved from the negotiation table to armed conflict. Do you think these conflicts affect the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and do you believe that the option of armed resistance still stands in case negotiations fail?*

Firstly, I emphasize that the negotiations have been at a standstill for a long time as a result of the Israelis' intransigence and the absence of a peace partner to oversee the negotiations. Despite our commitment to the two-state declaration and that East Jerusalem is the Palestinian capital, in the beginning, of course, we used armed resistance. But currently, we need to use politics. And after founding the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), we began to have a political vision. Once the PLO recognized international law, it became our duty to deal with it, and our course has followed international law. We are taking the political path and using peaceful popular resistance by all parties. It has undoubtedly impacted the world, which now sees that there exist people fighting for their rights and must get them at any price. And we know that our case is complicated and the fight is long-term. To answer your question, for the entire period of the Palestinian cause, when has the world been peaceful or has our region been peaceful? Tensions have always been present, starting with the Soviet and Western axes' struggle, the Cold War,

the arms race, and the constant wars and conflicts in the world. The Palestinian cause has always been present in the midst of it all, and it might be influenced at times, and might be raised in others, but we have suffered from resisting the occupation. We have given sacrifices at the altar of freedom and independence. And Palestinian diplomacy under the auspices of President Abu Mazen and his Excellency Riyad al-Maliki has achieved plenty for the Palestinian cause, such as gaining non-permanent membership at the UN in 2012, having the Palestinian flag raised at the UN, and becoming a part of international organizations. There have been 754 resolutions at the UN General Assembly since Resolution 181 for the Partition of Palestine. Unfortunately, none of these resolutions have been adopted. There have also been 94 Security Council resolutions, the latest of which was Resolution 2334, and it is one of the most important resolutions ever taken at the Security Council. However, none has ever been adopted, nor have any of the resolutions of the human rights organizations.

It is necessary to continue and keep going knocking on all doors to achieve our goal of constructing an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. And we will keep seeking permanent membership in the UN and get to the International Court of Justice and get it to recognize our state.

**THE KEY : The latest League of Arab States summit was held in Algeria under the slogan "reunion". However, we have seen other Arab initiatives that did not lead to the desired results in the last few years. Do you believe this initiative will bring different results under the accumulated disputes between the Palestinian factions?**

The Palestinians have no choice other than overcoming their divisions to keep up with the current situation and achieve national unity. The Palestinian factions have come to an agreement which is to end the division that lasted more than 15 years and achieve national unity to have legislative elections and a government of national unity.

The outcomes of the Algerian dialogue can be built upon to move forward with the reconciliation and end of the division. The Palestinian factions have agreed to form a national unity government that commits to a schedule to end the national division and bring back geographic unity.

The Algerian initiative was guided by the firm conviction that the current situation results from the systemic continuance of the Israeli occupation, its crimes against the Palestinian people, its sanctities, and the obstruction of the path to peace in the Middle East.

There have been previous attempts for reconciliation and ending the division and they have unfortunately failed.

- The Mecca Accord, 8 February 2005,
- The Egyptian Proposal, 15 September 2009,

- Cairo Agreement, 20 December 2011,
- The Doha Declaration, 6 February 2012,
- and now the Algerian initiative, 12 October 2022.

I would like to express our appreciation for the efforts and the role of Algeria and its President, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, in reuniting Palestine and express our appreciation for all the Arab efforts to reunite the Palestinian factions, especially, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Russia, Lebanon, and Turkey.

In the end, all doors remained open for reconciliation in Algeria. The agreement has been reached, we wait for the implementation.

**THE KEY : Some Arab governments have flocked to normalizing relations with Israel. What are the implications of this for the Palestinian cause and diplomatic relations between Ramallah and these governments?**

We look at our relations with other Arabs from the perspective of those countries' positions on the Palestinian cause. And despite the normalization, it did not affect those countries' positions on the Palestinian cause. Rather, they reaffirmed their position on the Palestinian cause considering it to be the first and most central cause to Arab countries without exception. This is what each Arab League summit confirmed including the latest "reunion" summit in Algeria.

Therefore, the general assembly of the Arab League asserted the centrality of the Palestinian cause to the entirety of the Arab Nations and that the occupied

East Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, is a part of the Palestinian-occupied land since 1967. It also reiterated Arab solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support of resistance in occupied Jerusalem in the face of systemized Israeli aggression and change the legal and historical situation of the city and its Islamic and Christian sacredness, including the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

**THE KEY : The bilateral relationship between Mauritania and Palestine is characterized by a long history and the persistence of the Mauritanian position in support of the Palestinian cause. How has this relationship developed ever since your Excellency became an ambassador, and are there any future plans to create an economic partnership between the two countries?**

The relationship between the Mauritanian and Palestinian people is special and in a constant state of closeness and progress.

This relationship goes back to the beginnings of the Revolutionary Palestinian National Action during the ruling of the late Mauritanian president, Moktar Ould Daddah. When the Palestinian Office was opened in Mauritania, in 1968 by Fatah (formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement). The Mauritanian government has offered the office a residence and annual financial aid that is still ongoing to this very day.

In addition, the government gave the office a radio program at the national radio

station (Radio Mauritanie) called 'The Voice of The Capital', later becoming 'Voice of Palestine'.

In 1974, the office turned into a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office after ambassador Abu Ammar (Yasir Arafat) gave a speech to the UN.

In 1988, the PLO became the Palestinian state, and Mauritania was one of the first countries to recognize Palestine as a country.

The Palestinian embassy is working on deepening this relationship between the two brotherly countries. As well as working diligently to resolve any issues facing the Palestinian community in the country.

The Palestinian community in Mauritania is the one of the smallest. The first Palestinians to arrive in Mauritania were a family from the Gaza strip in the mid-sixties of the past century. In addition, 21 teachers between 1975 and 1976, under an agreement between the PLO and the Mauritanian government, were among the original Palestinian community in Mauritania. And they were followed by a medical mission and a police mission and students who studied at the University of Nouakchott.

Several Palestinian workers and employees have come because of missions that were agreed on with Mauritania:

- The police mission started in 1977
  - The medical mission started in 1986
  - The educational mission started in 1976
- During President Abbas's visit in 2016, the following agreements were signed:
- An agreement creating a binational cooperation committee between the countries
  - An agreement on the protection of investments between the countries
  - A memorandum of understanding relating to political collaboration between the two countries
  - An agreement making Nouakchott and Jerusalem twin cities.
  - An agreement giving scholarships to Palestinian students to study in Mauritania.

There is no doubt that there are mixed Mauritanian-Palestinian families that have existed for decades. And upon meeting these families, I did not feel any differences between the two parties. Palestinians were able to cope with the traditions and customs of society. They spoke Hassanya and went to Mauritanian schools and universities.

This relationship is advancing notably, and I would like to pay sincere tribute to President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani for his firm position regarding the Palestinian cause and the government which, despite the external pressure and the temptations, refused to normalize relations with Israel. Mauritania plays an important role both regionally and internationally in the Palestinian cause.

In the end, I salute Mauritania, its children, youths, elders, and its leadership. Thank you!

**By Varha Abd Selam**





# Meet Matthew Anderson, the Man behind Mauritanian British Business Council

**The Key : Could you please introduce yourself to our readers?**

I am Matthew Anderson, I run a company called TVET UK that works with governments in emerging markets to strengthen the education systems and bring international quality education to the people of those countries.

We have a network of equipment suppliers, colleges, universities, schools, certification bodies, and English language experts to develop bespoke products for each country. We also work with financiers in the UK who can work with supportive governments to raise finance and ensure sustainable investment over the long term.

We are very active in this region in Algeria, Senegal, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and of course Mauritania. I also am Chairman of the Mauritanian British Business Council ([www.mbbc.uk](http://www.mbbc.uk)) a body designed to promote bilateral relations in trade between our two nations. And, most recently I co-founded a training company and study abroad agency in Mauritania called edUKate Mauritania.

**The Key : You have created the Higher Institute of English in Nouakchott back in 2015, what made you create such an institution in a country like Mauritania?**

TVET UK, my company had been working in Algeria for the previous five years, and some conditions of working there are common to Mauritania, such as the French/Arabic working languages. I knew the Charge d'affaires at the Mauritanian embassy having met him in London many times at events. The Minister of Higher Education at the time, Sidi Ould Salem, was in London looking for partners to set up this university. My company was ideally placed as we had already made inquiries about working in Mauritania, knew the country a little, and could deliver a complete turnkey solution for the government, everything from tables and chairs in the classrooms, to bringing in British teachers.

It was the first-ever UK-Mauritania collaboration in education. The model was to build, operate, and then transfer the running back to the government once it was launched but our most surprising achievement was to double the number of British people registered in Mauritania when we hired 15 UK teachers (13 British people officially lived in the country before then).

**The Key : In 2016, you have created the Mauritanian British Business Council, would you tell us about the council, its objectives, and what inspired you to create it?**

MBBC came about because after doing the Higher Institute of English, we wanted to do more projects in Maurita-



nia. However, there was no British embassy and the Mauritanian embassy in London was not set up to deal with trade inquiries. I have run membership organizations since 2003 and it was a field of expertise for me. I discussed this with a colleague here in the UK, Pieter Tesch, who was keen to do the same. He had a long history in Mauritania and is well known here. So we set about looking at what we could achieve and who would be interested. We formed the company and recruited two members and two weeks later, BP signed a deal with Kosmos to work on GTA and they contacted us. From there, things started to gain momentum with a whole gas supply chain and associated industries like training, logistics, business services, and legal matters. More than anything, though, it was the desire to find a way to do more work with Mauritania and help others do the same.

**The Key : You are also the director of EdUKate Mauritania, what is it, and would you tell us about it?**

It was no secret amongst people that know me that I had to do more in education in Mauritania. I could see the need and have spoken to the government at length over several years about raising finance to strengthen the state education system. I have access to substantial funds in London to fulfill UN Sustainable Development Goals, including some philanthropic investment, perfect for Mauritania, but I had a frustration inside and desire for a project that I could do quickly, drive, and control, that could get results in the short term. I met Mauritanian businessman, Mohamed Abdellah Yaha, who shared my desire and vision to bring international standards to Mauritania, and we then set up edUKate Mauritania. Due to the Covid period, things moved a little slowly, but now we have a building, which is being redeveloped, and we have temporary premises for training. In the meantime, we have appointed a principal to come here and drive the project forward in the country and we are looking at further ways of strengthening the offer through native-speaking English teachers and local talent. Things are going very well. At the moment. We have English training for corporate English ongoing and the plan is to open this up to the general public in the coming weeks. We have two sets of international certification, training in December and January for health and safety and dangerous goods movement. These were chosen to address the immediate needs of the new hydrocarbon and renewable industries in Mauritania, but we hope to bring business, finance, hospitality, and many other international standard training courses to Mauritania next year.

**The Key : Have you noticed any changes in attitude towards the English language in Mauritania since you first created the Higher Institute of English?**

100%. On my first visit to Mauritania, there was some English spoken, but it has never really been necessary to have

this skill in Mauritania on a day-to-day basis. Now you can see people seeking out opportunities to learn English either for personal development, to enhance their study opportunities, or in companies to help them deal with international customers coming in.

It is not just the British and Americans, but if you had Italian and Norwegian companies collaborating in Mauritania, their common language would be English. So this is the global language of business, media, and most certainly energy. One side effect of this is that I'm not improving my French as quickly as I would have done if the conditions have been the same as in 2015!

I must say as well, I am delighted to see an English-language newspaper in Mauritania and I wish The Key every success in the future.

**The Key : The gas and oil discoveries made recently, and the green hydrogen projects, have put Mauritania on the global energy map, how does the MBBC intend to assist British investors seek these opportunities?**

This is our Raison D'Être. In MBBC membership, we have people like Chariot, Shell, BP, and major energy companies already investing in Mauritania. The supply chain will follow and we can support them. We are also here to support our fantastic British ambassador, Colin Wells, and his team as they boost the profile of the UK in Mauritania. We are very lucky to have him and his team here. In practical terms, MBBC runs trade missions to Mauritania, holds events in the UK, and runs webinars. Everyone in the MBBC team is a volunteer and we are proud of the impact we have made.

As far as advice for UK companies, you must come here and persevere if you want to succeed, meet people make friends, be flexible, learn the business culture, and be patient. Local partners are also key but you must choose carefully.

My work here trying to invest in Mauritanian education has meant trying to work with four different economy ministers, and several different ministers dealing with education over three different ministries all under two presidents over 7 years! Things change a lot (as they do in the UK, you have seen our Prime Minister situation), and you have to be prepared to come back regularly and maintain relationships and build new ones. For example, we agreed on one project with a minister, and then there was a reshuffle two days later and we were back to square one. It can be frustrating but the end objective is quality education in decent education facilities to allow everyone a fair chance to be a success.

By Varha Abd Selam



# Regions of America: Texas



The United States is a massive, diverse country spanning the entirety of the North American continent and touching four different seas. Owing to this geographic breadth and the country's rich history, the United States is made up of many unique geographic and cultural regions. Each month, I will write about the most well-known of these regions here in The Key, discussing the geography, history, and culture of one region. This month's focus – the final edition in this series – will be not about a region but rather a state: Texas. Texas, though not the most populous or geographically largest state in the United States, is one of the most unique. Texas' distinct history and culture, combined with its expansive size, sets the state apart from the rest of the country. While often included as part of the Southern region for official purposes, in reality, Texas stands in a league of its own.

## Geography

Texas is often split into four geographic sections. North Texas – which includes an area known as the Texas Panhandle – is the southernmost portion of the Great Plains region. This dichotomous area is marked by vast, sparsely-populated plains and the massive Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Dallas-Fort Worth, sometimes called the "Metroplex," is home to some eight million people and if it were a country, its GDP would be the twentieth largest in the world (Texas as a whole has a GDP larger than Brazil).

Next is East Texas, the part of the state whose geography and culture are similar to those of the South. Covered in piney woodlands, Texas is much greener than the rest of the state. The area's low altitude and abundance of the river and other bodies of water give East Texas a humid, tropical climate. The largest city in this part of Texas is Houston, one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States. Outside of Houston, however, most East Texans live in small, agriculture-centered towns similar to those found in the South. Cajun culture, which is found primarily among the descendants of French Acadians in Louisiana, stretches into East Texas. Below East Texas lies South Texas. This region is closely tied, geographically and culturally, with Nor-

theastern Mexico. Like East Texas, South Texas has a hot, humid climate, especially along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The largest city is San Antonio, which was originally founded as a mission by the Spanish during the time of the Spanish empire.

Finally, there is West Texas. When most Americans and foreigners imagine Texas, this is the Texas that they see. Vast, dry plains in the eastern portion of the region gradually give way to arid desert. Much of the region is sparsely populated, with the exception of El Paso, a city in the westernmost part of the state that sits on the Mexican border. West Texas' economy is driven by oil and gas production, in addition to the livestock industry that sees cowboys herding cattle across ranches the sizes of small countries.

## History

The history of Texas is unique in the United States, and the state does not appear in the larger narrative of American history until decades after the formation of the republic. Pre-Columbian Texas was inhabited by a variety of tribes, the most notable being the Apache, who ranged across Western Texas. The Spanish were the first to colonize the lands that are now Texas. This colonization, however, came later than for most other Spanish possessions, as authorities in Mexico City saw little value in the dry, sparse territory. It was only when other European powers began encroaching on the area at the end of the 17th century,

that the Spanish began to construct a series of "missions." These missions were centered around a Catholic church whose mandate was to convert local native populations to Christianity. Many cities and towns in Texas today are built around these former missions. The region, however, remained sparsely populated by Europeans as Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821.

Hoping to increase the area's population and reduce the risk of Native American raids, Mexican Texas – the name of the territory under Mexican rule – relaxed immigration rules and recruited Americans to settle in the area. Soon tens of thousands of Americans flooded into the region, many of whom ignored Mexican law, particularly in regard to the owning of slaves. Displeased with Mexican rule, the Americans in Texas rose up in revolt. In 1836, Texas declared independence and forced Mexican forces from the territory. The resulting Republic of Texas – an independent country – lasted for ten years before it was annexed by the United States in 1846. During the Civil War some 15 years later, Texas sided with the Confederacy and seceded from the United States. A few consequential battles took place in Texas during the war, which allowed the state to bounce back economically during the Reconstruction era. Texas' economy remained strong but unimpressive from the end of the Civil War until 1901. That year, oil was discovered in Spindletop, transforming the economy during the 20th century into a powerhouse. Today, Texas has the second-largest GDP in the country and is a leader in the fields of energy, livestock and agriculture, and technology.

## Culture

Texan culture, while unique in the United States, has shaped many Americans' and foreigners' conceptions of American culture. Many symbols of the United States come from Texas. Perhaps the most identifiable aspect of Texan culture is cowboy culture. The way of life of cowboys at the beginning of the 20th century is often pointed to as the purest manifestation of the American ideals of rugged indivi-

duality, self-reliance, and social conservatism. Cowboy hats and cowboy boots – seen as quintessentially American attire – both originate in Texas. Many Texan men – and some women – wear both of these articles during daily life today.

In addition to cowboy culture, Texas is also marked by a strong Hispanic influence that comes from both the extensive history of Hispanic settlement in Texas and the state's proximity to Mexico. Approximately 40% of Texans are of Hispanic origin, a fact that can be seen in innumerable aspects of Texan culture, such as cuisine, popular language, and music. Tex-Mex, for example, is a blend of traditional Texan and Mexican cuisine which includes foods such as chili con carne, fajitas, and guacamole.

There are also numerous examples of the Spanish language seeping into Texan vocabulary. These include "jalapeño" – a spi-

cy pepper, "llano" – meaning "a plain," and "wrangler" – a person who handles livestock; the word comes from the Spanish "caballerango."

Finally, Texas is the source of the popular music genre known as "country music." This music – influenced by traditional Mexican and English styles of music – has spread from Texas to the rest of the United States, where it is popular with many Americans.

Texas is in many ways a country in its own right, whose population, size, and economic output would outrank most others. Nonetheless, Texas forms an integral part of the United States geographically, historically, and culturally. Texan culture is what many outside the United States know as American culture, and it is what most Americans look to as the purest form of what it means to be an American, for better or worse.

# THE KEY

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